Regulation Review workgroup – June 14, 2007 meeting notes

Attendance: Scott Self, Glenn Page, Steve Russell, Victoria Barlow.
The meeting convened in Town Hall at 3:30 and concluded at 5:00.

Agenda

1. Feedback on multi-family visits:
   Design standards:
   - Approaches/entrances
   - Impervious surface
   - Parking
   - Green space
   - Setbacks
   - Elevations
   - Amenities

2. Expanding design standards for our multifamily regulations

3. Location of multifamily units in what zones?

4. Home occupations - Discussion

Discussion of design/performance standards, stimulated by workgroup members' visits to multi-family(MF) housing developments in Swanzey

Evergreen Knolls Cobble Hill Pines Forest View Estates
Ashuelot River Apartments Haley Park Swanzey Township Housing
Several members also visited Riverbend Apartments.

The worksheets provided by Carbonneau were invaluable in helping members focus their inspections. Conversations with residents of the developments also revealed important information.

<u>Approaches/entrances</u>
Adequate site distances are especially important when an entrance off a high-speed road serves many homes. Haley Heights has a good approach, thanks to the big breakdown lanes. Lacking breakdown lanes, Evergreen Knoll and Riverbend are difficult, potentially dangerous turns.

> *QUESTION: On State highways, can the PB only suggest, rather than require, installation of breakdown lanes? Russell has been told by DOT that all the PB needs to do is say that we require one.*

<u>Impervious surface, parking, density</u>

Evergreen Knolls	1.93 units/acre – 16.5 acre project lot
Cobble Hill Pines	2.16 units/acre – 14.77 acre lot
Forest View Estates	5.11 units/acre – 14.1 acre project lot
Ashuelot River Apartments	9.54 units/acre – 4.2 acres
Haley Park	12.26 units/acre – 7.34 acre lot
Swanzey Township Housing	13.84 units/acre – 1.3 acre project lot

Russell: Calculations of density should address total quantity of impervious surface -- pavement + structure should count as one, especially since impervious surfaces of all kinds must be factored into stormwater management.

Barlow: Our perception/experience of density is affected by the amount of imperious surface -- we experience parking and roads as part of the built environment. The more pavement, the more densely settled the place feels.

Self: We should consider requiring carports in MF development, especially in developments meant to serve the elderly (physical difficulty with shoveling snow) and families (extra storage).

<u>Setbacks/green space</u>

Page: Setbacks should be proportional to the height of structures.

Barlow: Parking should not be allowed in the setback for MF housing, or in the business/commercial setback, either. Landscaping, erosion control, stormwater management are appropriate uses to allow in setback area.

Page: Eliminating parking from the setback would have to apply for all uses in the district, and that would be a hardship for business development, especially in densely developed areas. At what point does the planning process become a taking? We have to consider tax dollars generated/per acre in order to support education, town services.

> *QUESTION: Can setbacks be based on uses, rather than on the zoning district? Could there be a one setback requirement for MF housing and a different one for retail or commercial uses?*

Self: Buffers may be a more appropriate tool than excluding parking in setbacks across a zoning district. For example, exclude parking in the 50' buffer between MF and single-family (SF) housing. Alternatively, it might make sense to require a wider setback between MF and SF housing.

Page: Existing provisions allow use of berms, landscaping to screen residential uses from business uses in Business District.

Barlow: We have to be careful not to rely on abutting property owners to satisfy the intention of setback provisions by landscaping on their property. The property being developed should have adequate screening within its lot.

Members noted that Swanzey Township is architecturally pleasing, with its varying roof lines and the porches on its Main Street façade. However, it lacks adequate green space for children. It appears that snow that falling from roofs will overwhelm doorways.

Elevations

Several members were surprised by the steep dropoffs within Swanzey Township Housing, and dismayed by the steepness of the central mound in Forest View Estates. Members noted that the yard area of the condominiums backing onto Owens Drive have a sheer dropoff at the base of their decks' stairs.

