

November 8, 2010

To: Government Study Commission

From: Hingham Planning Board

Re: Responses to October 27 Questionnaire

At a regularly scheduled meeting on November 1, 2010, the members of the Hingham Planning Board and Town Planner Katy Lacy discussed the questions set forth by the Government Study Committee, and responded as follows:

1. Role of the Planning Board

The establishment of municipal Planning Boards is statutorily authorized by Massachusetts General Law (MGL), chapter 41, section 81A. Among its many diverse roles, all municipal planning boards are charged with the following duties, paraphrased here from the Massachusetts General Laws:

- MGL ch. 41, Sections 81K-81GG delegates municipal powers to the Planning Board to serve as the local authority for the Subdivision Control Act; adopting Rules and Regulations governing the subdivision of land in the Town of Hingham; and reviewing all preliminary and definitive subdivision plan submittals.
- MGL ch. 40A, the Zoning Act, authorizes Planning Boards to draft and submit zoning amendments for consideration by the municipality. When a zoning amendment has been put forward, the Planning Board must hold a noticed public hearing and report its recommendation to Town Meeting.
- In accordance with Section I-J of the Hingham Zoning By-Law, the Planning Board serves as the Special Permit Granting Authority for Special Permits A-3, which include Flexible Residential Developments, and Parking Special Permits.
- The Planning Board serves as Site Plan Review Authority for all Special Permits A-2 under consideration by the Zoning Board of Appeals, as well as for all non-residential Building Permits over \$20,000.00.
- Is always the “party of interest” in administrative appeals, special permit applications, and variance petitions within the municipality and in adjacent cities and towns;
- Under Mass. Gen. L. ch. 40, 15C, the Scenic Roads Act enables the Planning Board to recommend roads for municipal consideration and empowers the planning board to oversee specified activities.
- MGL ch. 41, Section 81A charges Planning Boards with adopting a master plan and official map of the city or town, and preparing other studies and reports as needed.

2. To whom is your Board accountable?

The voters and residents of Hingham.

3. What three things contribute most to the successful functioning of your Board?

A. A spirit of cooperation among the various permitting boards, and particularly between the ZBA and Planning Board;

B. Effective and capable staff;

C. An informed and educated public; &

D. Timely access to all information needed to make an informed decision.

4. What three things would you change to bring about more effective functioning?

A. Provide additional financial and/or staff resources for research and studies intended to inform future planning decisions and activities;

B. Improve public outreach and education on planning issues, specific project applications and (most importantly) the specific role of the Planning Board (as opposed to other permitting boards) relative to individual project applications; &

C. Limit the Advisory Committee review of proposed amendments to the Zoning By-Law; shift job of preparing "Recommended Motion" on zoning articles in Town warrant from Advisory Committee to Planning Board;

5. What challenges do you anticipate that might impact the work of the Board and the Planning Department?

A. Insufficient financial and staff resources;

B. Poor communication with other Town boards and committees; &

C. Lack of qualified candidates willing to serve as an elected official in the current political climate.