These minutes approved 8-7-2014, by unanimous vote, 5-0

Planning Board
Meeting Minutes of March 19, 2014
Ashfield Town Hall

Present: Michael Fitzgerald, Chair (MF)
Ken Miller (KM)
Lauren Preston-Wells (LPW)
Alan Rice (AR)
Brittany Martin, Scribe (BM)

Absent: Sarah Holbrook

Public Attendance: Brian Clark (BC)
Chris Gray (CG)
Jodi Hall (JH)
Arnold Jones (AJ)

The meeting is called to order at 7:32pm.

1. Planning Board reviews minutes from March 5, 2014 meeting, LPW moves to approve the minutes as amended, KM seconds and all vote in favor.

2. AR reports he has nominated MF for the Planning Board, at Town Caucus. MF responds that he will sign the papers he needs to, by Friday (as required).

3. Planning Board reviews ANR for David P. and Faith B. Thibault on 1903 Conway Road. MF states that it's a legal sized lot and they are moving property lines. KM moves to accept the ANR, MF seconds and all vote in favor.

4. Planning Board discusses Senior Housing Bylaw Hearing. AR states that a good area to consider is Town center, because that is where the amenities are concentrated, within walking distance; because it is flat; and because it would offer opportunities for a healthy integration of different age groups. KM states that he is leaning toward the notion to have senior housing approved for all of Town. MF states that if someone wanted senior housing outside of Town center we probably would not need a bylaw.

5. Planning Board recognizes Ashfield resident Jodi Hall. JH is new to town governments and is concerned about the proposed telecommunications system that Chris Gray is proposing to put on the steeple. JH has reservations about using the steeple for a telecom system because of its architectural and historical importance. AJ also shares concerns about putting antennas on the steeple. MF asks CG about what he is proposing. CG:
    a. Proposes to put up antennas to offer people wireless internet service in Town center. Mock-up antennas are currently installed on the steeple, to present an idea of their appearance.
    b. Antennas are white in color, but can be painted a different color to match a background color.
    c. Largest of the antennas is 53” x 12”; the smallest is 27” x 7”.

d. The service would be faster than DSL
e. Repeaters would be smaller and could be installed on other structures, poles or trees and so would provide service farther out of Town center (depending on locations of repeaters).
f. He is proposing six (6) antennas, as the worst-case scenario. Some may be substituted with smaller, directional antennas, provided there are receivers to aim at. Two sets of three antennas each are possible, with larger ones more visible on lower columns of the steeple. Antennas would be placed on existing structures.
g. If the antennas were to be placed inside the steeple structure, the signal would be weaker and would only serve a handful of people.
h. Per recommendations and oversight of the Building Committee (with whom he met), the antennas would be installed in a permanent, non-destructive fashion.
i. He will need at least ten (10) people to sign up for this service, in order to justify the installation.
j. He has a coverage map, but is not divulging it at this time.
k. Coverage will likely include Main Street, Baptist Corner, Norton Hill Road, and two-thirds of the way around the lake, as well as a couple of places further outside of Town center.
l. He can offer lower prices – up to a certain speed – than what people are paying now.
m. AR: How securely would the antennas be attached? What are the risks of one falling off? CG: Antennas will be attached securely; they won't come off unless a piece of the steeple structure breaks free.
n. CG: Recognizes that many people do not have a good internet connection in Town; is looking to work with the Town on this installation, which he sees as a good place for the antennas. The height is good and, while there would be a visual change to the steeple, the structure would not change, and the antennas would be taken down when a better system comes along.
o. CG was asked about the particulars of the service offered. CG: $200 for initial fee (installation), $50/month thereafter; speeds would be 10mb download (DSL is about 3mb), 2-3mb upload.
p. MF has spoken with Jim Hawkins (Building Commissioner); a special permit will likely be required for installation of these antennas
q. MF notes that the current telecommunications bylaw was written for towers, but not for wireless antennas, which potentially creates a dilemma. Structures other than cell towers are limited to 50 feet in height (that the Planning Board can regulate), but nowhere in the bylaw does it state anything about antennas being limited to that height. There is also the issue of emergency antennas (there is already one on the back side of the steeple, though it is no longer active). Does the Planning Board revise the bylaw, with more restrictions around the placement and height of wireless antennas? Or, does the Board provide guidelines for the Building Commissioner? In this case it is ultimately up to the Select Board to decide on whether the antennas should be placed or not, as this is a Town-owned building. MF thinks the telecommunications bylaw should be revised to take into account the increase in use of wireless antennas; this would require a hearing and a vote of the Town. AR agrees that – given the telecommunications bylaw was written over 14 years ago – advancement in technology is creating just cause for revising the bylaw.
r. AR asks how minimizing cell towers – as defined in the intent of the telecommunications bylaw – is to be interpreted. What is 'minimal'? Three towers? Five towers? MF: Has

to do with overlapping of coverage areas. The Board has no right to ban towers, but can regulate where they are to be located.

s. KM: Question about how CG's potential application would be affected by a change in the telecommunications bylaw. Discussion about grandfathering, and about commercial versus emergency uses.
t. CG raises the question about multiple special permits being required for antennas place on the same facility (collocation). MF: Would like to see some clarification on this issue. Discussion continues about different uses on the same structure (such as internet and cell).
u. CG notes that – regarding the installation of antennas on the steeple – he has met with the Technology Committee, Historical Commission, and Building Committee; The Tech Committee has renewed its support, while he has yet to meet again with the other two committees, for clarification on their positions.
v. MF suggests tabling the topic, until such time as when the Board has more sufficient information.

6. Board discusses proposed senior housing bylaw boundary (physical limits of senior housing district), as presented at the 3-8-14 public hearing, as well as the anticipated length of this hearing.
    a. Discussion on feedback about how much area should be included in a senior housing district – ranging from a small area in the center of Town, to including the entire Town.
    b. MF: Right now one could apply for a special permit from the ZBA to build multi-family housing anywhere. If someone wanted senior housing outside of the Town center it is likely it would have been done already. The intent of this bylaw proposal is to create a district in the Town center, not all over Town. If the area were to be expanded in the future, the bylaw would need to be revised or expanded.
    c. Question about the character of the Town center, how it has changed very little over the years. There are those who feel that introducing this bylaw will invite change, but not necessarily in a good way.
    d. AR mentions letter submitted by Harry Dodson, which supports the proposed bylaw, but with stipulations: structures staying true to the historical landscape; Town rural character maintained; a streetscape that supports healthy community interaction.

7. AR moves to adjourn the meeting, KM seconds and all vote in favor.

Meeting adjourns at 9:43pm.
Respectfully submitted,
Brittany Martin, Scribe