

MINUTES
PLANNING COMMISSION
MARCH 11, 2008 – 7:00 P.M.
TOWN HALL ANNEX – COMMUNITY ROOM 2

I. ROLL CALL

Regular members present: Munn, Pritchard, Sherrard, Steinfeld
Alternate members present: Kane
Staff present: Cullen, Davis, Murphy, Gilot

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

II. APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES OF meeting of February 12, 2008 and February 26, 2008

MOTION: To approve the minutes of February 12, 2008 as amended.

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

MOTION: To approve the minutes of February 26, 2008 as written.

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

III. PUBLIC COMMUNICATIONS

Staff noted that a letter was received from the Connecticut Federation of Planning and Zoning Agencies (CFPZA) indicating that Mr. Steinfeld has been nominated to receive a length of service award at the dinner on March 27th.

Staff received a referral today from the City of Groton regarding a public hearing on March 18th for a special permit to establish a vocational training center at 50 Sacred Heart Drive.

MOTION: To add the City of Groton referral to the agenda as an item under New Business.

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

IV. SITE PLANS

1. Lighthouse Point, Pleasant Valley Road North – Request for extension for start of construction

Staff explained the request for a six month extension.

Genevieve Salvatore, Attorney, represented the new owner, who plans to develop the project. Ms. Salvatore said that the mylars have not been filed due

to the valuation of the land prior to the filing, allowing the new owner to obtain financing. The new owner hopes to have this project under construction in the next six months. The current deadline for the start of construction is March 26, 2008.

MOTION: To grant a six month extension for start of construction to Lighthouse Point, Pleasant Valley Road North, to September 26, 2008.

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

The Chairman encouraged the agent to properly record the mylars.

2. Fort Hill Citgo Convenience Store, 180 Fort Hill Road

Staff noted that a variance was required and granted by the Zoning Board of Appeals for this project.

Russell Sergeant, Architect, explained the history and location of the site, a gas station since the early 1900's. This is a commercial use in a residential zone with driveways on Route 1 and Ring Drive. Mr. Sergeant explained the request to expand the existing commercial use. The existing house on the site would be demolished, and building expansion parking would be on that portion of the site. The site layout, including frontage, landscaping and improvements of the corner of Route 1 and Ring Drive were detailed.

John Martucci, Engineer, Colchester, Ct., explained the drainage and site layout. The existing driveways on Route 1 and Ring Drive were shown on the plans. The applicant proposes to relocate the southwestern driveway to the southeast; the northeast driveway (Ring Drive) will be widened. Staff suggested that the applicant narrow the southeastern curb cut entrance. The fuel truck uses that entrance and needs the 24 ft. width. Dumpster pads, curbs, and sidewalks were described. Sight lighting has been added.

Mr. Sergeant discussed sight lines and entrances to the site. Potential exit at the traffic light, pedestrian traffic and existing site limitations were discussed. The applicant requested to allow the Route 1 driveway to remain two-way, allowing traffic to exit on to Route 1. The applicant also requested a waiver of a 25 ft. buffer to the residential neighbors to the north. There is currently seven feet of buffer; on the western side is a berm and a wall; there are evergreen trees across the back with a six ft. board fence. A sidewalk agreement was requested by the applicant. Currently there is a bituminous island on the Ring Drive side (within the public right of way)

Staff explained the variance granted by the Zoning Board of Appeals. Staff showed pictures of the existing buffers and described the existing and proposed landscaping. Staff showed the Commission the proposed floor plan. The auto repair business will remain. Parking was detailed. Truck loading, handicapped parking and signage were discussed.

Staff discussed the southeasterly driveway and the desire for one way traffic. Existing conditions and circulation movements were detailed. Staff

recommends a one way entrance only at the light to improve the traffic safety. Staff also recommends a sidewalk agreement for the Ring Drive side of the property. Staff said this area along Ring Drive should be softened with landscaping and the public area within the right of way not used for vehicle storage or private parking. The one-way signage was described. The location of the addition to the commercial use was explained. The parking spaces were detailed. A bike rack on the site was suggested.

The Commission debated the options of the one-way entrance and exit at the traffic light.

Staff said this site is located in the Town's sidewalk priority area on Route 1.

MOTION: To approve the Fort Hill Citgo Site Plan, 180 Fort Hill Road, subject to the following modifications:

1. The applicant shall provide a frontage sidewalk according to the requirements of Section 7.5-2 of the Zoning Regulations on Route 1 frontage.
2. The owner shall enter into a written, binding agreement with the Groton Planning Commission pursuant to Section 7.5-5 A, whereby the owner agrees to appear before the Planning Commission when development conditions change in this area, or within a period not to exceed five years, whichever occurs sooner, to allow for a determination to be made as to the need for installation of a 5' concrete sidewalk along Ring Drive from their Route 1 intersection to the adjacent property owner's driveway on Ring Drive. Said determination as to the need for the installation of this sidewalk shall be at the sole discretion of the Planning Commission. The agreement shall be recorded in the land records with the site plan. Prior to the initiation of any construction of the sidewalk, the owner shall have prepared and will have approved a construction plan for said sidewalk, which shall meet the requirements of the Town of Groton, including necessary information for location, grades, elevation and other details.
3. The paved island along the Ring Drive frontage shall be landscaped from the intersection of Route 1 to the southerly radius of the entrance drive along Ring Drive, said landscaped island to retain at least one street tree, grass and low profile shrubs to be approved by the Director of Planning and Development.
4. Technical Items raised by staff shall be addressed.

