



City of Auburn, Maine

Office of Economic and Community Development

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To: Auburn Planning Board

From: Zach Mosher, City Planner

Date: February 13 2018

RE: Memo to Planning Board on Possible Work Plan Projects

The staff would like to present and discuss possible Planning Board initiatives for the upcoming year at the Feb. 13th meeting. Attached is a suggested Work Program written by Bob Bowyer that outlines a few ideas and projects for the Planning Board to think about and take on.

Bob recommends that time is dedicated, either at meetings or work sessions, for Planning Board members to discuss planning projects and initiatives. Bob also recommends that there be more reciprocity between the Board and the City Council so each is aware of what the other is doing and thinking especially when it comes to items such as marijuana or the Ag Study. Making sure the Planning Board is aware of Council items that have implications for the Board as well as having a Council liaison attend the Planning Board meetings are sound propositions.

Some of the projects for Planning Board consideration Bob mentions are the following:

- Zoning Ordinance Review
- Subdivision Regulations Review
- Regulation of Marijuana (Medical & Recreational)
- Developing an inventory of vacant or underutilized properties
- Comprehensive Plan Implementation

The Planning Board should try to prioritize these projects over the course of the next few meetings and any other projects or issues members would like to discuss. The Planning Board will likely review this year's CIP in April or May, and as mentioned above, there should be communication between the City Council and Planning Board so there is an understanding before the PB formally starts any new work plan activity.

I also wanted to share a link to the Ag Study and all the information surrounding it for your review – that link is here: <http://www.auburnmaine.gov/pages/government/agriculture-and-natural-resource-economy>. The information contained in that link will be continually updated, so I encourage you to keep checking in.

Suggested Work Program 2018 By Robert Bowyer,

I am bothered that the PLANNING Board does practically no planning! We are almost entirely a permit granting board. What little planning that is done in the City of Auburn is done by others.

“Planning Time” I recommend that time be scheduled at each meeting for reporting and/or discussion and possible draftsmanship on planning projects. We might even consider a separate meeting for those interested or one or more sub-committees to work on planning projects.

At the least the Board should hear from staff or individual members or guests to report on current projects that have planning implications. The February 6 Sun Journal reported on two planning issues. One is the location of marijuana producers and outlets. That sounds like zoning to me. (See the Zoning for the Weed project listed below). The other issue was seeking a State designation as a “Smart Growth Community”. Doug Greene is quoted as saying we are already doing smart growth. What does the State designation mean?

Most City Council meetings have one or more agenda items that have planning implications and involve planning staff. We should get periodic reports on the Council’s thinking and potential implications for items on which the Planning Board will have to take some action. The staff might also give us a heads up (via email for example) when they know there are planning related items on the Council agenda so that we can watch on our own telly.

In the early days on my terms the Council had a liaison who attended PB meetings. We may not get back to that but the staff can keep us briefed.

Similarly there are Board members who are liaisons or members of other committees, e.g. the Ag study or the New Auburn Plan, who should give periodic reports. Staff members also are involved with other committees and inter-departmental activities. For example, if the high school construction committee decides a new location, other than the current site, is preferable, that will have significant impact on the site selected.

The Planning Board is mandated by City Ordinance to make recommendations on the Capital Improvement Program. Most of the active projects are news to us.

Planning Board Projects

In addition to being better informed about what is going on in City government there are our own projects, listed below, that we should undertake.

Zoning Ordinance Review We acted to reconcile an inconsistency between the Zoning Ordinance and the Comprehensive Plan on the Troy Street project. By law the Zoning Ordinance is supposed to be consistent with the Comprehensive Plan. Each of the new form based code districts should be checked for consistency and appropriate action taken.

The Zoning Ordinance would benefit from a systematic review. Over a long time period it has grown into a lengthy and sometimes inconsistent regulation. That is the inevitable result of years of patching and pasting. There are provisions that addressed some problem years (actually decades) ago. No one seems to know why they are in the Ordinance and what problem they were meant to solve. This is a laborious process and is too often easily deferred. At the least the staff should be keeping a log of all the questionable provisions.

