

MINUTES
PLANNING COMMISSION
FEBRUARY 25, 2014 – 7:00 P.M.
TOWN HALL ANNEX – COMMUNITY ROOM 2

I. ROLL CALL

Regular members present: Kane, Pritchard, Sherrard, Steinford
Alternate members present: Fitzgerald, Zod
Absent: Munn (8:40 pm)
Staff present: Murphy, Glemboski, Silsby

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

Sherrard appointed Zod to sit for Munn.

II. APPROVAL OF THE FOLLOWING MINUTES – February 11, 2014

MOTION: To approve the minutes of February 11, 2014, as amended.

Motion made by Steinford, seconded by Pritchard, so voted 4 in favor, 1 Abstention (Kane).

III. PUBLIC COMMUNICATIONS

Sherrard noted that he contacted the Town Manager about the substandard condition of Crystal Lake Road.

IV. SUBDIVISIONS

1. Oat Re-Subdivision, 0 MacDonald Court, Noank (SUB13-03) (CAM)

Staff explained that she has not yet received requested legal advice from the Town Attorney and as such, she requested to table this item until March 11, 2014. The timeline was noted.

MOTION: To Table until March 11, 2014.

Motion made by Steinford, seconded by Zod, so voted unanimously.

V. SITE PLANS – None.

VI. OLD BUSINESS

1. Subdivision Regulation Amendments – None

2. Plan of Conservation and Development Update

Staff stated that he met with the consultants on February 20, 2014 to discuss the remainder of the work. The next meeting will be held on March 20, 2014.

3. Groton Open Space Association (GOSA) Request for Letter of Support for Land Acquisition: Tilcon Property – Continued

Joan Smith, 58 Mohegan Road, President of the Groton Open Space Association (GOSA), reviewed and presented maps showing the 5 parcels included in her request. She spoke about wetlands, steep slopes, and a potential trail management plan. Information was given about the different zones that exist on site and the appraisals that have been completed. In regards to the Commission's concerns about not locking up the property to future development, she stated that she would be willing to work together with the Town. She reminded the Commission that the grant application is due by March 31, 2014. Specific parcels numbers were noted.

Concerns were expressed about not locking up the land to potential future development and the importance of not disturbing the pitch pines and quarries. As far as constraints on the property, it was noted that there are many wetlands, ledge, and slopes.

Kane stated that he has walked this property. He noted the importance of keeping the integrity of the land in not disturbing the pitch pine and quarry areas.

Steinfeld noted the presence of a vast amount of ledge on the property and referred to The Ledges Apartments in Groton, which was built even though a large amount of ledge exists on that site as well. Referring to an article he submitted, he noted that The Ledges Apartments is the 3rd highest taxpayer in the Town, which is an important factor that should be considered. He expressed his fervent concerns about the land being locked out for potential future development and has strong reservations about placing this land into a conservation easement.

Fitzgerald expressed his concerns against putting this land into a conservation easement. He spoke about potential sewer availability in the future and gave background history about the facilities plan. He believes this could be a prime location for commercial development in the distant future.

Sherrard would support a smaller easement that included the important resources.

Steinfeld inquired about how much open space is dedicated in the Plan of Conservation and Development (POCD). Staff reviewed the current information.

Zod agreed with Kane that the pitch pine areas should not be disturbed. He does not want the entire property landlocked.

Pritchard also noted the importance of the pitch pines but clarified that the Planning Commission has been asked for an endorsement of the entire site.

Discussion ensued about splitting out the 3 parcels, protecting lands, and the percentage of dedicated open space recommended by the State of Connecticut. An inquiry was made whether land that has a conservation easement attached would be taxable.

Sherrard explained that the Commission needs to act on this item tonight. It appears that there is a consensus that the Commission would not support a conservation

easement for all 5 properties but believes that supporting 3 identified properties may be a realistic consideration because of the importance of protecting the pitch pines and quarries. After taking a poll, the members would consider supporting a conservation easement for the important environmental resources on the site. Pritchard clarified that GOSA is only asking for an endorsement. Discussion followed about a potential motion. Steinfeld reiterated why he would be opposed to this endorsement.

MOTION: That the Planning Commission does not support a grant for Groton Open Space Association (GOSA) to obtain all 201 acres of the current Tilcon Property based on the potential for future development. We do support a grant for the limited areas of the pitch pines, quarries, and adjacent large wetland areas. Currently, these areas we support to protect with the conservation easement are not defined by the existing property lines.

Motion made by Sherrard, seconded by Pritchard, so voted 4 in favor, 1 opposed (Steinfeld).

VII. NEW BUSINESS

1. Report of Commission

Sherrard stated that the Regional Planning Commission meeting will be held next Monday, March 3, 2014 at 7:30 p.m. in Norwich. He is looking for an alternate to serve on that Commission. Staff will pass this along to other Boards/Commissions.

Pritchard stated that he will not be at the next Planning Commission meeting on March 11, 2014.

2. Zoning Commission Referral for March 5, 2014 Public Hearing a) SPEC340, Pizzetta Outdoor Dining, 7 Water Street

Staff reviewed the map and explained the request to extend the special permit for the outdoor seating area. Staff noted that temporary permission had been granted last year.

MOTION: That the Planning Commission supports the request based on the prior year's experiences.

Motion made by Zod, seconded by Pritchard, so voted unanimously.

3. New Applications b) Watrous Subdivision, 0 Pleasant Valley Road North (SUB14-01)

The public hearing will be held at a later date. A wetlands permit has been granted.

VIII. REPORT OF CHAIRMAN

Sherrard inquired about pizza being sold out of the trailer on site outside of the Rolling Tomato on Fort Hill Road. Staff noted they have an Administrative Site Plan application to use the trailer until building space is completed.

IX. REPORT OF STAFF

Staff stated that the Thomas Road project is moving ahead. A variance from the City of Groton has been received. He stated that construction of Phase II of the Streetscape project should begin around March 10, 2014. Information will soon be available on the Town's website. A public information meeting will be held on March 6, 2014, at 6:30 p.m. at the Town Hall Annex. The CFPZA Conference is being held on March 13, 2014. Members should contact the Planning Department to confirm attendance.

Staff gave an update about Central Hall. Hard copies of the easements have been received and will soon be reviewed against the plans by Town staff. A caveat has come up in that Central Hall now needs a subordination agreement and a Certificate of Title. The deadline date is still March 11, 2014. Signatures will be required before the process can be completed. Additional information was given about the latest flood elevation changes.

Staff attended the most recent Mystic Task Force meeting on February 24, 2014. Information was given about Mystic Community Bikes being in need of volunteers.

Munn arrived at 8:40 p.m.

Staff stated that he will be serving on an upcoming Regional Planning Commission interview panel.

Murphy informed the Planning Commission that he will be retiring on March 21, 2014, after 26 years of employment with the Town of Groton. The members wished him all the best in his future endeavors.

X. ADJOURNMENT

Motion to adjourn at 8:44 p.m. was made by Sherrard, seconded by Steinfeld, so voted unanimously.

Jeffrey Pritchard, Secretary
Planning Commission

Prepared by Robin Silsby
Office Assistant II