

NASHUA CITY PLANNING BOARD  
October 6, 2005

A special meeting of the Nashua City Planning Board was held on Thursday, October 6, 2005 at 6:30PM in the auditorium at City Hall.

Bette Lasky, Chair, conducted the meeting.

Members present were:       Bette Lasky, Chair  
                                  Ken Dufour, Vice Chair  
                                  Mayor Streeter  
                                  Mike Lowe, Mayor's Representative  
                                  Ald. Richard Larose  
                                  Steve Dookran, City Engineer  
                                  William Slivinski  
                                  Steve Farkas  
                                  Hugh Moran

Also Present:                   Roger Houston, Planning Director  
                                  Mike Yeomans, Deputy Planning Mgr.  
                                  Rick Sawyer, Deputy Planning Mgr.

Mrs. Lasky said this has been booked as a special meeting, but it is a discussion item that would have been held at the end of their regular meeting, but because of other circumstances could not be done at that time. They will have a presentation, but there will be no public testimony at this time. Public testimony will be heard when this is formally presented to the Board in the future.

**Discussion Item**

**Southern New Hampshire Services, proposed housing development.**

Mayor Streeter thanked the Board for allowing the discussion of this plan at this time. He said it is an exciting plan for an area of the City that is begging for renovation and reconstruction.

Donnalee Lozeau, Program & Community Development Director, Southern New Hampshire Services. Mrs. Lozeau referred to an aerial shot of the Front Street area that she had distributed to the Board. She said the red line indicates the property line.

She said in January 2002 she became aware of the Front Street site potentially being available for some development. She said she approached Nashua Corporation at that time and they've had discussions ever since about what could happen in that general area and what they had interest in seeing happen as well.

She said Southern New Hampshire Services projects have included outreach offices that include senior housing. This project is about family housing, not elderly housing - although elderly people can live here.

She said they looking at how to develop this project most beneficial to the community. She said it became clear not too far into the project that it was just a little bit bigger than they could handle as a non-profit organization, especially if they were not able to access typical Federal funds for the development. She said they compiled a list of potential joint venture partners - looking in the for-profit housing market.

She said they determined that John Stabile and his company would be the best partner for this project.

She said John Stabile knows the community very well and understands the opportunities that exist here and some of the challenges that some sites can present.

Mrs. Lozeau referred the Board to the conceptual plan. She said there are issues. The river is one of them and they are in the flood plain. There is a wetland buffer. They have environmental issues. It's pretty much a Brownfields site.

It's unusual with its location. She said the Cotton Transfer Bridge feeds into the Cotton Mill building - this building being a problem by itself.

She said initially they had hoped to be able to be able to do an adaptive re-use of the property, but it has it's own issues that relate to it. It has 7'6" ceilings, windows on only two sides, and it's very close to the river. It takes away from the opportunity to develop the site and have enough parking to be able to do housing.

She referred to the charette that took place about a week ago on the river walkway and the things that could happen there. One of the things that occurred at that time was that this site was looked at for redevelopment similar to what she is presenting.

She said what they are seeing is what could happen if they took down the Cotton Mill building and brought in housing, opened it up, put the bridge in, and develop another building that could have some community space in it. It would allow the Riverfront walk to take place without having any interference. It's an opportunity to bring the boathouse back into that area. She said they feel it's critical to develop it in a way that's not isolated.

She said they have received funding from the New Hampshire Housing Finance Authority, United Way of Greater Nashua, and Community Development Block Grant Funds to do some of the initial things. It's allowed them to hold onto the property. They put down a deposit and have done due diligence - environmental work, some flood plain discussions, some of the drawings that they are seeing, some of the engineering plans, etc. She said they are at the juncture where they have to make a critical financial decision in the next few months on whether or not they are going to go forward. They aren't an entity that can afford to have that kind of discretionary funds to throw in. They are looking at more than a half million dollars to get it to the stage before it even comes to the Board officially. She said they are hesitant to do this if the sense of the community is that they don't want housing in this area or they don't want the building removed or they aren't interested in what could be done with the bridge.

She said they have been meeting with the City staff and with the Mayor and thought it was time to come to the Planning Board to get a sense of how the Board felt about it.

