

Sabin's Pasture Working Group

01/28/08 Meeting Notes

5:30 PM – 7:30 PM, held at Christ Church, 64 State Street, Montpelier VT.

Present: Todd Bailey, Katherine Cooper, Jennifer Hollar, Mary Hooper, Dave Keller, Jennifer Knauer, Rodger Krussman, Jim Libby, Rory Malone, Neal Rodar, Leigh Seddon, Roy Schiff, Nancy Sherman, Jean Vissering, John Waldo, and approximately 5 members of the public.

Part II of Visioning Exercise Facilitated by Jean Vissering, Landscape Architect.

Design Presentations. Based on the group's input at the 1/14 meeting, Jean presented several options depicting various degrees and densities of development on the property. Common elements to all designs include the following (*Questions raised by the group are in italics*) :

- The high open meadows, hemlock stand, wooded areas and sledding hill remain undeveloped.
- Green "fingers" that come into developed areas provide water retention and common open space within development.
- Each unit in Jean's sketches is 1200 square feet of living space.
- *How do the homes relate to each other? i.e. are these neighborhoods where people might go out and meet their neighbors?* Note the town "square" examples.
- *How do you increase the density to allow for more development using less land?* Probably would need to increase the number of stories/ building height. Also, as drawn, parking would not meet current zoning code of 1.5 spaces per unit with additional for commercial uses, but it comes close in most options. Group noted that a change to parking requirements in zoning may be possible and desirable. Parking has a significant impact on the overall development footprint.
- Keep in mind that the steep slopes will present challenges and increase costs of development because they will have to be graded and may require retaining walls.
- *What is the reasoning behind the curvy roads rather than straight streets?* The steeper slopes on the property require that curves in the roads to ensure reasonable grades. Roads are located to avoid grades over 10%, but would likely exceed this for short stretches (similar to Cliff Street neighborhood). In general roads and parking areas are oriented along contours. Buildings are organized in an orientation that is parallel or perpendicular to each other and to the street to reflect traditional development patterns in Vermont.

Group Critiques. Jean described several design options. Written descriptions accompanied each option and were distributed to those present at the meeting (see January 28, 2008 handout entitled "Summary of Development Features"). Members of the working group split into smaller groups, self-selecting to review the plan that they most preferred. Jean requested that each group critique the design and offer comments for improvements. Comments are summarized below.

Comments from small group on minimum development A/B (3-10 acres developed, 88-105 units):

- Consider creating parking across Barre Street?
- How many people should we assume would live in each unit? 3-4 people, but it would obviously vary.
- Reduce parking on southwest side.
- Would prefer row of houses along the street rather than up the hill towards the pasture.
- Liked the idea of opening up the brook, but not the hydropower dam.
- Also liked the bike path going through the neighborhood.
- Small group felt comfortable with either A or B.

Comments from small group on moderate development C/D (10-15 acres developed, 185-221 units):

- Liked the pedestrian ways
- Liked the road access and parking better on the B sketch; did not prefer having multiple lots with entrances to Barre Street (traffic considerations?), as shown in A. Also were concerned that these lots would degrade the views into the site.
- Liked the buildings on Barre Street frontage—assuming they will be mixed use. Parking in the back for those businesses would make sense.
- Also liked the density of the “medieval city” – relationship of houses to each other
- Where are the park entrances?
- The small group was reasonably comfortable with the amount of development shown in C/D

Comments from small group on maximum development E/F (15-20 acres developed, up to 379 units)

- Southwest corner of the property has anywhere from 16-44 units in the scenarios presented. This may be one that could easily accommodate high density and keep footprint small.
- 1800 foot maximum for the length of a cul de sac is a fire and safety rule. There may be difficulty with this scenario given that the proposed cul de sac is 200 feet longer than what zoning code allows.
- Would there be any likelihood of extending the existing dirt road east and connecting with existing roads it off the North-East side of property?
- Most of the units are screened by the ridge or are lower than the road. Probably wouldn't be visible from the other side of the Winooski (especially by the time these units would be built, as vegetation will have grown up)
- Could explore duplex or multi-unit homes (bigger, perhaps barn-like in design) instead of single-family units. This could increase housing availability without using up as much land.

General Comments from the whole group on all of the plans:

- Small hydro is a nice idea but not feasible in this area—not much yield given the gradient, and also would impact a significant wetland area.
- Incorporate solar power when possible.
- Any potential for wind power?
- Consider impact of cars on traffic congestion in city. Planning for access to a good public transportation system should be a consideration in the development of this property.
- Increasing density on the southwest corner of the property is a good idea.
- Important to try to imagine the sound created by the neighborhood, impact of traffic on road through the property. Anything going up past the knoll with have a significant sound impact in the conserved area.
- Possibly limit development to south of the upper road in the higher density model (E/F) to help preserve the feel of park and wildlife corridors
- Parks Commission favors retaining a wider wildlife corridor in the upper area.
- Limit development on the north-east of the stone ridge
- Would need another road if develop NE portion of property, as it would not be pleasant to live in lower pasture with so much traffic flowing through. Possible road connections needs further study.
- This will be a unique neighborhood due to topography and access to the conserved area. People who choose to live here may be willing to accept limitations on parking and traffic from up hill residents because there are other aspects here that they can't get elsewhere.
- Difficult to consider these options without the economic factors. For example, would it be worth constructing a road for ~30 affordable houses on the south side of the road?
- Consider phases—not all development happens at once. This addresses some of the marketability/economic concerns. Example, a 50-year build-out. Development may occur first near Barre Street with the possibility of other areas reserved for potential development to meet future needs, and areas reserved for conservation.
- The City is considering the possibility of providing infrastructure for the development of the property. This could enhance the potential for affordable housing and provide more control over how the area is developed.
- Some entity (that city has a say in) might allow the build-out over time, and would have a master plan for the work.

Next Steps:

- Jean will reduce the number of choices given tonight's comments, narrowing to two designs. She will provide an elevation illustrating development along Barre Street, and possibly vertically up the hill. The working group will review revisions one more time and see if it makes sense vis a vis the physical information it has to date. Then the designs may be submitted to an engineer and developer for reality-checking.
- Economic Realities might be helpful to know—at least what kinds of things are entirely OUT of the question. (However—many variables from the market make this a bit undependable.) What would a PDR look like?

- The goal is to extract the principles behind the design scenarios Jean comes us with, in order to offer criteria for development to the City and future developer(s). Jean asked the group to review the handout that describes the principles behind each design and to comment via email prior to the next meeting.
- TPL and City would like this group to help come up with a recommendation—what other sorts of information would be helpful in order to craft the recommendation?
 - Zoning Overlay
 - Engineering Feasibility
 - Development Feasibility, perhaps offer what a build-out plan might look like— from a developer’s perspective
 - Street Profile: Would be helpful to understand the profile view when looking at the street (for example—a wall from the street could show inside views of the property, or could be fashioned to be inviting and appealing...a sequence of various views) and from up above (meadow view).
 - Funding possibilities

NEXT MEETING is Monday 2/11/08 at 5:30 at Kellogg-Hubbard Library.