

To: Shaftsbury Selectboard

From: Shaftsbury Planning Commission

Date: April 28, 2020 - draft

Subject: Roadside Commercial Zoning

MEMO

At the conclusion of the Town Plan process, the Selectboard gave the Planning Commission several assignments of areas to study and report back with recommendations. This report deals with the possibility of expanding Roadside Commercial zoning along Route 7A. The commercial corridor as it presently exists involves Village Center zoning from south of Cleveland Avenue to the railroad tracks where it becomes Commercial/Industrial to Airport Road where Roadside Commercial takes over up to West Mountain Road (not both sides of the road).

Expanding North

Traveling north from West Mountain Road, we observe two transient lodging businesses and a commercial cluster around Hidden Valley Road. This includes Clearbrook Farm, the Chocolate Barn, Herzfeld Studio, the Buxbaum barn sale operation and the Becker Fence Company. All are grandfathered nonconforming businesses except for Clearbrook Farm which exists outside municipal zoning by agricultural exemption. From the Chocolate Barn to the Arlington town line, there are no commercial entities. From the Arlington town line to Arlington village, there are no commercial entities except for the Second Chance Animal Shelter because that section is zoned rural residential just like the section in Shaftsbury. We feel that this accomplishes the objective of the Shires Scenic Byway designation – to provide the traveler the experience of our rural valley with great views of farms, forest and mountains without a Duncan Donuts in sight.

The Planning Commission spent a great deal of time talking to the stakeholders in the vibrant commercial cluster around Clearbrook. They were somewhat ambivalent about a zoning change being secure in their present situation.

Expanding South

From the south end of the Village Center district to the Bennington town line is about .8 of a mile along Route 7A. A single commercial use exists along this stretch – an office building. Crossing into Bennington, you enter a commercial strip that runs across the top of Harwood Hill. This includes the very popular grocery/deli, The Market Wagon, Hiland Hall School, West Mt. Animal Hospital, Sunset Playland, Vermont Roofing, Bennington House of Tile, etc, etc. From a planning perspective it seems more logical to connect Shaftsbury commercial zoning to Bennington commercial zoning. That would mean a continuous commercial strip from West Mountain Road to downtown Bennington. Not every acre of the Shaftsbury section is suitable for development. Steep slopes and a wetland make some sites unsuitable. Nonetheless a number of developable sites exist such as the now defunct Howard Art Museum.

Therefore the Planning Commission recommends that you consider rezoning the section of Route 7A from the south end of the present Village Center district to the Bennington town line 500 feet deep on both sides of the road to Roadside Commercial zoning. We will be glad to talk further with you about this subject