

**Residential Project Meeting
June 14, 2010**

Members Present: Michael Hingston, Judith Esmay, Kate Connolly, Joan Garipay, Bill Dietrich

Staff Present: Vicki Smith, Jonathan Edwards, Judith Brotman

Michael Hingston started the conversation by asking members to think about how the Zoning Ordinance advances or hinders elements of neighborhood character. The following comments were made:

- Dimensional requirements, specifically the front set back hinder the character that is provided by front porches.
- The Zoning Ordinance will not allow the West End neighborhood to develop as it has historically developed.

The example of a 10,000 square foot lot with 35% lot coverage was discussed. It was noted that a single family home and parking can easily be accommodated given existing dimensional controls. One member concluded that the dimensional requirements are generous, although the front setback in residential districts could be changed to accommodate a porch.

There are very few lots in the West End that can be subdivided under our existing regulations and even a smaller number of vacant lots. The West End is essentially built out in terms of density.

The question was posed: What is purpose of each of the various elements of the Zoning Ordinance? In the discussion that followed it was stated that elements of the Zoning Ordinance are not necessarily adopted with a full understanding of the consequences. The lot coverage provisions were adopted fairly recently and with reluctance about making properties non-conforming.

Building tear downs will change the character of the neighborhood. The question was asked: Do we want to keep the neighborhoods looking like they are? It is part of organic change to have tear downs occur. Compared to many other communities, Hanover has not has as many tear downs. The Committee thought it was important to develop a policy position about tear downs.

Thinking about tear downs, the following comments were made:

- We are concerned about the scale of building in reference to the existing neighborhood.
- Most people do not want to be restricted but do not want their neighborhood to change.

Reflecting on dimensional controls, these statements were made:

- Interrelationships such as the height of building and distance to street, are more important than those individual dimensions
- Side and rear setbacks affect a neighbor's sense of privacy.

The discussion was summarized with the following as directives for the work in the West End:

- To preserve the character of the neighborhood
- To consider limiting the size of buildings
- To guide a building's orientation to the street
- To use special exceptions instead of variances to allow flexibility in dimensional considerations

In addition, the approach of thinking of town as discrete neighborhoods instead of zoning districts was agreed to be a more careful way of guiding neighborhood change. The Committee will try to let go of SR and GR typology and look at areas of town as discrete neighborhoods.

The gradations of rural were discussed- remote rural, rural, suburban, more urban housing. It was noted that compared with many cities, Hanover's downtown residential area is really a dense suburban form.

Infill and incorporating additional density to the West End were discussed. The fact was noted that many lots in the West End are non-conforming in terms of lot size. Infill was favorably considered "in places where we want it" which will be hard to define. Infill is supported in the Master Plan as a way to implement the 75% urban /25% rural population distribution policy. Some felt that an increase in density in West End is a logical public policy choice, and a "smart growth" option, however, most people would not like to see a substantial increase in the size of buildings, number of lots or population. There is also the challenge of keeping the neighborhood diverse, as it is now with larger and smaller units and a range of household incomes. There is a fine balance to be maintained concerning the number of units occupied by students. Their integration successfully into the neighborhood often is predicated by the presence of a local landlord.

Focus returned to dimensional standards and their appropriateness. Lot size and frontage are not concerns since many lots are substandard with regard to the minimum lot size. These elements are not seen as critical to the neighborhood character. Height is more relevant as it is perceived as impinging on public space, crowding as viewed from the street and giving a sense of enclosure. We don't have any standards regarding the front facade, windows, doors or entrance areas.

To enhance neighborhood character, the zoning should be modified to accommodate front porches, push cars behind the building line, and to positively reinforce the inter-relationship of the building to the street. The use of a special exception process will allow input of neighbors. If a public purpose cannot be identified for a zoning provision, it was one member's suggestion that those unsupported provisions be left for variance proceedings, which would be unlikely to be successful as they would be contrary to the purposes of the zoning.

The revival of the consideration of the Rental Housing Ordinance should be initiated as a companion to the zoning changes. This would help separate some of the concerns about student occupancy in neighborhoods from the Zoning Ordinance.

The next meeting will be held on Monday, June 21 at 2 PM. Meeting adjourned at 4:25 pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Vicki Smith
(using Judith Brotman's notes taken after 3:20 PM)