She said as the Board can see from the aerial photographs, this is really a residential district. Gone are the days when you needed the river to do your industry and manufacturing. This is a wonderful opportunity for them to have riverfront housing. She said that Mr. Stabile has agreed that a minimum of 20% of the units can be affordable units.

John Stabile. Mr. Stabile said it is unique to have a public/private partnership like this, but in Nashua you can do things like this. There are opportunities to bring people together. He said they have built over 3,000 houses in the Nashua area over the last thirty years.

He said with this project they are attempting to take a piece of Nashua that really can be a statement on how Nashua's downtown

is taken to the next step and make this a landmark development for that area. He said they are asking the City to be their partner because they are going to be asking for a number of things that are normally considered difficult.

He said that there are traffic problems. He said they are doing a traffic study right now and hope to get a report on that soon. He said they will provide the Board with a plan for a river walk promenade and a boat landing. He said they are going to look over the whole area to work with the Board so that other developers can see what they are doing and perhaps they can "build a quilt" in the whole area.

Mr. Stabile said they are going to work with the City on the bridge from Clocktower over to where the Cotton Mill building is today. They are going to build a community center and have the bridge come right into that facility. He said they are dealing with the railroad. There are some secondary access considerations. They are going to need some help on wetlands. They are in the flood plain zone. He said ultimately what they are going to do is bring something where they are going to have at least 20% affordable housing. They'll have market rate housing that will be in the \$170,000 - \$190,000 range.

He said they are going to need the Board's help on the Shoreline Protection Act. They are going to take down the buildings that are in violation of that. There are two that will be taken down.

He said if they consider helping them, they will keep going. In the first week of December they have to put a large deposit down with Nashua Corporation. They don't intend to ask for an extension because it's not fair. They have been good to them. Then they have to spend around \$500,000 on top of that just with engineers, their wetland people, geotech people, etc. They don't want to show the Board something and have the Board say three months down the line that they were never really happy with what they were shown.

Mr. Lowe asked if this was going to work without the Broad Street Parkway.

Mr. Stabile said "yes". He said they have a main entrance and a secondary means of egress. He said they are going to help with the Broad Street Parkway, hopefully, by broadening their access over the B&M to benefit the Broad Street Parkway.

Ald. Larose said they have indicated that they want to partner with the City. He asked if they are talking about financially or other things.

Mrs. Lozeau said primarily they are talking about cooperation to go outside the box and talk to them about the things that concern the Board. She said they have been meeting with the Planning staff and others to get a sense of what the things are that they want to make sure that they don't do. She said they are hopeful that the City might be able to help them with some of the Brownfields grant money that might be out there.

She said she neglected to mention the number of units that they are talking about. She said they are looking at up to 200 units. While the Board may see two buildings, depending on height issues, it may end up - depending on the design - being three buildings or four buildings. She said the Master Plan talks about looking at 500 units in that general area.

Mr. Stabile said all the decisions that they make now have to be on a "fast track" to a certain extent. They need to know where the Board stands so that they can make the next decision.

Ald. Larose said there was a mention of market rate housing. He asked if these would be condo type housing.

Mr. Stabile said their intention at this stage of the game they are looking at three-story stacked flats with underground parking.

Ald. Larose asked how many bedrooms they are talking about when they talk about family housing.

Mr. Stabile said there are going to be one, two, and three bedroom units.

Mrs. Lozeau said when they did the Mayor's Task Force on Housing it was determined that there were a lot of people who could afford to move into something in the range of \$175,000 - \$250,000, but they couldn't find it so they are staying in the apartments that typically a low-income person might be able to move into. This may help free up some of that market.

Mr. Slivinski asked if they had looked at what impact this would have on schools. He said he envisions there would be younger

families with school age children will be looking in this price range.

Mrs. Lozeau said that she sits on the State Workforce Housing Coalition and the regional one that they are doing now. She said they don't necessarily think that people are going to be coming from outside the community for these. They think that that people that are now living in apartments are going to be looking at these.

She said as far as school age children are concerned, she knows that the sense is that it's multi-family type of housing that draws in kids to the school, but if you went to the New Hampshire Housing Finance Authority's website, they just released a report from an economist that explains that actually you get more children from the single-family home developments than you do with these kind of developments.

Mr. Slivinski asked Mr. Stabile if this is prime property. He asked if the property could be developed to bring middle-class people back into the inner city.