> *QUESTION: Page recommendation to schedule a workshop on plan reading, to increase PB members' skills in relating contour lines to the landscape.*

Members of the group felt that the parking garages, mature trees, and relatively wide open spaces around the buildings help soften the impact of the height of Haley Park buildings.

Amenities

Self: previous recommendation for carports, under parking

Barlow: MF housing designed for families must have adequate open space, and playground facilities that have been designed with professional help to meet the needs of likely users, and sized based on the likely number of users. She reported conversations with residents of Evergreen Knolls and Swanzey Township Housing, and observations of children at play in both developments. At Evergreen Knolls, families feel the open space is conducive to giving children freedom to play without close supervision. At Swanzey Township Housing, there is no place to play other than an undersized tot lot and the parking area. At both developments, "playgrounds" lacked sufficient equipment overall and no diversity for various ages of young users. The two swings at Evergreen Knolls are hung too high for 4-year-olds to get on; the only other piece of equipment is a slide.

Barlow: Community meeting/congregation space is vital when large numbers of residents live in a small area. Ashuelot River Apartments has a community room with indoor mailboxes, laundry facilities, kitchen, large meeting room with tables, a television and comfortable seating. Other options include a covered pavilion with grill and picnic tables, outdoor seating in shady areas.

Barlow: Laundry facilities should be proportional to number of occupants. Community outdoor clotheslines (as at Ashuelot River Apartments) should be provided in several unobstrusive locations.

Russell, Barlow: All MF housing should have places for people to sit and congregate outside the front and back doors. Covered (public) front porches, with adequate room for entry plus 2 chairs. Covered (private) back patios, balconies must be screened/divided from neighbors.

Barlow: All multi-family housing must have places for people to walk. At minimum, trails and paths have to be smooth enough for pushing strollers or riding bikes with training wheels. Internal network of paths should connect to road serving development, and paths should be built along frontage, but SET BACK at least 20' from frontage.

Russell: Dumpsters in Swanzey MF developments often are screened on three sides, but open to primary view. Screening on 4 sides would make servicing unwieldy, but the dumpsters should be positioned so they're not the first thing seen in the development.

Page: Amenities are market-driven, and may push up the cost of developments.

Barlow: We have a responsibility to insist on a certain, minimal quality of life for Swanzey residents when they live in close quarters. Covered places to congregate, play space, places to walk are all relatively inexpensive. A tennis court or swimming pool *would* be expensive, and they are the kind of amenity developers should consider optional and market-driven.

Discussion MF housing as a permitted use in particular zoning districts

Existing Swanzey regulation allow MF housing in the Business and Residential Districts.

Page: The Town should require MF housing to be connected to municipal sewer, especially rental units.

QUESTION: Is this requirement defensible? Given Swanzey's aquifer . . .

Members of the group expressed concern about protecting Industrial Park land from the encroachment of MF housing – re-zoning the portion of the Business District that abuts this land to prohibit MF housing should be considered.

The group discussed the question of whether SF houses should be permitted in the Business District, including existing residential neighborhoods in

existing business zones. For example, two areas of SF homes exist within the Business District on Route 32. Why not change those areas to Residence?

QUESTION: Would such a change amount to spot zoning?

Self: Since SF houses are allowed by special exception, people are put on notice that they live in a business district.

The group noted that the nature of Route 32 relative to its business/housing mix may change significantly when Route 32 becomes connected to Route 12.

Russell recommended looking at other communities' regulations pertaining to MF housing. Russell will bring samples to the next meeting.

Preliminary discussion of home occupations

Noting the desire to encourage home occupations as "incubators" for new Swanzey businesses, the group discussed the problems that arise when the business becomes so successful that it outgrows its home. Enforcement becomes an issue. As an example, members discussed the problem of chain saw noise generated by a firewood business in a residential neighborhood.

FOR THE NEXT MEETING, Russell will ask Carbonneau for a list of home occupations currently permitted in Swanzey.

Next meeting: July 12, 3:30--5:00 at Town Hall