

MINUTES
PLANNING COMMISSION
APRIL 28, 2015 – 7:00 P.M.
TOWN HALL ANNEX – COMMUNITY ROOM 2

Chairman Sherrard called the meeting to order at 7:04 p.m.

I. ROLL CALL

Regular members present: Sherrard, Pritchard, Kane, Steinfeld
Alternate members present: Zod
Absent: Fitzgerald, Munn, Tarbox
Staff present: Jones, Glemboski, Silsby

Chairman Sherrard appointed Zod to sit for Munn.

II. APPROVAL OF THE FOLLOWING MINUTES OF April 14, 2015

MOTION: To adopt the Planning Commission minutes of April 14, 2015

Motion made by Kane, seconded by Pritchard, so voted 3 in favor, 0 opposed, 2 abstentions (Steinfeld, Zod), as written.

III. PUBLIC COMMUNICATIONS

Sherrard presented Commissioner Kane with a Certificate of Recognition for his 12 years of service to the Town of Groton Planning Commission. The certificate was distributed in March at the annual Planning and Zoning conference which Kane was not able to attend.

IV. SITE PLANS – None

V. OLD BUSINESS

1. Community Market Analysis/Land Use Regulatory Audit – Focus Group

Staff referred to a previously distributed memo to the Planning Commission pertaining to a focus group established to provide feedback to the consultants preparing the market analysis and regulatory audit. The Planning Commission is allowed to have one member participate as a member of the focus group though all Planning Commission members are welcome to attend the meetings. The first meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, May 27, 2015 at 6:00 p.m. in Room 1 at the Town Hall Annex. Sherrard asked members to contact him if interested in serving on this focus group.

2. Review Draft Municipal Coastal Program Section 5.1 – 5.4

Section 5.0 – Geographic Conditions, Issues, and Strategies

Staff reviewed the map showing eight subareas along Groton's coast. This section discusses issues and recommendations for each subarea. Pritchard suggested

that all references to the 21st century be deleted. The Commission agreed that the Navy Base and West Pleasant Valley subareas should be combined into one subarea.

The following recommendations for the entire Section 5 were made:

- Adjust the boundaries on the index map (p. 5-2) to reflect the descriptions of the subareas
- Put the information in the “observations” sections and the concerns raised at various workshops into paragraph form
- Put the area plan maps in the body of the plan rather than in the appendix. Include the recommendations called out on the maps in the body of the plan
- Discussion of public access should distinguish between areas where the public can look at the water and areas where the public can enter the water
- Include discussion of the water trail recommended in the Bicycle, Pedestrian & Trail Master Plan in the appropriate sections

Section 5.1/5.2 – Navy Base and West Pleasant Valley

The following recommendations were made:

- Retrofitting West Pleasant Valley drainage systems to protect water quality of the Thames
- Discuss Thames water quality
- Dredging/channel maintenance of the Thames
- Water taxi discussion
- Designation of Military Highway as a scenic road
- NMDD – Success/lack thereof. Echo recommendations of the POCD.

Section 5.3 - Airport

Discussion followed about making the airport more resilient to coastal hazards.

Discussion followed about changing the zone along the Southeast side of Thomas Road from Industrial to Open Space to allow for marsh advancement and to encourage relocation of businesses.

The following recommendations were made:

- Eliminate recommendations that cannot be effected by the town
- Address shell fishing issues
- Evaluate hurricane evacuation signs for elevation
- Expand the evacuation plan recommendation to include businesses and homes that would have to evacuate through flooded areas even if their structures are not in a flood zone

Section 5.4 – Poquonnock Bridge/Bluff Point

Staff spoke about issues regarding the access to Bluff Point and the WPCF being impacted by climate change, as well as the revitalization of commercial area along Route 1.

