

Kelley's Corner Steering Committee

Meeting Minutes – 5 August 2015

These are the meeting minutes from the Kelley's Corner Steering Committee of the Town of Acton, Massachusetts. The meeting took place on 5 August 2015 in the Land Use Conference Room at the Acton Town Hall.

The meeting was called to order at approximately 7:30 pm by Andy Brockway.

Present: Andrew Brockway, Eric Solomon, J D Head, Jeff Clymer, Kat Hudson, Larry Kenah, Margaret Busse (via phone), Peter Darlow

Not Present: none

Board of Selectmen: Peter Berry

Planning Department: Kristen Guichard, Robert Hummel, Roland Bartl

Other Attendees

Steve Cecil and Josh Fiala from The Cecil Group also attended the meeting.

Meeting Summary

This was the first meeting in a little while where we were joined by the external consultants. The agenda items listed draft versions of three documents or deliverables.

- Design Guidelines
- Zoning Standards
- Overall Plan

The actual conversations focused on three questions associated with these documents.

- How will we address the issue of four-story buildings in Kelley's Corner?
- What development criteria can be addressed in design guidelines and what criteria must be constrained by zoning standards?
 - This issue is sometimes framed as a flexible approach (design guidelines) compared with a prescriptive approach.

Meeting Details

Opening Presentation

Josh Fiala presented some slides that provided discussion points.

- How is building height defined?

- Wayland Town Center (nearby development but in previously empty fields)
- Lots of recent examples from Massachusetts towns
- Design criteria
 - Adjusted setback
 - Building height
 - FAR
 - Parking

Four Stories

Some of the recent negative reaction to specific Kelley's Corner changes centered on an increased maximum height (45 feet) that in turn might be used to allow four story buildings in Kelley's Corner. The most important point that must be made about the increased allowed height is that it will only be allowed under a proposed master plan. That is, the increased height will only apply to a very small number of proposed developments and the town will have a lot of control early in the review process about what such proposed developments might look like.

During the course of the meeting, several additional points related to buildings that might be higher than three stories in one way or another.

- The original impetus for four stories was based on the pro forma models that required additional residential units in order to be economically viable.
- Roland talked with colleagues at a recent conference who suggested that 45 feet might not be high enough to allow viable four-story structures.
- Steve Cecil suggested some options that would allow developers to reach four stories without violating the 45-foot ceiling.
- Steve and Josh showed pictures of several pleasing four-story structures on nearby towns. Some of these structures might be classified as three-and-a-half structures (next section).
- We also saw a four story building from Hudson that illustrated everyone's concerns with a wide open approach to four stories.
- Margaret Busse reminded everyone that four stories might continue as an issue and asked whether there might be other ways to "sweeten the deal".
- Andy Brockway asked whether this entire conversation was too focused on economics and not enough on other characteristics of a proposed development.
- Steve Cecil gave an example from Stamford Connecticut where the argument was not between 5 stories and 4 stories but between 5 stories and nothing (no development).

The conversation continued to discuss how we might allow a very small number of four story structures but to limit them and make them acceptable to the town.

- Are four stories only allowed under a master plan?
- Could we impose limits that included a maximum height but also included a minimum setback? This would prevent four stories right on the street.
- Might we impose limits using FAR?

- Someone made the observation that developers maximize value, not FAR (or any other dimensional criterion).
- Can we offer four stories but only under very specific circumstances?

Three and a Half Stories

Several of the example buildings in nearby towns were not really four full stories. Instead, the top floor was part of the roof line. Useful floor space on the fourth floor was increased by adding gables at the roof level. Buildings like this are sometimes referred to as three and a half stories. Such buildings might provide developers an approach to additional residential units in a style that would be quite acceptable to the town.

Summary of Conversation

At the end of this rather long conversation where we discussed many topics with four story buildings as a connecting issue, we did not reach any conclusions but did recognize some important points.

- Infrastructure continues to be a concrete and large component of the overall plan.
- A proposed development needs to include housing.
- The town needs to provide incentives for bundling parcels.
 - Without bundling, there are practically no opportunities for a developer to make a proposal that would require (allow?) a master plan.
- At the risk of stating the obvious, we did point out that, unlike nearby developments in towns such as Wayland, Kelley's Corner is not empty land.
- In many ways, Kelley's Corner is not really a town center (and cannot become one).

Meeting Minutes (4)

Minutes from the 29 July 2015 KCSC meeting were approved with minor edits only.

Administrative Updates (5)

There is no next regularly scheduled meeting. Kristen Guichard will poll committee members for their availability for additional meetings in late August.

In Closing

The meeting adjourned at 10:25 pm.

These minutes were recorded by Lawrence J Kenah.