

# Comments before the Planning Board

## Introduction

Let me begin by introducing the members of the Village Study Committee: Chris Hartwell, Toni DeSoto, Gloria Gustafson, Lew Stowe, Peter Smith, Scott Stevens, Joel Lefever, Stu Dawson, Jody Merrill, Dylan Smith, Dean Lessard and Robert Palmer. I'm Ron McAllister and I chair the committee.

Our committee has been working for three years to develop a Master Plan for York Village. Early on, we wrote a mission statement that focuses on:

- 1) *the vitality and beauty of York Village*; that envisions
- 2) *a town center that is dynamic, safe, and sustainable*; that is conscious of
- 3) *the unique history of the community*; and that is
- 4) *both welcoming to visitors and supportive of local businesses*.

This is what we have been trying to do and we hope the Planning Board will be our partner in achieving this vision. I'd like to think that tonight's workshop might be the beginning of a fruitful partnership between our two boards.

Let me give you a quick overview of what has been accomplished to date.

## What We've Done So Far

One of our earliest tasks was to determine what people mean when they talk about the Village. We decided there were at least three different ideas in play:

*Concentric Rings*: People see the village in geographic terms as either: a 2-Minute Village (1/8 mile from the monument), a 5-Minute Village (1/4 mile from the Monument) or a 10-minute village (1/2 mile from the Monument). The first two years or so we zeroed in on the

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2-Minute Village but our focus now is on the 5-Minute Village — roughly Moulton Lane, Woodbridge Road, Avon Avenue and Yorkshire Commons.

*Elements:* We also identified several elements of Village improvement. Among these are: narrower vehicle travel lanes, parallel parking only, limited but safer on-street parking, more off-street parking, less asphalt and more green space, designated or shared bicycles lanes, sidewalks throughout the village, better placement of crosswalks, places to sit and gather, street trees, better lighting, relocated utility lines, better signage, etc.

*Alternative Scenarios:* After a series of public stakeholder meetings, we generated a series of scenarios for re-routing traffic through the village. We have been calling these: 1) the Monument Garden (which keeps the two-way traffic behind the monument but reduces the parking there), 2) the Village Park (which makes that road a one-way street but keeps some parking), and 3) the Town Common (which grasses over that road and eliminates the parking behind the monument altogether). These scenarios are all detailed on the committee's website: [www.yorkvillage.org](http://www.yorkvillage.org).

*The Engineering Survey:* A baseline survey of the 5-Minute Village which shows everything on record as far as rights of way, property boundaries, and physical features are concerned has just been completed.

*TDRC:* The BOS also hired a team of landscape architects, engineers, urban planners, etc. to conduct a technical investigation of all our scenarios and to develop a formal Master Plan that will build on our work. TDRC will be working with us for the rest of the calendar year on this phase of the project.

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### Future Tasks:

There will be two further phases before the Master Plan can be considered complete:

- 1) A Schematic Design Phase will refine the work of Phase 2 and result in estimated construction costs for actual completion of the project.
- 2) An Advanced Design and Bidding Phase will see the development of the final technical aspects of the project which will make the plan ready for implementation.

### The Role of the Planning Board

At this point, there is a crucial role for the Planning Board because much of what we envision cannot happen without matching up zoning standards with the evolving master plan. We know the Village is currently zoned either GEN-3 or RES-1B.

The existing zoning determines building heights (50' for municipal buildings and 35' for everything else) and lot coverage (50%). It also determines minimum lot size (30,000 sq. ft.), minimum frontage (100 ft.), front setbacks (30 ft.), rear and side yard setbacks (20 ft.). We think changes in some of these standards are essential.

Further, because the Village Overlay District area does not conform to our 5-Minute Village, we would like to see the district expanded to take in the whole 5-Minute Village.

Some of our ideas for re-vitalizing the village will not be possible without changes to the area's zoning. Village re-vitalization almost necessitates changes if economic development is to be facilitated.

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TDRC and the committee are also talking about signage and lighting and other features within the public realm as well. These can't be done without work by the Planning Board — perhaps a lot of work by the Planning Board.

As you well know, zoning standards within the Town are what Dylan would call “conventional.” They describe the highest and best uses to which property can be put. There is an alternative to this traditional approach. I am sure you know more about this than I do. I am aware that form-based codes, wherein the appearance of buildings rather than their use is paramount, are one alternative scheme.

I don't know if form-based zoning is best suited to our re-vitalization goals or not. Maybe some sort of hybrid system is preferable. This is your domain, not mine and not the Village Study Committee's but we need to work together to go forward.

### Conclusion

We are here tonight because we need your help. We know that York Village can be a much more lively place. Look at Kittery Foreside or at Kennebunk and you can imagine the potential for York. But we also know that our vision will be little more than an illusion without the active engagement of this Board. We welcome your comments.

Thank you.