Mr. Stabile said if they were Master Planning the whole area and could implement everything at the same time, for example, the Broad Street Parkway, some of the church properties, perhaps the Gamache building; he said they could. The reality is they're going to have to build a "quilt" and patch all these things together. In doing so he said he thought they would be able to have a mix of all walks of life in that area. He said it's an attractive area and next to downtown. He said it will help the vitality and viability of Downtown Nashua.

Mrs. Lozeau said the population that she is talking about is the middle-class population. She said they are only talking about 20% of these units being available to those of lower income. She said it's the middle class that are

stuck in a position of not being able to afford the \$300,000 starter homes that are being built now.

Mrs. Lasky asked if everything in front of the red line is going to be leveled.

Mrs. Lozeau said "yes".

Mrs. Lasky asked if they have looked at any way to save the Cotton building.

Mrs. Lozeau said she has spent over two years trying to do that. She said there are at least four joint venture partners that didn't make it to the table because they started by saying this building had to go in order to do this and this wasn't acceptable. She said Mr. Stabile was willing to explore it with them.

She said the Architectural Team out of Chelsea is one of the premiere New England adaptive re-use teams. They walked through the building and they advised that it is not a prime candidate for re-use. It's cost prohibitive. She said it isn't like Clocktower across the river. The Cotton building was strictly designed to house this much cotton, send it across the bridge, and that was it.

Mr. Stabile said the ceilings are 7'6" high. The floor load is 125 pounds per square foot so tremendous weight can be put in the building. The building was designed so that if you take one of the floors out to build lofts you lose all the trussing effect in the building. Any changes in the structure of the building would change the structural capacity of the building.

Ald. Larose asked what it is that they are looking for from the Planning Board. He asked if it was some kind of consensus that they should continue or not continue.

Mrs. Lozeau said this is correct. She said there's a significant investment, both on behalf of Southern New Hampshire Services as well as the Stabile Company.

Ald. Larose said there are problems, but he doesn't think they are insurmountable. He said he personally feels that they should continue on what they are trying to do. He said it will be an asset. He said he didn't think it would be a bad idea for them to make a presentation to the Board of Alderman.

Mr. Farkas said he understood that the traffic impact study was underway. He asked if this has been started.

Mrs. Lozeau said it has started.

Mr. Farkas said the plan sounds great. He said he has a concern with the secondary access and making sure it is a good secondary access.

Mr. Dufour said any time they can get housing in the City of Nashua it's a good thing. However, to look at it and say they are putting in 200 units and most people are coming out of these apartments and it isn't going to be an impact, they are looking at it with just one eye. He said he thought the impact is going to be significant. He said that they are hearing that the class sizes are at max at the schools. He said that he's been hearing that they've been getting their schools ready for the future and the future was yesterday.

He said he's looking at stuff that he's driven by for years and never imagined that a subdivision would be going in. He said they never envisioned 200 units coming in at this site.

Mrs. Lozeau said she didn't want to leave the impression that there wouldn't be any new people. She said she just didn't see it as a draw card. She sees it as an opportunity. She said she would give the Board a copy of the Task Force Report so that they have a sense of some of the numbers.

She said she agrees with the reports that have come out that talk about single-family having more of an impact. She said if you look at the Master Plan and the amendment for that area in the community calls for 500 units.

Mr. Dufour said he does realize what the Master Plan says, but there's also a term that they have been kicking around for years and that is "premature" and he thinks that is something that they have to consider. They wouldn't be fulfilling their obligation to the community if they didn't.

Mayor Streeter said the High School space problem is a scheduling problem. There are eighteen empty classrooms in the elementary schools today. If anyone has a fear that they are putting an undue burden on the elementary schools this should be taken into consideration.

Mr. Dufour said that the Board would probably approve some subdivisions tonight that will probably fill up those eighteen classrooms. He said he didn't think that eighteen classrooms is a lot.

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Mr. Slivinski said if the Board believes the project is in the best interest of the community, they would do a lot. He referred to the project by the Dunkin Donuts by the river that they felt was so important and how they compromised some of the things that they would have never compromised in order to get that project done.

ADJOURNMENT at 7:00PM.

**APPROVED:** \_\_\_\_\_

Bette Lasky, Chair, Nashua City Planning Board

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