

# Paving the way for planning the town

DEC 3, 1987

The Planning Board is one of the most active Boards in our Town Government today. It seems perfectly natural to read in the newspapers about their approval, or disapproval of plans for new real estate developments. What is common today was only a theory fifty years ago.

It was in 1935 at the Annual Town Meeting that the idea of zoning the town and naming a Planning Board was debated. Under Article 32 of the warrant for that meeting, James A. Grant, a member of the Board of Selectmen, moved and "it was voted to authorize the Selectmen to appoint from each precinct of the Town three persons to serve as a committee to investigate the advisability of creating zoning bylaws, and to report their recommendations at the next Town Meeting."

In compliance with this vote, John H. Valentine reported for the committee at the Town Meeting on March 9, 1936. But even after a year's work by the committee, zoning was a long way from a reality. Mr. Valentine "explained that it was necessary for this committee to have a plan of the Town and that this was being done by the WPR (Works Projects Administration — one of the many so-called "alphabet soup" federal agencies) and would be completed during this coming summer, therefore he requested that this Committee be allowed to continue and report at the next annual Town Meeting, and it was so voted."

## The way it was

By George A. Parkhurst



One year later (March 8, 1937), the Town Meeting heard a report of the committee and voted to "establish a Planning Board under the provisions of General Laws, Chapter 41, Section 81A and 81F to 81J inclusive and to accept the provisions of these sections, and that the voters elect a Planning Board consisting of seven members."

It was also voted to raise and appropriate the sum of fifty dollars for the purpose of defraying the cost of establishing a Zoning Scheme under the direction of the Planning Board.

The ground work having apparently been done, Article 10 of the 1938 Town Meeting warrant asked that the Town adopt a code of zoning bylaws. The first reaction to this article was to move that it be dismissed, but the motion to dismiss was defeated and it was then voted to adopt the bylaw.

(It is interesting to note that the sum of \$15 was appropriated "to be used by the

Board of Appeals for stationery, postage, printing, and other miscellaneous expenses." Prices certainly were lower in those days than today.)

However, zoning was not yet fully accepted. On May 28, 1938 a Special Town Meeting was convened with only one article on the warrant. Mr. Charles P. Wright moved "that the code of zoning bylaws accepted at the Annual Town Meeting of 1938 under Article 10 be repealed."

After lengthy debate — the meeting started at 2 p.m. and adjourned four-and-a-half hours later at 6:30 — a vote by ballot produced 349 "yesses" and 279 "noes." Although this was a simple majority in favor, the motion was defeated because a two-thirds majority was required.

The work of the Planning Board proceeded at a leisurely pace. In the 1939 Town Report the Board stated that they had prepared the zoning regulations but there was no mention of any requests for rulings.

By 1940, five years after the start of the project, three applications for sub-divisions were received.

How times have changed.

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