

MINUTES
TOWN OF GROTON
ZONING BOARD OF APPEALS
MAY 11, 2016 – 7:00 P.M.
TOWN HALL ANNEX – COMMUNITY ROOM 1

Chairman Stebbins called the meeting to order at 7:03 p.m.

I. ROLL CALL

Regular members present: Stebbins, Manning, Grady, Russotto
Alternate members present: Mencer
Absent: Kravits
Staff present: Allen, Silsby

Stebbins appointed Mencer to sit for Kravits.

II. PUBLIC HEARING

The public hearing opened at 7:04 p.m. Secretary Manning found the mailings to be in order. Public hearing procedures were read.

1. ZBA#16-04 – 715 Noank-Ledyard Road, Fields of Fire LLC/Applicant, 715 Noank-Ledyard Road LLC/Owner, for a variance to Section 7.3-6 B (Signs Permitted in Residential Districts) to allow a 22 foot x 14 foot (308 SF) sign in lieu of a 24 square foot sign in a residential zone. PIN#260911557487, RU-40 zone and IP-80B zone.

Thomas Vignato, business owner of Fields of Fire, LLC, 715 Noank-Ledyard Road, Mystic, explained that the business model has changed to accommodate additional park activities, which is why he is requesting to install a large sign in the residential portion of this two-zoned property. He reviewed the placement of the original and most current sign location as he submitted numerous photos and documents. His goal is to attract more people to the park and expand his business. The hope is to have this sign visible from Interstate 95, so motorists will be able to view it before driving past the park. He believes that the topography in the industrial area of the property prohibits the installation of a sign, which he believes is a hardship.

Discussion followed about having two different zones on the property and the size of the proposed sign. Grady questioned why Mr. Vignato put up such a large sign initially, without inquiring with the Planning Department beforehand. Information was given about the amount of ledge and trees in the industrial area. Sign requirements were reviewed. Manning felt strongly that putting a large sign in the industrial zoned area could potentially be a hazard to motorists driving on Interstate 95, which is already a hazardous roadway.

Chairman Stebbins asked if anyone in the audience would like to speak in favor of this application.

David Brown, 358 River Road, Pawcatuck, on behalf of the Greater Mystic Chamber of Commerce, spoke in support of this application.

Leo Roche, 573 Fishtown Road, Mystic, spoke in favor of this application. As a small business owner in downtown Mystic, he noted the importance of growing a business.

Twenty-nine (29) letters of support were read into the record. Manning read a memo from the Planning Commission dated April 27, 2016, stating the following, "The Planning Commission has strong concerns about setting precedence in a single family residential area and concerns about the size and the lighting of the sign".

The Public Hearing closed at 8:08 p.m.

2. ZBA#16-05 – 0 North Road, Christ United Methodist Church/Applicant, City of Groton/Owner, for variances to Section 7.3-3 B to allow a sign to project beyond the property line, and Section 7.3-7 to allow a freestanding sign on a parcel not containing the principal use, and to allow for a 1 foot setback on Hazelnut Hill Road and a 3 foot setback on North Road instead of the required 10 feet. PIN#169920812360 E, IP-80C Zone

The Public Hearing opened at 8:10 p.m. Secretary Manning stated that the mailings have been reviewed and found to be in order.

Austin Alvarez, the applicant, 33 Pleasant Run, Gales Ferry, requested an extension to address comments from the Zoning Board of Appeals and the Planning Commission.

Secretary Manning read a letter dated April 27, 2016 from Mr. Alvarez, requesting an extension until July 13, 2016.

Chairman Stebbins noted that the applicant previously came before the Board to request a larger sign to replace a smaller sign that had been in place for over 40 years. That variance request was denied as no hardship was shown. Stebbins distributed a photo of the 0 North Road location, pointing out 4 signs that relate to the church and questioned the applicant.

Mr. Alvarez stated that he received permission from the State of Connecticut to put up a sign in that location. Stebbins explained that four signs are not allowed according to zoning regulations. Stebbins recommended Mr. Alvarez discuss this situation with Planning Staff.

III. MEETING FOLLOWING PUBLIC HEARING

1. ZBA#16-04 – 715 Noank-Ledyard Road, Fields of Fire LLC/Applicant, 715 Noank-Ledyard Road LLC/Owner

Inquiries were made about placing the proposed sign in the residential zone, in close proximity to Interstate 95. Inquiries were made about the sign being illuminated. Russotto felt that the hardship hinges on the difficulty of installing a sign in the industrial zone due to its topography. Grady does not believe a hardship exists and would not support this variance. Manning explained that Interstate 95 is already a hazardous roadway and believes that putting a sign in the residential area would be safer for motorists, as it would be less distracting than one placed in the industrial area. It was noted that the applicant has the right to have 1 sign in the industrial area. Mencer would support this application as he felt that having two zones in this one property could be considered a hardship. Stebbins explained that he would be in favor of this application due to the topography in the industrial area. Discussion followed about the potential to condition this variance and the uniqueness of the property. Staff referred to zoning regulations regarding signs.

MOTION: To approve the variance as requested

Motion made by Russotto, seconded by Mencer, so voted 4 in favor, 1 opposed (Grady)

2. ZBA#16-05 – 0 North Road, Christ United Methodist Church/Applicant, City of Groton/Owner

MOTION: To grant an extension until July 13, 2016

Motion made by Russotto, seconded by Grady, so voted unanimously

IV. CORRESPONDENCE - None

V. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

1. April 13, 2016

MOTION: To adopt the minutes of April 13, 2016, as written

Motion made by Grady, seconded by Russotto, so voted unanimously

VI. OLD BUSINESS

1. Election of Officers

MOTION: To postpone this item until all members are present

Motion by Russotto, seconded by Mencer, so voted unanimously

VII. NEW BUSINESS

Staff briefed the Board on a newly received application regarding the Barbour Residence, 49 Watrous Avenue.

VIII. REPORT OF STAFF

Staff explained about the Gibbons Case and how it is pertinent to the Board in terms of opening public hearings. The case highlights the necessity to open and then make and pass a motion to continue a public hearing in the event less than the required 4 members are present.

IX. ADJOURNMENT

Motion to adjourn at 8:55 p.m. made by Russotto, seconded by Mencer, so voted unanimously.

Tom Manning, Secretary
Zoning Board of Appeals

Prepared by Robin Silsby
Office Assistant II