

MINUTES
PLANNING COMMISSION
JULY 14, 2009 – 7:00 P.M.
TOWN HALL ANNEX – COMMUNITY ROOM 2

I. ROLL CALL

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

Acting Chairman Pritchard opened the meeting with roll call at 7:04 p.m. and seated Kane for Sherrard and appointed Roper as Acting Secretary.

II. APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES OF meeting of June 23, 2009.

MOTION: To approve the minutes of June 23, 2009 as amended.

Motion made by Roper, seconded by Steinfeld. Motion passed 3-0-2, 2 abstentions (Kane, Munn).

III. PUBLIC COMMUNICATIONS

In general, the following residents spoke in support of GOSA's current position regarding limitations on the use of trails on the Merritt Farm Forest property.

Joan Smith, 58 Mohegan Rd., President pro tem of GOSA (written comments submitted).

Sidney Van Zandt, 3 Front Street, Noank, GOSA Director (written comments submitted)

Genevieve Cerf, 17 Crescent Street, Groton Long Point, treasurer for GOSA, RTM member (written comments submitted)

Bruce McDermott, 328 Noank Road

Doug Smith, 58 Mohegan Road

Jim Furlong, 57 Fishtown Lane, GOSA Director

Wendy McFarland, 48 Bel-Aire Drive

The following voiced concerns about the proposed trail use limitations and other related matters.

Lola Leopold, Fishtown Lane

Connie Burke, 1225 Gold Star Highway (submitted a petition with approximately 100 signatures)

Brian Kent, 125 Fishtown Road, responded to GOSA's claims that he has a conflict of interest in this matter.

IV. SITE PLANS

1. Barnum Elementary School Parking Lot Expansion, 68 Briar Hill Road

Colin Kelly, Engineer for Town of Groton Department of Public Works, presented the application for the parking lot expansion of the Barnum Elementary School. The site, existing parking and poor traffic flow, and requirements were detailed by Mr. Kelly. The proposed improvements to the parking lots, drop-off areas and landscaping were explained. The drainage, site lighting, was reviewed. A waiver of sidewalk extension northerly along Briar Hill Road was requested, due to the grading, the location of an existing stone wall and the general lack of development potential to the north of the subject site.

Wes Greenleaf, Director of Buildings and Grounds for the Groton Board of Education, further detailed the proposed traffic flow.

Several suggestions regarding the angle of the driveway, extension of a fence, access drive radii, and lighting were made by and discussed with the Commission.

MOTION: To approve a waiver of section 7.5-1 regarding frontage sidewalks because the Commission finds that there will be no significant pedestrian movement between the school and the area to the north along Briar Hill Road and because there would be significant disturbance of existing vegetation and stone walls in order to install the sidewalk.

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

MOTION: To approve the Charles Barnum Elementary School, 68 Briar Hill Road, parking lot addition with the following modifications:

1. Any fire lanes required by the Fire Marshal shall be shown on the plan.
2. Technical items as raised by staff shall be addressed.

The Commission finds that the landscape buffer, in which the existing vegetation is to remain and will not be supplemented with evergreen plantings, meets the intent of Section 7.4-4 because the new parking lot will be constructed below the grade of Briar Hill Road and the existing mature vegetation will provide privacy from noise, headlight glare and visual intrusion for the lots on the west side of Briar Hill Road

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

Motion to change the order of agenda and consider item VI 2 (CGS 8-24 referral for Thames Street Improvements) ahead of the Merritt Family Farm discussion was made by Steinfeld, seconded by Roper. Motion passed unanimously.

V. OLD BUSINESS

2. CGS 8-24 Referral of Proposed Thames Rehabilitation Project #2009-0158

Barbara Goodrich, planner for the City of Groton, reviewed the proposal for the Thames Street streetscape project.

