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Jones Library Trustees Agree to Sponsor Town Meeting Articles Regarding Changes to the Zoning Map for 67 Amity Street

Background

Since 2009, the Historical Society Trustees and the Jones Library Trustees have been discussing the possibility of sharing exhibit, meeting room and climate controlled storage spaces. These two very important Town institutions, soon to be a part of the Town's Cultural District, share similar purposes, thus collaboration, both programmatic and physical, makes sense. Various plans have taken shape over the years.

For many months, the Town of Amherst, Jones Library Trustees and Historical Society Trustees have been working on drafting a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) which discusses what shape this collaboration might take. The impetus for this current effort is the Library's plan to apply for a Massachusetts Public Library Construction Grant in January 2017, and during the course of these conversations, it became apparent while analyzing the different configurations of the proposed expansion, the movement of the Jones Library in the direction of the Historical Society makes the most sense.

Proposal

The Amherst Historical Society is proposing to sell a piece of property to the Jones Library. The Jones Library is proposing an expansion and would like the extra land area.

Zoning

The Historical Society property is zoned R-G (General Residence). The Jones Library property is zoned B-G (General Business). The attached maps show the existing zoning, the area that the Library is studying for its proposed expansion and a proposed rezoning of the Historical Society property.

Problems

1. If the Library purchases a piece of the Historical Society property, it will create a non-conformity for the Historical Society. (The requirement for a "building circle" under Section 6.40 would be compromised.) Therefore the Library, as a Town entity, with agreement from the Historical Society, has proposed to request a rezoning of the Historical Society property from R-G to B-G. This rezoning will remove the requirement for the "building circle" and will also make setback and other dimensional requirements more flexible. This request is actually a fairly minor change, as it will bring the Historical Society into conformity with the neighboring structures and it will allow the Historical Society to continue providing services as a 501 (c) 3 non-profit, as well as continue to rent out their second floor apartment.

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2. The proposed rezoning needs to occur this spring in order for the Library to keep to its design schedule and satisfy the requirements of a state grant that it is using to design the expansion.
3. In addition, some people have expressed concern that if the Historical Society property is rezoned and the Historical Society changes its operation or ceases to operate, that the rezoning to B-G will open up the possibility of uses for the Historical Society property that are not desirable. Therefore a historic preservation restriction been proposed to restrict the future uses of the Historical Society property.

Motions

During last night's joint Library Trustee and Historical Society Trustee meeting, the Trustees of The Jones Library unanimously approved the following two motions:

1. "The Trustees of the Jones Library agree to sponsor a Town Meeting Article which asks the Town to amend the Official Zoning Map such that the Amherst Historical Society property at 67 Amity Street (Map 14A/Parcel 35) and an area extending out from the street frontages of said property to the midline of adjacent public ways (Amity Street and North Prospect Street) shall be rezoned from their current designation of General Residence (R-G) to General Business (B-G)."
2. "The Trustees of the Jones Library agree to sponsor a Town Meeting Article which asks the Town to authorize the acceptance of a restrictive covenant or historic preservation restriction in relation to the rezoning of the property at 67 Amity Street (Map 14A/Parcel 35)."

The first motion had already been approved by the Board of the Historical Society.

The Library Trustees and Historical Society Trustees will be present at upcoming Finance Committee and Select Board meetings to discuss this further.

Thank you for your time.

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