

**Winthrop Town Council
Regular Meeting
Monday, August 6, 2007 at 7 p.m.
Winthrop Town Office**

Attendance: Patrice Putman, Patricia Engdahl, Ken Buck, Kevin Cookson, William MacDonald, Cornell Knight (Town Manager) and Julie Winberg (Secretary). Absent: Linda Caprara and Jim Norris,

Chairman Putman called the meeting to order at 7:04 p.m.

Approval of Minutes for July 2, July 16, July 31, 2007

Motion by Cookson and seconded by Engdahl to approve the minutes as submitted for July 2nd and July 16th, 2007. Vote was unanimous.

Motion by MacDonald and seconded by Engdahl to approve the minutes of July 31, 2007 as submitted. Vote was 4 approving the minutes and Cookson abstaining due to the fact he was not present at this meeting.

Ordered that the Winthrop Town Council meet to consider the following items:

Item #76 Hear an update on the School Consolidation Plan/Process from Superintendent of Schools Mark LaRoach.

Superintendent LaRoach updated the Board on the meetings held in reference to the school consolidation. He has attended several meetings with the local superintendents, which include the towns of Hallowell, Fayette and Monmouth. He informed the Board that a letter of consolidation intent has to be drafted in order to pursue this merger. This letter of intent must have final state approval and is due to the State Department of Education at the end of the month. This letter will include a plan to meet new state mandated spending cuts in four areas: administration, transportation, facilities and maintenance and special education.

Monmouth has decided not to go along with Winthrop and Maranacook. Fayette is one of the few small towns in Kennebec County to have an independent school system. Monmouth is another.

The number of school children is an integral detail in the school consolidation effort. At present, Winthrop and Maranacook has 2,300 students with a 2% declining enrollment base each year.

This is a work in progress. The Winthrop Advisory Committee is working diligently. The Town Council along with the School Board and interested citizens, all with the same common goal, are working together and are primarily in charge of putting this letter of intent together. The Advisory Committee meets every Wednesday at the Town Office and all interested parties are welcome. The Committee's charge is basically to decide what other school administrative units Winthrop wants to look at for consolidation. By August 31, each of Maine's 290 school units must have filed a letter of intent that it either will negotiate with other school units to develop a new, consolidated regional school unit or will submit an alternative plan.

Councilor Cookson agreed that attempts must continue to be made approaching other towns and dialogue must be kept open and positive.

Asked what the comments were in the obvious choices made to date, educational philosophy, loss of identity, loss of local control were some of those issues.

The Council was appreciative for the update and thanked the Superintendent and school representatives for their hard work in this venture.

Item #77 Discuss the status of the Morrill House, Union Street with Jim Harrington, Trustee.

Mr. Harrington, one of the trustees for Ida Morrill House, a single family home at 23 Union Street, was present to discuss the possibility of donating this property to the town.

There was a time when the town, approached on this subject years ago, declined to take this donation. The trustees would like to pursue this again.

The building is structurally sound but definitely not economically viable any longer. In the past, conference rooms would be rented

out to various organizations at \$10.00 per year. As time went on, those meetings got less and less especially due to the lack of parking.

The owner's intent was to leave the home to be used as a meeting place for civic associations. The owner did not want any nationally chartered organizations to meet in this building. The trustees adhered to that wish.

The Town Manager confirmed that the building was structurally sound. It is a 2-3-bedroom home that would be a good start for a family and perhaps the beginning of an affordable housing unit in the downtown area.

Commander Randy Knox of the Veterans of Foreign Wars was present and spoke to the Council on the VFW's interest in this location, as the VFW needs a home base in Winthrop. They have nowhere to store their records (which need to be stored under lock and key) and are presently meeting at various homes. Winthrop's VFW has grown from 51 to 123. With the war in Afghanistan and Iraq, this number will only grow. He went on to say that the VFW has been awarded a \$2,900.00 grant through Home Depot and that money will be allocated, should this donation go through to them, to refurbish both house and property.

Chair Putman commented that she is hesitant approving a donation of \$150,000 (Vision's 2007 appraisal of this property). She realizes what a worthwhile organization the VFW is and the need to have a home base in Winthrop. But went on to say that other similarly deserving organizations may have the same need and should have the opportunity to express that need in the same way the VFW is doing this evening. With the trustees wanting to donate this to the town, there are many options available some of which are to sell it, use it for the library, give it to the VFW, and many other things. But hearing from other organizations is paramount.

Councilor Buck expressed his opinion that he felt the Council should donate this property to the VFW as the VFW has given so much. They are, he went on to say, an exceptional organization and have a definite need. He is assured that they would maintain the property and its upkeep would not be an issue.

Councilor Cookson commented that given the fact it has been in trust and thus the town has not gained anything from it, and the fact that there are parking problems (no garage, no driveway and no parking at all), selling it as a residential home would be difficult if not impossible. The VFW turns a lot of money back into the town. Should the town take it over, he would recommend turning it over to the VFW with a stipulation that in turn they would allow others to use the building. It would be primarily a VFW Post, keeping their files secure, and offering it to other organizations to use on an as needed basis.

Chair Putman commented that this is property that the town would own and its value is \$150,000. The Council would have to have a community discussion as to what to do with this.

