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Commercial appraisal missing from report

By **Katie Liesener**/ Staff Writer
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When Town Planner Joe Laydon circulated notice that the original April 17 hearing for Judi Barrett's long-awaited financial report had been postponed, the glaring thing missing was an explanation.

Financial report

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Rebecca Regan, Planning Board vice-chairwoman, provided that explanation to the public at hearings last Thursday and Monday.

According to Regan, Town Administrator Fred Turkington did not obtain the third-party commercial appraisal of the property that Barrett requested to finish her report.

"This meeting was canceled through no fault of the Planning Board," Regan said at Monday night's meeting. "We learned on April 17, unbeknownst to us, that the town administrator had never engaged the appraiser."

In an e-mail obtained by the Crier, Turkington wrote to other town officials, "We have been unable to get any commercial appraiser willing to perform the scope of services in a timely manner."

The e-mail was sent the morning of the scheduled hearing.

Turkington received his charge nearly a month beforehand, at a March 21 meeting held with Barrett, various members of town boards, and representatives for the developers.

Jayson Brodie, a town assessor who was at the meeting, said, "We recommended that if they were interested (in a commercial appraisal), they should go to an outside consultant, just as we do ourselves."

Finance Committee member Cherry Karlson drafted a scope of services for a commercial appraisal and gave it to Turkington.

In an interview, Turkington acknowledged receiving directions to obtain a commercial appraisal and said he contacted four appraisers. Two did not respond, a third was too expensive, and a fourth, First Fidelity, was chosen to do the commercial appraisal, Turkington said.

According to Turkington, he received word from First Fidelity a week before the scheduled hearing, and three days before the information was due, that it would be unable to conduct the commercial appraisal because it was too difficult.

He said he did not notify the town officials who had given him his charge.

"I held out some hope that (Fidelity) could at least generate something not as specific," he said.

That something was residential appraisals.

"I thought that Judi Barrett was looking for some validation of the residential aspect," Turkington said.

In an interview, Barrett said she never requested a third-party residential appraisal because residential values are easier to calculate from the market. She did, however, request a third-party commercial appraisal.

"It's quite startling to me," Regan said. "It only leads one to believe a decision was made in a vacuum."

In the absence of the requested commercial appraisal, Barrett finished her report by drawing from her own commercial property database, information from other fiscal impact analysts and community assessors, and the developers' own assumptions.

"That delay gave voters far less time to look at Judi's work, bring up questions, and digest it. It gave others in town time to circulate numbers that are not legitimate," Regan said. "There's so much misinformation out there, perhaps on both sides ... The whole point of doing this was to get a third-party view."

Turkington said he believes the "miscommunication" did not affect the outcome.

"What's important is the understanding that the (Town Center) will generate an excess of half a million dollars compared to the 40B," he said. "It's not about the process to get there."

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