

MINUTES  
TOWN OF GROTON  
ZONING COMMISSION  
DECEMBER 6, 2017 – 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: Edgerton

Absent: Archer

Staff present: Glemboski, 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

Chairperson Sutherland stated that the commission would be taking written as well as oral communications regarding the zoning regulation rewrite during the Public Communications portion of tonight's meeting.

James Furlong, 57 Fishtown Lane, Groton, commented on the open space discussion at the November 15<sup>th</sup> meeting. It was tentatively decided at that meeting that Groton Utilities land would be zoned like Bluff Point, as conserved, keeping open space to two zones rather than three. He said he would like to see Groton Utilities have its own zone because those properties have little in common with Bluff Point. He provided three color photos taken outside of the Groton Utilities properties which show the land is not primarily a conservation area but more of an economic enterprise like a farm. It generates power instead of food. There is storage of dangerous chemicals, electrical substations, emergency generators, solar panels, and only Groton Utilities may undertake anything there that would be allowed in most conservation tracts, such as hiking. To call it a conservation zone would be misleading and contrary to the simplification of zones. It should remain closed to the public.

Zell Steever, 81 Main Street, Groton, said he prefers the old format of the public being allowed to comment during commission workshops. It is difficult to keep comments until later. Regarding open space, he suggested three green areas, the third being Groton Utilities, with notes that it is intended exclusively for Groton Utilities or its successors for generation of power. If it is sold, it should be kept for the same use. The small parklets which have not been identified on the open space map should be identified and remain as such on the zoning map. He also noted that at the November 1<sup>st</sup> meeting, he provided nine suggestions to be considered in the regulations, and asked for the commission to respond to each of them. He said #1, open space, was addressed. He would like to know the commission's thoughts on the other particular matters, such as flood plain, FEMA, etc. He discussed the decision points identified in the Horsley Witten memo for the December 6<sup>th</sup> meeting, and said the review process should be spelled out as far as procedures, enforcement, what needs to be referred to other boards or bodies, and what it is they are expected to provide.

V. APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES

1. November 15, 2017 Special Meeting

MOTION: To approve the November 15, 2017 special meeting minutes as amended.

Motion made by Hudecek, seconded by Sayer. 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 an open space map, and a Horsley Witten memo regarding the RS-8 zoning district.

Jeff Davis, Horsley Witten, distributed a GIS map of the existing WDD zone. He identified specific parcels on the map for consideration of including them in the (current) WDD zone: 0 West Main Street (John Kelly statue), 1 Bank Street, 6 Pearl Street, 5 Pearl Street, and 3 Gravel Street. The commission discussed consideration of the Masonic condos and Christian Science buildings on Gravel Street, as well as some properties on Water Street. Staff said there are no other zones in the town where a specific border change is proposed. The village district areas will definitely be changing, and other entire areas will have new zoning designations. The commission could not reach a consensus on the parcels in the WDD; they would like to walk the properties first. Staff said the regulations in the (current) WDD zone will be changing; even if some of the parcels are included, the regulations may also lessen the impact to some of the other parcels.

Mr. Davis discussed a memo he distributed tonight regarding the RS-8 district analysis. The dimensional standards proposed to be changed were front setback, building coverage, and lot size. He noted there were 105 parcels in the zone. The net average setback in the district is 17.5 ft., almost 70% currently non-conforming for front setback. The proposed new standard of 10 ft. would still leave over 40% of parcels non-conforming. There would be fewer non-conforming lots with the new building coverage standard. Currently just under a third is non-conforming; the average net coverage is 21%; the new proposed standard would be 35%, leaving only 4 lots that would be over the 35%. The current lot size requirement is 8,000 sq. ft.; if it was lowered to 6,000 sq. ft. the non-conformity would be reduced to 24.8%, or 26 lots.

Sutherland asked for an evaluation of a middle ground between 6,000 sq. ft. and 8,000 sq. ft. standards, and if there are any vacant lots in the area. Mr. Davis said he would get information.

Mr. Davis said he would like to do this analysis for the R-12 and RS-12 zones, but due to budget and time, he would work with staff to do representative sampling, or a target some of the older subdivisions.

