

Concord Square Planning & Development, Inc.

Memorandum

To: Town of Petersham
From: Ted Carman & Yuqi Wang from Concord Square Planning & Development
Subject: Nichewaug Inn & Academy Property Consulting – Public Information Meeting #1 on April 13, 2016
Date: April 19, 2016

Summary

The Public Information Meeting #1 (“Meeting”) for the Nichewaug Inn & Academy Property consulting project (“Project”) was held on April 13, 2016 at the Petersham Town Hall. This memo summarizes the basic meeting information, and the key communication between the consultant and the public during and after the meeting.

Basic Meeting Information

The Meeting was hosted by the Selectboard of the Town of Petersham. Henry Woolsey, the Vice-Chair of the Petersham Selectboard, presided over the meeting. About 60 residents from the town attended the meeting. Attendees from the consulting team included: Ted Carman and Yuqi Wang from Concord Square Planning & Development, Inc. (“CSPD”), the lead consultant, J.B.Clancy from Albert, Righter & Tittmann Architects, Inc., the architect, Joanne Shelton from Bonz & Company, the market analyst, and Douglas MacLeay, the septic & water engineer. CSPD provided a handout with an overall project schedule.

The Meeting started at 6:05 pm with Henry Woolsey providing an overview of the Project background and introducing the consulting team. Then the consulting team gave a presentation covering the team’s proposed approach, work to-date (e.g. site visit, previous engineering studies, etc.), preliminary assessment of the issues, and preliminary concept of potential solutions. This was followed by a general discussion session during which the audience made suggestions, gave comments, and raised questions about the potential alternative uses of the building and the site, the issues associated with water & septic, zoning, visual appearances of

future development, etc., as well as the public process and the anticipated outcomes of the consulting work.

The general discussion session ended at around 8:00pm, with informal discussions continued afterwards for another half an hour.

It was also declared that the Meeting presentation, one-page handout, and this memo will be posted on the Town's website under the "Town Business – Nichewaug Property" page.

Comments, Suggestions, and Questions

The comments, questions, and suggestions from the public generally fell into the following five categories:

1. About potential alternative uses of the building and the site

- a) Affordable housing that targets senior people who want to downsize within the Town
- b) Affordable housing that targets senior people from the region who want to downsize
 - Suggestion: do market study for this need
 - Question: in this case, would the current residents in the Town have a priority to buy?

Joanne answered: this probably would limit the market therefore is not a preferable approach
- c) An alternative to single family dwelling in town, not limited to senior housing, but helps people to remain in the community if they want to
 - Jim Regan in audience: the Petersham Committee is conducting a survey on local people's housing needs, and will share with the consulting team
- d) Part-time residence such as seasonal or vacation homes and condos that targets people from out of Town
 - Suggestion: do market study for this need
 - Comment: this type of housing echoes the Town's history when some people were drawn to open rural landscape and agri-tourism from urban areas

- e) Co-housing characteristics combined with condo structure: all the units will be condo, and co-housing is optional
 - Comment: Why would someone want a condo? People come here for open space and land.

Answer from an audience member: many people like closer proximity to other people, village community – not everyone wants to be isolated

- f) Housing that adopts a “rent to own” model
 - Ted answered: “rent to own” has difficulty with the financial structure, because a real “rent-own” requires the unit be sold at market price at the end of five years. It is difficult to estimate the eventual sale price, therefore hard to finance and obtain up-front commitments.

- g) Demolish the existing building and build new townhouses (with same number of bedrooms as the proposed renovation & conservation approach)
 - Comment: There seems to have been a bias toward preserving the building, however, should compare the cost of total tear down + new construction versus partial demolition and renovation.

Total tearing-down would make it easier to do a better site plan.

Ted answered: we would consider this option in our analysis.

- h) Municipal office use – it was suggested that the Town needs better, additional office space

- i) Senior Center – a Town gathering space

- j) Business space or Studio space

- k) Small Inn or Restaurant

- Is it possible to get a liquor license?

- l) Community garden

- Will it be able to continue on site?