Subdivision Regulations Review What was just observed about the Zoning Ordinance applied equally as well to the Subdivision Regulations. There are some other issues. The Woodbury Heights subdivision is an example of what we can not tolerate in Auburn. The developer clear cut the land and bulldozed the site and we are supposed to make a finding about the protection of natural features. Doug has noted the absence of requirements in the Regulations by which we could prevent abuse of the land. Both he and I have worked with other regulations that are better than the minimalist Auburn regulation. I think of two examples -- a "limit of work" line that confines site disturbance to the area around the house and a requirement for a "site analysis" which identifies significant natural features leading to a more sensitive design. Doug is also trained a landscape architect and knows of other requirements that would produce better results.

I am also uncomfortable with the Board's habit of waiving requirements if a developer asks. You may disagree with my position on the maximum length of a cul-de-sac. If we have a provision in the Regulation we need to stand by it. If the Board is going to grant a waiver every time some developer asks, then eliminate the requirement.

Great Falls Area Subdivision Plan During the review of the form based code and of the location for the new bus terminal, a subdivision plan surfaced that showed an inadequate street layout plan. The official status of the subdivision plan is questionable but we do need a new plan for the area before development starts to move forward.

Zoning for Weed I have been working with zoning since 1960 and have never had to think about marijuana propagation and retail sale. Well, if you live long enough! It looks as though that will be in front of us soon.

Adaptive Reuse We encountered resistance from the prior Council and an earlier City Attorney in what I believe was a well conceived permit procedure for adaptive reuse first at St. Louis Church but potentially applicable elsewhere in the city. Time will tell whether there could be a new response from a new City Council and a new City Attorney but the Church and the issue are still there.

Large Developed Lots With all the interest in development and growth in the tax base the Planning and Economic Development staff should prepare an inventory of vacant and underdeveloped parcels in the city that might be candidates for housing, commercial or industrial, or municipal uses. The study should distinguish parcels that are in areas served now,

or potentially soon, by water and sewer, and are identified in the Comprehensive Plan as part of a staged growth strategy.

Using existing City information resources, GIS and real estate data base, develop a simple profile of vacant and underdeveloped parcels with basic data on site characteristics e.g. wetlands and steep slopes. The Economic Development staff should contribute to this study and develop an inventory of vacant or underused non-residential buildings.

Regardless of size, there should be an inventory of City owned lots that might be a candidate for sale and development.

Each of the lots, and buildings, if applicable, should be reviewed for consistency with the Comprehensive Plan and existing zoning.

Some of this work may already have been done in part if the high school construction committee decides a new location, other than the current site, is preferable.

Comprehensive Plan Follow up There is an appendix to the Comprehensive Plan that lists a variety of follow-up actions to implement the Plan. We should look at that because little has been done.

With the turnover in Board membership and staff I think we are down to two Board members and Eric Cousens who were on the Comprehensive Plan Committee that worked for nearly three years leading to the adoption of the Plan in 2010. With new replacement members due to be appointed by the City Council that institutional memory is fading. I suggest a review of the Comprehensive Plan for all the “new” people, including staff, who were not involved with it previously.

Housing Inexpensive (relatively) housing compared to the Portland area, metropolitan Boston or other areas along the Eastern seaboard is an often overlooked asset for economic development in Lewiston - Auburn. With the projects on line, under construction and completed we are making progress on adding to the supply of housing in Auburn that responds to the changes in household size, i.e. many more 1 person, 2 person households and empty nesters who are candidates for smaller housing units than they are presently occupying. That will free up family type units in the existing housing stock

The missing element is new construction oriented to our significant senior and empty nester population.

Ag Study, New Auburn Plan These are ongoing projects that have PB representatives.