The green zoning districts, conservation and recreation districts, were identified on a map distributed to the commission. At this time, all of Groton Utilities land is shown as conservation. Staff said the small parcels in subdivisions are deeded open space, and they cannot be changed. They would just show as tiny dots on the zoning map. If the commission wants every parcel to be identified, a zone change would have

to be done for every one of those small parks to change the zone for each parcel, rather than a deed restriction. Any underlying deed restriction or conservation easement overrules the overlying zone. With regard to the third open space zone, Smith said he doesn't think a third zone is that confusing; it's only those specific parcels belonging to Groton Utilities, for their use. It is currently zoned housing, so the commission would prefer to make it a separate zone. Staff said there were some parcels that needed to be corrected to take the buildings out, substations out, and include only properties used for conservation. The parcels with buildings, etc., would be pulled out and be the underlying zone, most likely commercial. Mr. Davis recommended not listing the third zone in the use table. Staff asked what the commission would accomplish or regulate if a separate zone was created for the Groton Utilities properties if the commercial parts are taken out. Discussion ensued on watershed conservation, green conservation, zoning based on ownership rather than uses. The commission will take this as a "homework assignment" and discuss again. The map was based on the last meeting, and the uses the commission decided as passive/active at the last meeting. Staff asked the commission to look at the use table and map distributed tonight, compare them, and they will discuss at the next meeting. Infrastructure will be taken out of the Groton Utilities parcels.

#### Use Table

If a use is strictly prohibited in the WRPD, it has an X. Any sort of additional conditions, or if a special use permit is required, it gets a W. If it is blank, the WRPD has nothing to say about that use.

Hudecek said there should be a note to "go to the underlying district" in the WRPD zone.

On the front page, the WRPD first bullet should say if there is a blank...

The commission discussed identifying letters for the downtown Mystic district, such as "MDD" for Mystic Downtown District, or DM (Downtown Mystic). No consensus was reached.

#### Outreach/Website

Horsley Witten is developing informational one-pagers to be printed out and handed out to people; topics will include a zoning overview, zoning jargon, and a general primer. Also, a general one-pager on ways in which zoning regulations affect the environment would be included. Mr. Davis asked for any other topics or suggestions from the commission.

A "Doing Business in Groton" guide is being developed by the Economic Development division.

Press releases and public information sessions will be held before the public hearings as an outreach to businesses and larger residential groups.

Mr. Davis provided a preview of the zoning regulation update website that Horsley Witten is developing as part of the public outreach program. It will be linked to the town's home page, but it will have a unique domain name, and will be searchable.

The commission wanted it to be made clear on the website that if a comment was made through the website, they are or are not making a comment to the Zoning Commission. There would be one format for formally submitting comments. One field for “tell us about yourself”; a second field for comments addressed specifically to the Zoning Commission.

Mr. Kelly said he would like to consult with the attorneys regarding comments from the website. Also, once the public hearing happens, the comment ability would be closed.

Mr. Davis said he will add the schedule, and a link to update what has been done; maybe a timeline.

The commission asked about the “Stay Informed” section of the website. Davis said the comments will go to staff. The names can be collected to a database for communication; mass mailings could be sent to the lists.

Staff said discussion of mixed use zones has been pushed back to the February meeting. The schedule provided by Horsley Witten has one topic listed for each month. The goal is to get all the information for the first meeting of the month. January’s meeting will be discussion of use conditions, as well as the items not decided tonight.

Definitions – No discussion

VIII. NEW BUSINESS

1. Report of Commission - None
2. Receipt of New Applications - None

IX. REPORT OF CHAIRPERSON

The Chair thanked everyone for doing a fine job at the last few meetings that she was unable to attend.

X. REPORT OF STAFF

Staff circulated the holiday party invitation and distributed the most recent issues of “Common Ground” magazine.

XI. ADJOURNMENT

Motion to adjourn at 8:18 p.m. was made by Hudecek, seconded by Smith; so voted unanimously.

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Susan Marquardt, Secretary  
Zoning Commission

Prepared by Debra Gilot  
Executive Assistant