

MINUTES  
TOWN OF GROTON  
ZONING COMMISSION  
JANUARY 3, 2018 – 6:30 P.M.  
TOWN HALL ANNEX – 134 GROTON LONG POINT ROAD  
COMMUNITY ROOM 2

I. ROLL CALL

Regular members present: Hudecek, Marquardt, Sayer, Smith, Sutherland

Alternate members present: Archer, Edgerton

Absent:

Staff present: Jones, Reiner, Gilot

Chairperson Sutherland called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m.

II. PUBLIC HEARING - None

III. CONSIDERATION OF PUBLIC HEARING - None

IV. PUBLIC COMMUNICATIONS

James Furlong, 57 Fishtown Lane, Groton, said he liked the new open space map with the chart which quantifies the properties and labeled each parcel as a number for easy identification. He said he would like to hear the definitions of recreation and conservation, and what criteria were used to determine each. He said Poquonnock Park is identified as green and Bluff Point is green, but they are not similar tracts of land.

V. APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES

1. December 6, 2017

MOTION: To approve the December 6, 2017 meeting minutes as amended.

Motion made by Sayer, seconded by Hudecek. Motion passed unanimously.

VII. OLD BUSINESS

1. Commission Workshop – Zoning Regulations Rewrite Project

Staff reviewed the Horsley Witten memo included in the agenda packet, and distributed a revised open space map and a Horsley Witten memo regarding the RS-8 zoning district.

Jeff Davis, Horsley Witten Group, said three items that will be discussed after decisions are made will be parking, cottage communities, and signage.

Decisions that need to be made at this meeting are the inclusion of identified parcels in the WDD, the changes proposed to the RS-8 zoning district, revised open space parcels on the zoning map, and edits to the definitions of some of the service uses.

WDD parcels

Some commissioners had concerns with the 1 Bank Street parcel due to the concerns of the neighbors. Staff recommended taking 1 Bank Street off, since two or three commissioners were not comfortable with the change. Staff said the commissioners should focus on the big picture – what do they want the town to look like based on the POCD, and need to balance the needs of neighbors with the look of Mystic; sea level change could also affect what Mystic looks like in 30 – 50 years. It was the consensus of the commission that 1 Bank Street and the Kelly statue parklet would not be included in the new zoning district.

#### RS-8 zoning district

Jeff Davis reviewed the existing and proposed setbacks, coverage, and lot sizes for the RS-8 district.

The commission concurred with a 10 ft. front setback, 35% coverage, 7,000 sq. ft. lot size. It will now be identified as the R-7 district.

Davis said staff identified about 1,500 parcels in the RS-12 and R-12 districts, and Horsley Witten will randomly choose ten percent or 150 parcels for the same type of analysis as they did with the RS-8 district. The neighborhoods located around the WDD, and Fort Hill Homes have the largest number of parcels. Davis hoped to have the analysis done by next month.

Homework for the February meeting: Staff asked the commissioners to drive through the neighborhoods, become familiar with the mix of each of the neighborhoods. Staff said they would send maps identifying the neighborhoods.

#### Green zoning districts

The new map given to the commissioners removed the developed portions of the Groton Utilities parcels, which will default to the underlying zone. Staff thinks one green zone is sufficient and three zones is excessive. Most parcels are protected by easements, etc. Sutherland said some of the reservoirs had to be dredged in the past; if it has to be done again, how difficult would that be? Staff said that Town of Groton services and utility infrastructure would be allowed in every zone, and those will be defined. Definitions of recreation vs. conservation – It was noted that the commission does not have specific definitions for recreation or conservation. Sayer said she wasn't sure how they would differentiate between the two. The uses define the type of conservation. Davis said to avoid confusion, have one district with stipulations that the underlying easement rules. Staff said many of the parcels owned by state or DEEP, such as the Mystic Education Center and the airport, are not shown on the map. If Mystic Education center is sold, it could be a subdivision, with permanent easements on the open space. Staff said some of the smaller green parcels were left out. Sutherland would like all of Groton Utilities' parcels identified on the map; she was curious as to why some were left out.

The consensus was to have two open space zones. Sutherland suggested that Bluff Point be changed to a conservation zone (pink instead of green).

Staff reviewed the uses allowed in each of the two green zones. The commission concurred to change the Bluff Point reserve parcels to pink. Staff reminded the commission that Bluff Point is state owned, so they can do whatever they want without consulting Groton.