- m) A mixed-use, perhaps multi-phase project that incorporates home business support services, Town office space, Inn, Restaurant, and several different types of housing (senior housing, condo)

Ted answered:

- Will find out the Town's need for office spaces
- Will provide a list of alternative programs
- Generally speaking, it is harder to finance this type of mixed use development

2. *About the water & septic issue*

a) Suggested to first make an assessment on the upper limit of the number of bedrooms based on septic system capacity, and then look at various ways to configure the same amount of bedrooms

- Generally agreed that this is a good approach
- Douglas agreed that the upper limit would be 30-40 bedrooms
- Ted said would look at a number of options including townhouse, single-family house, etc. within this limit
- Comment: 40 bedrooms sounds too high

Ted answered: if the number is too low, it will work less well financially because of the cost of demolition which ideally would be recovered from future property tax revenues

- Comment: the town's previous decisions about Nichewaug were not based only on financial considerations, neither should this time

Ted answered: the consulting team is not planning to propose a single solution that is most financially preferable; instead, we will provide a number of options with financial projections for each of them, and let the town choose

- Suggestion: include tax revenue projection for each option.

Ted answered: will do.

b) Suggested to explore new technologies and alternative methods for waste water disposal, such as gray water reuse, artificial wetland, a greenhouse system, Silo system, sand filter, etc.

Douglas answered:

- Gray water reuse is limited to particular uses such as flush toilet, etc., and cannot satisfy many other uses such as drinking water; also, gray water system needs special maintenance

- Other “innovative” systems – people tried that, but so far haven’t been widely successful
- c) Suggested to consider create a Water District and put in a public water system
 - Ted answered: this would be a good solution
- d) Whether the existing well on the site is usable, and how much development can it support?
 - Douglas answered: the well hasn’t been used for several years; it will need to be tested.
- e) If build condominiums on the site, what is the ownership of the septic & water system? Relations to abutters and the Library?
 - Ted answered: we will talk to abutters. For the Library, it is feasible and likely to be desirable for the condo association to sign an agreement with the Library.
- f) Comment: 5,000 gallons a day seems like a lot
 - Douglas answered: will discuss with DEP about the engineering feasibility of our options / proposals

3. *About zoning, density, and design issues*

- a) Clustered houses usually don’t have enough open space.
 - Ted answered: will establish design standards
- b) Whether the consulting team’s preliminary development concept requires zoning variance or special permit? The current zoning requires 1.5 acres for a single family house
 - Ted answered: the proposal probably would need new zoning; a potential approach is to create a zoning overlay district with design standards for this site

4. *About public process*

- a) Suggested to meet with the abutters and boards before moving forward with a plan
 - Ted answered: will set up meeting to have a discussion with the abutters and key boards and other groups
- b) Suggested to actively reach out to residents who were not able to attend the meeting

- Ted answered: will coordinate with Henry to figure out a way to reach out to these residents
 - Henry answered: all information will be available on the Town’s website; people can contact the consultant directly
- c) Suggested to meet with local groups such as the Petersham Committee, the Nichewaug Friends, etc.
- Ted answered: will set up meeting to have a discussion with these and other groups

5. *Other general comments and approaches*

- a) Where will the funds come from for demolition?
- Ted answered: probably Town Funds, with the expectation that future tax revenues from new development would be used to pay back the demolition cost.
- b) Suggested to take into consideration Petersham’s unique qualities: 1) 70% to 80% of the town land is protected open space; 2) it is the most aged community in the County, and the elderly population is projected to grow.
- Suggest to take a look at the town’s inventory of protected open space, finding out how much of the preserved land is publicly accessible
- c) Is there room on site for parking (if building at the proposed density)?
- Ted answered: there will be space for parking if the Academy portion is demolished.
- d) There are not adequate amenities or services in Petersham to support seniors (market, medical, gas, bank, transit, etc.), so probably not a good place for senior to “age in place”.
- Answer from an audience member: neighbors help each other out
- e) Project scope and next steps – what will happen at the end of the consulting work, and what’s next? Will the town have everything they need to act after Fall Town Meeting?
- Ted answered: the consulting work will provide a range of options for Town Meeting vote. Then the Town can issue an RFP to find a developer to carry out the plan that the town favors.

- f) What might be some other costs that the town should plan for in the next 6 months – studies?
 - J.B. answered: the town has already paid for environmental reports and drawings of existing conditions – these can be used to get demo bids.
- g) Suppose the community reached a consensus after the consulting work. How to ensure future development would follow the proposal?
 - Ted: the idea is for the Town to issue an RFP to find a developer to purchase the property for redevelopment. The consulting team would provide a list of requirements and standards that could be incorporated into the RFP so that any potential developer should follow those requirements. Also, zoning overlay district with design standards would help control the visual appearance.
- h) Energy: will there be a consideration of alternative energy production, conservation measures, etc.?
 - Ted and J.B. Clancy answered: the concept is to use energy efficiency technologies, which also could be a marketing point for the new development.