

MINUTES
PLANNING COMMISSION
JANUARY 26, 2010 – 7:00 P.M.
TOWN HALL ANNEX – COMMUNITY ROOM 2

I. ROLL CALL

Regular members present: Munn, Pritchard, Roper, Steinfeld, Sherrard
Alternate members present: Fitzgerald, Zod
Absent: Kane
Staff present: Murphy, Davis, Doolittle

Chairman Sherrard called the meeting to order at 7:02 p.m.

II. APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES OF meeting of January 12, 2010.

MOTION: To approve the minutes of January 12, 2010 as amended.

Motion made by Steinfeld, seconded by Roper. Motion passed unanimously.

III. PUBLIC COMMUNICATIONS

Commissioner Pritchard received a letter from the Town Clerk to acknowledge his reappointment to the Planning Commission until 2014.

Joellen Anderson, 215 Plant Street, Groton and Caroline Driscoll of Pequot Avenue in New London (CFPA Board member) spoke to the Commission in regards to certain conditions of land use approvals for a project at 110 New London Road.

Chairman Sherrard asked Staff to respond to their concerns and to give the Commission an update at the next meeting under old business.

IV. SUBDIVISIONS - none

V. SITE PLANS - none

VI. OLD BUSINESS

1. Land Use Regulation Update Project

Staff handed out and discussed a tentative schedule for the Subdivision Regulation update, anticipating a public hearing in late June. Staff and the Commission discussed the potential agenda items for some of the dates listed, including a potential joint meeting with the Zoning Commission on 2/18/10.

2. Zoning Commission referrals for January 21, 2010 – Amend Current Zoning Regulations Regarding Temporary Non-Accessory (off-site) Signage in Certain Residential Districts (REGA#09-03)

Staff noted the continuation of this Zoning Commission hearing to February 3, 2010 and stated that he believed the Zoning Commission will take action on the amended proposal on that date. The reason for the continuation is to develop and then review potential amendments to the zoning commission's proposal.

Staff noted the prior information given to the Planning Commission, and noted the 1/21/10 EDC concerns. In light of the fact that the Planning commission did not have another meeting prior to the 2/3/10 hearing, staff offered a draft motion and findings, which generally reflected the subjects areas anticipated to be discussed as potential amendments on 2/3/10.

Commissioner Roper was not in favor of the zoning commission proposal and agreed with the findings and recommendations contained in the draft motion.

Commissioner Steinfeld also opposed the Zoning Commission's proposal and noted the extensive efforts made by the Town to clean up illegal signage.

Commissioner Fitzgerald also did not support the proposal, feeling it was not in the best interests of the community.

Commissioner Pritchard was not necessarily opposed, but did feel that if the proposal was to be approved, that it should be amended.

Commissioner Munn felt the proposal should not be supported, and generally agreed with the draft findings and motion, with the suggestion of a proposed amendment, which the commission discussed and agreed would be appropriate.

MOTION: The Commission finds that while the Zoning Commission's proposal successfully addresses some of the issues raised during prior ECAR applications, as written it is still inconsistent with the Town's Plan of Conservation and Development in terms of general land use policy, and that it is a significant change in terms of the Town's historical approach to non-accessory commercial signage in residential zones. Accordingly, the Planning Commission recommends that such permitted regulations not be adopted.

If such a provision is adopted by the Zoning Commission, the Planning Commission recommends at least the following revisions. While these will not render the proposal consistent with the 2002 POCD, they will at least partially address concerns raised by this commission and others.

1. A registration process, registered and controlled by the OPDS.
2. Appropriate definitions and applicability limitations.
3. Basic bulk standards (height and setback).
4. Basic time, place and manner standards (proximity standard, number of signs permitted per lot at any one time).
5. Acknowledgement of separate Historic District Commission jurisdiction.

Findings:

1. The proposal represents a significant change in present and past Town approaches to non-accessory (off site) commercial signage in residential zones.
2. There are practical staff and administrative limitations which make administration of the proposed change difficult and the proposal has the potential to create a significant burden on limited staff resources.
3. These signs have the potential to damage the character of residential areas, including those having scenic roads, those within historic districts, and those located within coastal and waterfront areas.
4. These signs are prohibited in Noank and are not permitted in the City of Groton or within Groton Long Point.
5. The proposal lacks important administrative provisions, definitions and other basic components of an operational zoning regulation.

Motion made by Munn, seconded by Roper. Motion passed unanimously.

3. Discussion and action regarding Town Attorney edits to DEP & GOSA communications

Staff handed out the draft letter to the DEP and associated addenda, with corrections suggested by the Town Attorney. He noted that the Town Attorney did not recommend any changes to the GOSA letter. Staff then detailed the suggested changes.

MOTION: To approve the changes as presented tonight and to send the letter to the State DEP

Motion made by Pritchard, seconded by Munn. Motion passed unanimously.

Chairman Sherrard asked Staff to prepare the letters for his signature.

VII. NEW BUSINESS

1. Report of Commission

Commissioner Roper handed out a summary for the Commissioners of Randall Arendt's "Reinventing Commercial Strips" workshop that he attended. He also noted that he attended the Regional Planning Commission meeting, which will now only meet annually.

Commissioner Pritchard attended the Freedom of Information workshop and thought it was very well done. Commissioner Steinford commented that he was also very impressed. Staff noted the attendance by Chairman Sherrard as well.

Commissioner Pritchard attended and chaired the Committee of Chairpersons quarterly meeting, during which there was a presentation on the FEMA Flood Maps, discussion on the property maintenance program and other matters.

Commissioner Munn has agreed to volunteer as a member of the Parks & Recreation master plan implementation committee, primarily in terms of how projects relate to POCD goals and objectives, including for instance implementation of community trail systems.

2. New Applications – None

VIII. REPORT OF CHAIRMAN

Chairman Sherrard received a flyer on ‘Making the Best Land Use Decisions – Wetlands, Water Quality Protection and Land Use Change’ and invited any of the Commissioners to attend.

He noted the Special Meeting being held January 27, 2010 at 6:00pm at the Town Hall Annex on the CIP.

IX. REPORT OF STAFF

Staff provided a brief report on the status of the departmental budget process, including necessary staff reductions and anticipated minimal increases being proposed for next year.

Staff noted the first of three Climate Adaptation Workshops will be held all day 1/27/10 at the Town Hall Annex. The Town of Groton has been chosen by the State DEP as a model community for this effort.

Staff gave an update on the Mystic Streetscape Project, including funding, design and anticipated bid/construction dates.

Chairmen Sherrard inquired about the potential opening of the new Senior Center. Staff stated that a potential soft opening on March 1, 2010 has been discussed, but that no firm date has been established. The commission will be invited when a date is determined.

X. ADJOURNMENT

Motion to adjourn at 8:15 p.m. made by Sherrard, seconded by Roper, so voted unanimously.

Jeffrey Pritchard, Secretary
Planning Commission

Prepared by Katie Doolittle
Office Assistant II