The following recommendations were made:

- Include recommendations from the POCD regarding the Poquonnock Bridge focus areas
- Address shell fishing issues

VI. NEW BUSINESS

1. Review of Draft Municipal Coastal Program Sections 5.5-5.8 & 6.0

Section 5.5 – Mumford Cove and Groton Long Point

The following recommendations were made:

- Access to GLP as sea level rises – bridge reconstruction
- Access to state parks
- Sea level rise impact to Amtrak service
- Marsh advancement

The Planning Commission felt it would be important to keep the wording generic.

The Planning Commission recommended to eliminate the following:

- Recommendations regarding acquisition of flood damaged properties
- Access to the shoreline in Groton Long Point
- Marsh advancement in state parks

The Planning Commission felt that stabilizing eroding marsh edges and providing space for marsh advancement should be a generic recommendation. Address shell fishing and channel dredging.

Section 5.6 – Noank

Staff reviewed the issues about low areas, including marinas, being vulnerable to sea level rise and Esker Point Beach being vulnerable to erosion and sea level rise. Maps were reviewed. Discussion followed about harbor management plans and maintenance and options for Esker Point Beach. Background information was given about this man-made beach.

The following recommendations were made:

- Consolidate the recommendations concerning Esker Point Beach Park into a general ‘Develop a Master Plan for Esker Point Beach Park’. The recommendation should list items that may be included in the plan
- Narrative should address the origins of Esker Point Beach as they are key to understanding the ongoing maintenance issues
- Address any issues with the Noank Hatchery and Aquaculture Business
- Address any shell fishing issues
- Address sport fishing or marina development/support issues
- Add recommendation regarding townwide Harbor Management Plan

Section 5.7 – Mystic

Staff reviewed issues pertaining to lack of parking for public access points, the lack of public access points north of the Gravel Street pump station, sea level rise impacts, potential of storm surges on homes and businesses, change of water dependent uses to non-water dependent, shoreline stabilization and its impact on coastal resources and intensifying wave action.

Maps were reviewed as discussion followed about the lack of parking and differentiating between parking for public access points versus just parking to visit a store in the downtown area.

The following recommendations were made:

- Additional docks for transient use to access downtown area from the water
- Encourage water dependent uses in buildings that currently house non-water dependent uses
- Include recommendations from the POCD regarding the WDD
- Develop a plan for easy access to water for people to launch water vehicles such as boats and kayaks, and formally enhance public access

Section 5.8 – Old Mystic

Staff reviewed issues pertaining to public access, coastal hazard resilience and tidal marsh advancement. Discussion followed about protecting marshes, the public water access near the Mystic Oral School, water access on River Road, and dredging.

The following recommendations were made:

- Discourage development to protect existing marshes
- Channel maintenance and dredging
- Public transportation between tourist destinations
- Water taxi
- Development of trails on the lower portion of the Mystic Education Center and town-owned open space

Staff will take all of the Planning Commission's recommendations and comments and report back with a revised draft for final review by the Planning Commission before sending the revised Municipal Coastal Plan document to the consultant.

2. Report of Commission

Pritchard attended a recent Council of Government meeting, noting that due to low attendance at monthly meetings, holding quarterly meetings is being considered.

An inquiry was made about the status of the old Caldor building and Electric Boat's use of the building going forward.

3. New Applications

Staff stated that a new application pertaining to the Oat Re-subdivision has been received. The KFC application will be discussed at the May 12, 2015 Planning Commission meeting.

VII. REPORT OF CHAIRMAN

As noted earlier, Sherrard requested commission members to contact either him or town staff if not able to attend a Planning Commission meeting. Concerns were raised about making sure there is a quorum for all Planning Commission meetings.

VIII. REPORT OF STAFF

Staff stated that a Request For Qualifications (RFQ) will go out regarding amendments for the WRPD areas in Groton. She spoke about market analysis and the zoning audit.

Staff noted that the new position of Assistant Director of Planning is currently being advertised. The new position of Manager of Economic Development is still being considered.

IX. ADJOURNMENT

Motion to adjourn at 8:55 was made by Steinfeld, seconded by Pritchard, so voted unanimously.

Margil Steinfeld, Secretary
Planning Commission

Prepared by Robin Silsby
Office Assistant II