

Public Meeting

The meeting was opened at 11:10 a.m.

Introduction and Project Review

There was a brief introduction by each member present as well as the representatives from the consulting firms of Fitzgerald and Halliday, Inc (FHI) and Vanasse Hangen Brustlin, Inc (VHB).

Susan VanBenschoten gave an overview of FHI's and VHB's goals and what may be the goals of the Committee. Ms. VanBenschoten asked the Committee members to think about what their vision is for the downtown and gave a brief overview of the scheduling.

Carol Gould reviewed the scope of work for the project and the objectives of the study.

Jim Cole requested that more emphasis be placed on traffic and circulation and wanted to know what work will be done in that regard.

Mr. Afragola requested clarification on the objective of the study.

Ms. Gould provided a more in-depth explanation of the scope of work and what would be done. She stated that as part of the study they will conduct an existing conditions analysis; a visual assessment will be conducted by Ms. Vairo with the assistance of Mr. Kleppin; a build-out analysis will be performed; and then a draft plan will be prepared and presented to the Committee.

Ms. VanBenschoten stated they would next meet with the Committee in mid September and that they would begin collecting data in the interim.

Mr. Franco suggested that it was a bad time of year to collect parking data since there was less traffic and activity downtown since school will be out.

Ms. VanBenschoten replied that was one of the questions they had for the Committee and would adjust their schedule accordingly. She suggested collecting parking data once school was back in session and waiting until the Fall to conduct the community workshops.

Mr. Scannell wanted to know if there could be more workshops since there never seemed to be enough input at the Planning and Zoning hearings when they were revising their regulations.

Mr. Papp commented that if the Committee found it needed additional monies for more meetings that they would go to the Selectman and request additional money.

Ms. Gould reviewed the map of the study area. She stated they would expand the map to include other parking lots outside of the study area. She further stated that at the next meeting they would present the different zoning districts within the study area.

Mr. Papp, in response to an inquiry from Ms. VanBenschoten, stated that there was a lot of interest in preserving the unique character of downtown New Canaan. He stated that they had gathered information on steps being taken by other towns to limit chain businesses and would forward that to FHI.

Mr. Afragola stated he feels that New Canaan has lost its uniqueness. He was interested in examples from other towns of good practices.

Study Session

Ms. VanBenschoten then led an exercise with the Committee focusing on three aspects of the downtown:

1. Land Use and Development;
2. Sidewalks, Roads and Circulation; and
3. Parking.

For each category the Committee members were asked to state five (5) things they liked, five (5) things they disliked and five (5) things they would change.

Land Use and Development

Likes:

Pedestrian core, history, the prohibition on ground-floor offices, small merchants, lack of chain stores, brick sidewalks and lamps, small size of stores, the parking exempt area, the existing green-space, ease of access and stroller accessibility.

Dislikes:

Teens skateboarding on Elm Street, need a balance between business and customers, add underground parking, promote second floor residential use, deter chain stores, concerns expressed if the private parking lots are sold.

Changes:

Limit building height's on Elm Street, obtain an open plaza on Forest Street, keep the movie theatre, find a place for the kids to congregate, more culture and arts, add a crosswalk on Main Street by Town Hall, more use of the Village District Regulations, more trees on the sidewalk, broaden the aesthetic of Elm and Main Street to other portions of downtown, promote new business and expand the commercial business.

Sidewalks, Roads and Circulation:

Likes:

Brick sidewalks and lamps, the wide sidewalks, the sidewalk trees, the pedestrian mall feel, keep Elm Street one-way and keep the north-south traffic issue downtown.

Dislikes:

Keep clutter off the Elm Street sidewalks, reduce speed limits, keep 18-wheel vehicles off Elm Street during certain hours, not allow Park Street to be used as a truck route, fix the timing of the light on Cherry Street and South Ave., stop double-parking, allow outside display of merchandise on Main and Elm Streets during warmer months, close off Main Street to traffic at certain times of the year,

Changes:

Add brick throughout the downtown, possibly look at more signals, improve commercial access (signage), add sidewalks to Irwin and Kiwanis Parks, make East Maple a two-way street.

Parking:

Likes:

Parking limits and the separation of uses on Elm Street.

Dislikes:

(They seem to be changes.)

Changes:

Eliminate the parallel parking on the north side of Elm Street, move the pay-parking meters, restrict drive-through businesses, add valet parking, more parking facilities, evaluate parking needs, add double decking to some parking structures, add underground parking to Morse Court and the Town Hall parking, add underground parking to the

Locust Street lot, increase commercial parking fees and no employee parking on Forest, Main or Elm Streets.

Audience Participation

Mr. Cody asked that minutes be put on the town's web site.

Mr. Kleppin stated that would be done.

Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 1:00 p.m.

Stephen Karl, Recording Secretary