Davis said he would write descriptions of the zones, as they have done with the other zones; they would not be definitions but descriptions.

Staff noted that the Avalonia property near Beebe Cove, and the Groton Utilities property near Tilcon will also be zoned GC.

#### Use Definitions

Mr. Davis reviewed the changes to be made: “for example” tables; “health” removed from health and fitness, indoor; combined aquaculture related uses; health activities; the table has been renamed “Use Table; A/C and A/SP for Accessory uses; “campsite” was kept because it is used in the definition of a campground.

Sutherland commented that she didn’t think that two industrial zones were necessary. Staff said the heavier uses should be separated, kept closer to the airport area.

The commission agreed that Horsley Witten should go live with the new zoning website.

Nate Kelly, Horsley Witten Group, gave a brief PowerPoint presentation on cottage housing. Developers are building cottage communities with small homes, porches, and a shared common green area in the middle, similar to old New England communities. There is a great interest for affordable housing for middle income housing, starter homes and housing for seniors. The communities are built for multi-family density but with prescriptive standards for high quality design, and used to transition from Main Street to more urban neighborhoods. There are generally 8 – 20 units, each 900 to 1,200 sq. ft. with all homes facing a central common area. Most of the housing units are two story with a limited second story, porches, and common decorative accents; some models are multi-family. These communities would be allowed by putting them in the use table and linked to design standards, or a cottage community overlay. Core zoning standards would need to be revisited with regard to height, parking volume and design, setbacks, and additional standards for building form, materials, variation, features and landscaping. These might be considered for Groton adjacent to mixed use areas, along Routes 1 and 184. Staff said they may be a good option for some of the schools that are going to be closed.

The commission would like Horsley Witten to create some draft standards for the use tables for cottage communities and identify lots that might take advantage of the standards.

Mr. Kelly then presented a slideshow on parking volume and design. Mr. Kelly briefly reviewed the history of parking requirements and standards, and noted parking’s impact on impervious cover, hydrologic balance and water quality. Mr. Kelly further discussed tailoring minimums with regard to density, patterns, demographics and public parking, and establishing maximums for common abusers, such as national chains retail and restaurants, using care to avoid overly restrictive regulations. He also discussed shared parking, buffer requirements, curb cuts, landscapes, surfacing, low impact development techniques, and drainage.

Mr. Davis presented a brief PowerPoint on sign regulations. He provided background on the Reed v. Gilbert Supreme Court case of June 2015, from Gilbert, Arizona. Sign ordinances must be content neutral for non-commercial speech. Signs must be content neutral. Acceptable is regulation by zoning district, regulation by illumination, size and form. Regulation of off-premises signs- billboards may be

regulated or prohibited; temporary signs (banners); commercial speech cannot be favored over noncommercial speech. Key points for the commission to consider: reduce the number of exceptions to permitting requirements, do not introduce exceptions in the prohibited sign list; reduce the number of sign categories; consider deregulation of some categories of signage and a flat ban on categories of signage. Additional Groton sign regulation issues: removal of prohibited signs, removal of signs after 30 days' cessation of a bona fide business; limiting signs to directional only – no commercial advertising permitted; Reed and McKenzie issues with sign regulations for industrial parks.

Davis said the next meeting will be a special meeting workshop on January 17<sup>th</sup> and the commission will discuss residential zones, definitions.

VIII. NEW BUSINESS

1. Election of Officers

MOTION: To nominate Susan Sutherland as Chairperson.

Motion made by Hudecek, seconded by Sayer. Motion passed unanimously.

MOTION: To nominate Steve Hudecek as Vice Chair.

Motion made by Sutherland, seconded by Smith. Motion passed unanimously.

MOTION: To nominate Susan Marquardt as Secretary.

Motion made by Smith, seconded by Sayer. Motion passed unanimously.

2. Report of Commission - None

3. Receipt of New Applications

Staff said a special permit application was received for outdoor seating at Chapter One Restaurant, West Main Street, Mystic. The public hearing was set for February 7, 2018.

IX. REPORT OF CHAIRPERSON - None

X. REPORT OF STAFF - None

XI. ADJOURNMENT

Motion to adjourn at 8:44 p.m. was made by Smith, seconded by Hudecek; so voted unanimously.

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Susan Marquardt, Secretary  
Zoning Commission

Prepared by Debra Gilot  
Executive Assistant