

MINUTES
PLANNING COMMISSION
JUNE 23, 2009 – 7:00 P.M.
TOWN HALL ANNEX – COMMUNITY ROOM 2

I. ROLL CALL

Regular members present: Pritchard, Roper, Sherrard, Steinfeld
Alternate members present: Zod
Staff present: Davis, Murphy, Gilot

Chairman Sherrard opened the meeting with roll call at 7:03 p.m. and seated Zod for Munn.

II. APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES OF meeting of June 9, 2009.

MOTION: To approve the minutes of June 9, 2009 as amended.

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

III. PUBLIC COMMUNICATIONS

Roper recommended a moment of silence in honor of Priscilla Pratt, long time president of the Groton Open Space Association, who passed away last week.

Staff asked the Commission to add Item #2, Repp Subdivision, 10 Maxson Street, request for extension for the filing of mylars to “Subdivisions” on tonight’s agenda.

MOTION: To add the Repp Subdivision, 10 Maxson Street, to the agenda under “Subdivisions”.

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

Mr. Jim Furlong of GOSA asked if he could address the Commission in regards to the Merritt use limitations matter now or during the agenda topic. The Chair suggested that he defer until the agenda item was being discussed and after staff had provided its report.

IV. SUBDIVISIONS

1. Morgan’s Run Subdivision, Cow Hill Road (CAM) (3 lots) – Set public hearing date

A public hearing date of July 28, 2009 was set for the public hearing for Morgan’s Run Subdivision, Cow Hill Road.

2. Repp Subdivision, 10 Maxson Street – Request for extension

MOTION: To grant a 90 day extension to the Repp Subdivision, 10 Maxson Street for the filing of mylars.

Staff indicated that this is the final extension available and that the extension if approved, would run to 10/10/09.

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

V. OLD BUSINESS

1. Discussion regarding use limitations proposed by GOSA on the Merritt Family Farm parcel

Staff provided a brief summary of the communications received and handed out at the 6/9/09 meeting, including the findings of staff's policy analysis and how these limitations would affect implementation of the Town's Master Trails Plan.

The Chair requested input from the members. Members noted their concerns with the restrictions, the impact on the Trails Plan, the use of public funds for the purchase, and the lack of prior consultation with the Commission. The option of a formal referral to the DEP and/or the Town Council was suggested and discussed.

Jim Furlong, 57 Fishtown Lane, a director of GOSA, read a written statement objecting to staff's analysis and relating information GOSA felt was important and relevant to the dialogue. Mr. Furlong submitted several items to the Commission together with a written copy of his statement.

Additional members and or affiliates of GOSA made statements in defense of the proposed restrictions, and claiming that the Planning Commission had no role in decisions regarding the property's management by GOSA.

Debra Finko-Kent, 125 Fishtown Rd., spoke in order to rebut certain claims made by GOSA and to voice her concerns about the limitations.

Staff said that GOSA has attempted to turn the focus to Mr. Kent and Town staff, rather than the Commission's concerns with the property. Staff reviewed the community process used to develop the concepts in the Trails Plan, and noted that it was not Mr. Kent's plan, but the community's plan. Staff is simply providing communication and information to the Commission regarding public policy issues and concerns.

Staff indicated that it was unfortunate that one of the speakers characterized staff's actions as an attack. Staff stated that they had received communications from citizens concerned about the limitations, had evaluated the relevant public policy plans and documents and had provided the information to the Commission for its consideration. Staff noted that the Master Trails plan was adopted by duly elected and/or appointed Town officials, and the notion that the Planning Commission has no role or right to be a part of this is disheartening.

The Chairman said he would like time to think about what was said and walk the property. He recommended tabling further discussion, and adding this to the next agenda. The members agreed with this approach. It was a consensus that it was appropriate for the Commission to take an interest and a

role in this issue, that they were not promoting unlimited use of the entire property, that they needed to understand the basis for any differentiation between this and other open space parcels, that the use of substantial public funds for the purchase justified a public role, that the limitations both penalized “compliant” users and unnecessarily undermined support for public open space initiatives in general.

Mr. Furlong stated that the formal name of the property is now The Merritt Family Forest. They are in the early stages of their stewardship and still taking inventory. They do not want to prematurely overuse the property.

MOTION: To table any discussion on the limitations proposed by GOSA on the Merritt property until the next meeting (7/14/09).

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

The Chairman said he will advise the three members not in attendance and that if members go, they should not go in groups of more than two members.

The Chairman called a short recess and the meeting resumed at 8:07 p.m.

2. Discussion of CT Siting Council Petition #896 for Installation of Proposed Diesel Generators

Staff explained the Siting Council hearing date for this petition is scheduled for June 29th. Tom Solinsky, CMEEC, briefly addressed the Commission and advised that he and his representatives would be willing to work with Town staff to address staff’s plan review comments.

Due to the time constraints, it was the consensus of the Commission for staff to submit their recommendations to the Siting Council in time for the Siting Council’s public hearing, and to provide the Commission with a copy of those comments.

3. Land Use Regulation Update Project – No report.
4. Review of Planning Commission By-laws

Staff said the Town Attorney is still reviewing the proposed changes.

V. NEW BUSINESS

1. Report of Commission

Steinford said that he has received complaints from neighbors of Mardie Lane as to the condition of the property.

Steinford said he spoke with the Public Works Department regarding the status of the Route 1 sidewalk across from the 99 Restaurant. He was told that the Town is waiting for the State’s modifications. Staff will investigate and provide a report to the Commission at the 7/14/09 meeting.

2. CGS 8-24 Referral of Proposed Thames Street Improvement Project

The Commissioners discussed the referral in general terms and staff indicated that action could be deferred if that was preferred, in order to have a representative from the City present the proposal before the Commission.

MOTION: To table the CGS 8-24 referral of the Proposed Thames Street Improvement Project to the next meeting on July 14, 2009.

Motion made by Sherrard, seconded by Steinfeld, so voted unanimously.

VII. REPORT OF CHAIRMAN

The Chairman asked staff about the extension for the Groton Highpoint Subdivision, 245 Hazelnut Hill Road. Staff said the final extension expires on July 1st, and that he has sent a letter to the owners regarding the post approval documents required by the Planning Department. Chairman Sherrard asked staff to add the status of this subdivision to the next agenda.

VIII. REPORT OF STAFF

Staff said they included in the agenda packet a piece of correspondence from GOSA to John Silsby regarding the proposed Groton Parks and Recreation Master Plan and the potential use of the Copp property.

IX. ADJOURNMENT

Motion to adjourn at 8:27 p.m. made by Steinfeld, seconded by Zod, so voted unanimously.

Jeffrey Pritchard, Secretary
Planning Commission

Prepared by Debra L. Gilot
Office Assistant III