Tony Ciriello, an engineer with Milone & McBroom, detailed the project. The existing infrastructure, intersections, pavement, installation of additional catch basins, curbing replacement, sidewalks, replacement of paver crosswalks, retaining walls, parking, lighting and street trees, were explained to the Commission.

The Commissioners and staff asked questions about proposed lighting, parking and other project elements, and consistency with federal standards. Commissioner Kane provided information based on his participation as a member of the project design committee.

MOTION: To send a favorable referral to the Town Council in support of the proposed Thames Street Improvement Project #2009-0158.

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

The Commission took a short recess and the meeting resumed at 8:56 p.m.

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

The acting Chair suggested that the Commission consider some form of report or referral to the Council, the DEP and other parties, and asked for member input.

Members provided their opinions as to the use of public money for the purchase, their personal inspections of the property, opinions regarding possible trails use, and other relevant policy concerns.

In response to Commission requests, staff made reference to additional public communications that had been included in the packet, as well as handouts of information being provided this evening. Staff indicated that they had also walked the easterly portion of the site and gave their impressions of the site's trail system, the site's attributes and the potential for use based on the community's Master Trails Plan recommendations. Staff also noted that in order to provide the Commission and staff with more complete and factual information, staff had gone to DEP to review the GOSA grant application file, had made copies of materials from that file (some of which were handed out tonight) and that based on their review, staff had concerns about some of this information (factual inaccuracies, use of limited and inappropriate

information taken out of context, application scoring deficiencies, questions about possible funding limitations in the law at the time of the grant as to required endorsements, etc.)

The Commission had an extensive discussion, including the possibility of forwarding communications to the DEP, the Council, State legislators, the DEP Land Acquisition Review Board, and the Town Conservation Commission. The consensus was to keep the item on the agenda for the 7/28/09 meeting, and at this time for staff to at least send a referral to the Conservation Commission for its input.

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

Pritchard said that perhaps as an interim measure the Commission could consider including the Vice Chairman requirement from the Charter update. The members agreed and Mr. Pritchard will draft some suggested language for the Commission to review.

VI. NEW BUSINESS

1. Report of Commission - None
2. Groton Highpoint Subdivision, 245 Hazelnut Hill Road – Status update

Staff said a certified letter was sent to the applicant advising him that the last date to record the subdivision was July 1st. Staff has had no response. Staff said this in affect renders the subdivision void.

3. Route 1 Sidewalk Project Update

Staff said the State Department of Transportation is still working on modifications to the placement of guardrail along Route 1. Staff will address this further under Report of Staff.

4. Zoning Board of Appeals Referral for Application #09-08, Little Owl's Valued Experiences, 187 Laurelwood Road for July 22, 2009 public hearing

Staff explained the referral. The Commission had no comment.

VII. REPORT OF CHAIRMAN

Acting Chairman Pritchard told the Commissioners that there will be a Committee of Chairs meeting on Monday, and reviewed the agenda.

IX. REPORT OF STAFF

Staff noted that it had included in tonight's packet a letter staff had sent to Parks and Recreation Director John Silsby, addressing representations and statements included in correspondence from Joan Smith of GOSA to Mr. Silsby and widely copied to others, in regards to the draft Parks and Recreation Master Plan update Report.

Staff will follow up on the Route 1 sidewalk matter and inform the Commission of CONNDOT action on the encroachment permit.

Staff explained the history of the sidewalk on Stanton Farm Lane, as part of the Mystic Ice House Subdivision.

Committee of Chairpersons meeting is on Monday. Barbara Strother will staff that meeting.

Staff will provide copies of public communications received tonight from members of the public, for those items where only one copy was provided.

Staff is attending a meeting this week at the State Department of Transportation to address the permit process for the Thomas Road Bikeway project.

X. ADJOURNMENT

Motion to adjourn at 10:05 p.m. made by Roper, seconded by Steinfeld, so voted unanimously.

Peter Roper, Acting Secretary
Planning Commission

Prepared by Debra L. Gilot
Office Assistant III