Motion made by Cookson and seconded by MacDonald authorizing the Town Manager to meet with the Town Attorney to discuss the most feasible options for the town to own and dispose of the Morrill House. Vote was unanimous.

Item #78 Hold a public hearing on the Victualer's License application for Little Shop of Ours, 2208 Route 202.

Public hearing opened at 7:49 p.m. to discuss Victualer's License application for Little Shop of Ours, 2208 Route 202.

The applicant was present to explain to the council her request and its location on Route 202 on the side where Joey V's Deli was located to expand present services to include selling ice crème.

There being no objections or further comments from the public or the Council on this application, the public hearing was closed at 7:51 p.m.

Item #79 Consider the Victualer's license for Little Shop of Ours.
Motion by Cookson and seconded by Buck to approve Victualer's license for Little Shop of Ours. Vote was unanimous.

Item #80 Consider the recommendations from the Social Service Funding Committee.
A list of recommendations was reviewed with a notation that the amount reflected for the Good Shepherd Food Bank is part of Winthrop's Account.

Motion by Buck and seconded by MacDonald to approve the recommendations from the Social Service Funding Committee. Vote was unanimous.

Item #81 Discuss the Council's goal on affordable housing and its definition.

The Town Manager updated the Council on his meeting with the Planning Board on August 1, 2007 to review the Zoning Ordinance to see if there are any amendments that can be updated or changed to spur affordable housing in Winthrop. He explained the Board's position and their reluctance in taking on this task noting that the members felt that this request was very vague with a real lack of partnership between the Council and the Board. The Board also was skeptical as to the real reasons given for this request and felt that there were more issues that were not being discussed. The Board especially did not want to have another repeat of the Council's meeting held in December of 2005 on this same subject as the citizens expressed their dissatisfaction quite verbally. In summary, however, the Board agreed to meet with the KVCOG representatives and their first meeting will be August 15th to go over suggestions as well as review what some other localities are doing on this same subject.

Councilor Engdahl expressed her concern about the Board being asked to consider this issue due to the fact they are expressing such real concerns over it. She went on to say that the Planning Board may not be the right group to take this on and recommended that Economic Development or the Council should be the ones to take this over for review.

Councilor Cookson commented that he has received quite a few calls with the central theme that the Council is not economically in tune and this may indeed be a start to promote the kind of growth that would contribute in a positive way to the town's economic viability.

Several citizens in attendance discussed the problems at hand with the Village Zoning requirements and present grandfathering restrictions especially in relationship to parking regulations that they deem completely unreasonable and a real deterrent to growth.

Chair Putman, after listening to some of the stories relayed by the public at hand and the reasons behind decisions made denying their applications as presented to the Code Enforcement Office, noted that one major step is to take to solve some of those problems would be to loosen the present restrictions as they relate to parking in the downtown area and revisit the grandfathering issue and the one year requirement that correlates to that. She went on to say that perhaps the requirement for two parking spots should be revisited as well and perhaps be waived by the Planning Board.

Steve Robbins, an active Planning Board member, expressed concern over the Planning Board's reluctance. He was not able to attend that specific meeting and noted that the Planning Board works at the pleasure of the Council. He expressed areas where the Planning Board could reevaluate some of their present requirements in reference to the apartment issues in town with examples of Ned's and Sully's given. He noted that some of the decisions made are made in the Code Enforcement Office.

Councilor Cookson expressed frustration on how some of these things in the Ordinance come about.

Ed Vigneault, another active Planning Board member, suggested that the Council give the Board a list of what they would like the Board to look at and review. If the Council knows of some 'unfriendly' rules and regulations, the Board needs to know of them. By identifying them, it would make this task much easier and save a lot of time. Does the Council feel that a standard is inappropriate? Does the Council want the Board to specifically address that parking? Does the Council want the Board to review the Village Zoning Requirements?

Councilor Cookson wanted to know if there was any action this evening that the Council could take to suspend the parking regulations for the downtown district.

The Town Manager responded that this needs to put it on an agenda with a public hearing. It would need to be advertised as well.

Councilor Engdahl suggested that the Council meet with the Planning Board and the RDC along with interested citizens and

business members of the community to have an open dialogue on this subject.

Motion by Cookson and seconded by Engdahl that the Town Council, Planning Board, Chamber of Commerce, the RDC, and interested citizens, hold a meeting on affordable housing in Winthrop. After that meeting, a smaller workgroup should be formed identifying the specific issues and recommendations and report back to the Town Council. Vote was unanimous.

The Town Manager will discuss the process that is now taking place in the Code Enforcement Office with the CEO but reiterated that the CEO is enforcing the laws that the town has put in place.

Item #82 Consider a contract with Benefit Strategies for a flexible benefit plan.

The Town Manager explained that this is would be a payroll deduction that an employee could use for all medical expenses, and childcare and that is it pre-tax. There is a \$650 set up/annual fee and \$4.50 per account, but the town does not pay FICA and Medicare on the amounts deducted. The more employees on the plan the lower the cost will be. Motion by Cookson and seconded by Engdahl to approve the Benefit Strategies flexible benefit plan. Vote was unanimous.

Motion by Cookson and seconded by MacDonald to adjourn the meeting at 9:30 p.m. Vote was unanimous.