Town of Charlestown

Planning Commission Design Standards Subcommittee Meeting Minutes

Wednesday, March 5, 2025 at 9:00 A.M.

Charlestown Town Hall, Council Chambers

4540 South County Trail, Charlestown, RI 02813

1. CALL TO ORDER:

Ms. Topping called the meeting to order at 9:03 a.m.

2. ROLL CALL:

Members present: Ruth Platner, Frances Topping, Carol Mossa, Charee Jackson, Lorna Persson

Members absent: Paula Orsini

Others: Sean Henry, Town Planner

3. MINUTES APPROVAL:

Discussion and/or potential vote concerning:

A. Minutes from February 12, 2025

The Committee reviewed the February 12, 2025 meeting minutes.

A motion was made by Ms. Jackson to approve the meeting minutes as written. Seconded by Ms. Mossa and carried by unanimous vote.

4. CONTINUED DISCUSSION:

A. Review of final report prepared by Libra Planners

B. Development of guidelines that can be accepted by the Town Council and adopted as an ordinance

The Committee continued their discussion as to what they hoped to accomplish with this project.

Ms. Jackson stated the EIC was anticipating producing a document that would provide guidelines that would be more user friendly toward small businesses. She said she would like the subcommittee to develop a document that could contain both standards and guidelines. She suggested developing guidelines for each district and reference each with an ordinance.

Ms. Platner explained that the Planning Commission was looking to produce standards that could be incorporated into an ordinance for the large-scale commercial projects that may come before the Commission. Ms. Platner said that it was important to move rather quickly so the standard could be put in place prior to any new large commercial application coming before the Planning Commission.

Ms. Jackson said she had reviewed the Shannock Guidelines and found them very clear and user friendly. She felt that document was more in line with what the EIC would like to see.

Ms. Topping clarified that the Design Standards document prepared by Libra Planners was prepared for new commercial projects only. Existing commercial structures have been grandfathered in, unless a large renovation was proposed.

Discussion ensued as to how to create a document that would be acceptable to both the Planning Commission and Economic Improvement Commission.

Mr. Henry said that from what he was hearing there were two issues that need to be dealt with: aesthetics and a procedural approach. He understood there were different expectations as to what the project should look like.

The Committee discussed some of the elements contained in the Design Standards document. There was discussion about pedestrian walkways and sidewalks. Ms. Jackson felt it was an unnecessary burden to be placed on the applicant. An applicant should not be required to pay to install sidewalks in front of their business on a state-owned road. One suggestion she offered to provide funding for sidewalks was the implementation of impact fees. Ms. Topping stated it was referencing sidewalks within a development not sidewalks along a road. The Commission has in some instances asked for some land to be reserved for a future sidewalks, if possible, but did not determine the surface.

Mr. Henry suggested offering business owners incentives to improve and maintain their properties. He stated that it is a tool that North Kingstown is using.

Ms. Persson added that all the Committee members would probably like to see wood siding on all new commercial projects, but that could become cost prohibitive. Ms. Topping stated other materials are cited.

Ms. Platner stated that a few years back, there had been a pre application before the Planning Commission called "Charlestown Commons", the project never came to fruition. She suggested for the next meeting that the Committee review the proposed design for that project to discuss their opinions on its design and aesthetics. It would be beneficial to see if there was common ground as to what was pleasing and what may be perceived as a negative and work from there to begin the discussion as to aesthetics.

The Committee set the next meeting for Wednesday, April 9th at 3 P.M.

5. ADJOURNMENT:

A motion was made by Ms. Mossa to adjourn at 10:40 A.M. Seconded by Ms. Persson and carried by unanimous vote.

Respectfully Submitted,

Janet Lombardo
Recording Secretary