The Planning Commission notes that a reduction in the requirement under Section 7.4-3 (A) (requiring a minimum of 30'

front landscaped area in a residential district) is appropriate for this unique retrofitted site. The proposed landscaping and trees as noted on the plan received March 5, 2008 shall constitute the minimum required in lieu of this 30' requirement.

The Planning Commission notes that a reduction in the buffer area under Section 7.4-4(A) (25 foot buffer to residential properties) will reduce the requirement from 25' to the existing 7' of mature existing trees and board fence currently on the site and noted in the exhibit photographs.

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

The Commission recessed at 8:43 p.m. and the meeting resumed at 8:49 p.m.

V. OLD BUSINESS

1. City of Groton referral for POCD update for public hearing on March 18, 2008

The Commission concurred with the draft comments dated 2/26/08, and discussed the maps in the POCD. The Commission also discussed differentiating between the Town and City land in the graphics on pages 17 and 21 and making sure that the plan text indicates that economic development plans and initiatives will be undertaken jointly in coordination with the Town, not as separate City initiatives (e.g. ref. p. 44).

MOTION: To forward to the City of Groton the draft comments of 2/26/08 with the two additional comments as recommended.

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

2. Zoning Board of Appeals referral for March 12, 2008 public hearing
ZBA#08-02 – 12, 14 & 16 Godfrey Street, Elaine Cole, Applicant,
Mystic River Residential Care, Inc., Owner

Staff explained the referral. The request is for a nonconforming use expansion variance.

MOTION: The Planning Commission is concerned with the increased size of the building in relation to the existing residences.

Motion made by Pritchard, seconded by Sherrard. Motion passes unanimously.

3. Discussion of Councilor O'Beirne legislative proposal (2/19/08 COW packet)

The Commission members discussed the Town Council's role, if any, in land use decisions. Staff said it is not currently in the Town charter and that this

conflicts with the state law. The Commission asked staff to add this as an agenda item for the next Committee of Chairpersons meeting.

Motion to table the discussion to a future meeting in April made by Sherrard, seconded by Pritchard, so voted unanimously.

3. Review of Planning Commission By-laws

The Commission discussed protocol for meetings in the absence of the chairman and secretary. The Chairman asked Commission members to submit any comments in writing to staff and asked staff to add this to the next meeting's agenda. Mr. Pritchard provided written suggestions, copies of which were provided to the Commission members in attendance. Zoning Regs - 8.3 - advisory report -

VI. NEW BUSINESS

1. Report of Commission

1. Kane reported that he attended a Thames Street Rehabilitation Study Committee meeting. The Committee discussed the idea of making a section of Thames Street one-way. Kane said the Committee meets on the first Wednesday of every month.

Steinford asked about the School Design Committee meeting and Kane said there has not been a meeting in several months.

2. Zoning Commission referrals for April 2, 2008 public hearings

MOTION: To table the Zoning Commission referrals for the April 2, 2008 public hearings to the next regular meeting on March 25, 2008.

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

3. Town Council referral under CGS 8-24 regarding Par Four Restaurant lease

MOTION: To send a comment of no objections in response to the Town Council referral under CGS 8-24 regarding the Par Four Restaurant lease.

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

4. Town of Ledyard referral for March 27, 2008 public hearing

The Commission discussed several potential concerns with the proposed regulation amendment. It was the consensus of the Commission to have staff check with other abutting towns and the regional planning agency to see their response, and resume discussion at the next meeting.

MOTION: To table the Town of Ledyard referral to the next regular meeting on March 25, 2008.

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

4. City of Groton referral for March 18, 2008 public hearing

Staff explained the referral for a proposed vo-ed use per a recently adopted City zoning regulation. Staff noted that the Town owns the Colonel Ledyard School and has therefore been notified under the City's zoning regulations. The Commission had no comment.

VII. REPORT OF CHAIRMAN - None

VIII. REPORT OF STAFF

Staff reviewed the status of upcoming applications for the Planning Commission.

Staff confirmed that Steinfeld and Sherrard would be attending the CFPZA dinner at the Aquaturf on March 27th.

The Drinking Water Quality Management Plan (DWQMP) revised meeting notice was distributed to Commission members.

Staff said the Planning and Development Services budget will be presented to the Town Council on Monday, April 7th.

The Planning Department has completed interviews for a new secretary for Inspection Services and will be interviewing soon for the vacant building inspector position.

Staff said the contract for the regulation amendment update project is close to being signed.

As requested by Kiran Parekh, the owner of the hotel, staff distributed individual invitations to the Hilton Garden Inn open house being held on April 4th.

IX. ADJOURNMENT

Motion to adjourn at 9:57 p.m. made by Munn, seconded by Kane, so voted unanimously.

Jeffrey Pritchard, Secretary
Planning Commission

Prepared by Debra Gilot, Office Assistant II