

MINUTES
SPECIAL MEETING
TOWN OF GROTON
ZONING COMMISSION
FEBRUARY 21, 2018 – 7:00 P.M.
TOWN HALL ANNEX – 134 GROTON LONG POINT ROAD
COMMUNITY ROOM 1

I. ROLL CALL

Regular members present: Marquardt, Sayer, Smith, Sutherland
Alternate members present: Archer
Absent: Edgerton, Hudecek
Staff present: Glemboski, Jones, Reiner, Gilot

Chairperson Sutherland called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. and seated Archer for Hudecek.

II. ITEMS OF BUSINESS

1. Commission Workshop – Zoning Regulations Rewrite Project

Staff provided a brief overview of mixed uses. After a presentation by Horsley Witten Group on mixed use, the floor will be open to the commission for questions, and then to the audience for any questions regarding the mixed use zoning.

a. Website Update www.grotonctzoning.com

Staff said the new zoning website is kept updated with meeting agendas, minutes, technical reports, presentations, etc. Any questions can be directed to staff at any time by email or phone.

b. Mixed-Use Design Introduction

Nate Kelly, Horsley Witten Group, introduced himself and Jeff Davis and provided a brief introduction of what mixed use zoning is and how it translates into zoning regulations.

Kelly gave a PowerPoint presentation on mixed uses. Examples of mixed use districts, centers, villages and buildings were demonstrated. Regulatory hazards, design standards, design guidelines, housing density, shared parking, regulating design by retrofitting conventional standards were discussed. Kelly showed how building placement, setback design, parking placement, public space, pedestrian circulation, spaces that are for pedestrians and spaces for cars are all important considerations. Illustrations of site design options and building materials were also detailed in the presentation.

Kelly asked the commission for their thoughts regarding specific items to be considered for mixed use zoning.

Residential use location: The commission concurred to not limit the location of the residential uses in these districts.

Design standards: Kelly asked the commission their feeling about traditional building styles and types, and newer development styles. The commission said they were not necessarily committed only to traditional architecture, but they would like the buildings to match together well.

Height or number of stories for buildings in the Town Center District and Poquonnock Village District: Some of the commissioners thought the height should be lower in the village district. The surrounding buildings currently are one, two, or three stories. The town center has nothing to compare to, but most likely higher would be appropriate. There is also nothing for comparison at the Route 184/Route 117 area. The commission said they would really like input from the public at this point in the discussions, rather than when there is a draft ready for a public hearing.

Sayer said that with regard to landscape standards, stone walls are important to the history of this area. She also noted that with small scale village development, sometimes a change in the texture of the roadway, either at intersections, or whole streets, can slow traffic. Kelly said roadway surfaces and sidewalk materials or treatments can be used to create "sidewalk zones".

The Chair asked for questions from the public specific to the mixed use zoning, and asked that comments be limited to five minutes.

Rosanne Kotowski, 24 Ann Avenue, asked if the mixed use zones will be as prohibitive as the existing residential zones. Staff said the new mixed use zones will not be dropped into the middle of an existing large residential area. There may be some existing single family residential properties in downtown that are incorporated into the district, but it will allow the type of development that we want to see in our town and encourage what the market is demanding.

Zell Steever, 81 Main Street, spoke in support of the mixed use zoning, and allowing maximum flexibility. He said the downtown Route 1 should be referred to as the town center, to identify a sense of place. He believes this is really about people and where people live, where they work, and recreating the older villages that already exist in Groton. He said there needs to be a diversity of residential types and ownership – rentals, condos, co-ops, privately owned individual structures. He discussed public transportation, and choosing areas with infrastructure already in place.

Kate Zod, High Meadow Lane, Mystic, said there should be opportunities for seniors to be included in mixed use areas.

Jim Furlong, 57 Fishtown Lane, Mystic, would like to see a picture of an ideal village feeling created with modern buildings with visual interest, because he cannot visualize. He hoped there would be places in the new downtown that allow lower rent businesses (such as vacuum repair). Big-box, indoor malls, and tourist-type stores would not be necessary in the downtown, and he would like to have local hobby and hardware stores back in town.

Hank Steinfeld, 32 Valley Road, said he lives close to the town center district and he was confused as to how the allowed uses for each area are designated. He noted that Groton now has in excess of 600 apartments within 5-10 minutes' walking

distance, and it should be considered that those residents would be contributing to the businesses in that area.

Rachel Franco, 28 Topsail Lane, said she would like to see an entertainment area, such as a green, or stage, to draw people to the area. She said she wasn't sure about the exact location of the Poquonnock Village area. Staff said they are currently working on design standards for the village and the exact boundaries have not been identified. Generally it goes from the fire house to the intersection of Routes 1 and 117, and would be considered the civic center of town with Town Hall, the former Fitch Middle School, and a fire department and schools.

Conrad Heede, 58 Mirra Drive, said the town should embrace variations with regard to the number of stories in the Poquonnock Village. Most buildings are probably two or three stories, but five or six could be considered; the same with downtown, to encourage variation. Also, pedestrian walkways are important in mixed use areas, and the commission should consider that.

Staff said they are thinking about millennials, families, aging in place, integrating different types of housing to attract all types of people. Consideration will also be given to the connectivity and walkability to the town center for the residents of the existing apartments just outside of the downtown area.

The commission took a five minute recess at 8:23 p.m. and the meeting resumed at 8:32 p.m.

c. RS-12 and R-12 Zoning District Analysis

Jeff Davis, Horsley Witten Group, addressed the commission. He provided a general background of the existing RS-8, R-12 and RS-12 districts in Groton, and discussed some suggested changes in dimensional standards (setbacks, building coverage, and lot size) for the neighborhoods that were analyzed.

The front setbacks were found to be generally non-conforming, closer to the street than current zoning allows. Building coverage was not as much of an issue; most are within the 20% coverage.

Davis suggested moving the front setback to 20 feet and keeping the rear setback at 30 feet because most are deep properties. He also suggested increasing the building coverage to 25%; 30% would eliminate virtually all non-conformities for properties under 12,000 sq. ft. These would be new standards across all the neighborhoods. Davis noted that overall Fort Hill was more conforming than some of the other neighborhoods, except the two-family or three-family homes which were all non-conforming. Staff said they would recommend that all of these neighborhoods that are a minimum of 12,000 sq. ft. should have the same standards, and the goal should be to make homes and lots less non-conforming. Davis and the commission discussed the zoning, floodplain regulations and coastal area regulations as they relate to the Fort Hill neighborhood.

Davis said that to make a significant amount of properties conforming in the RS-12 zone, you would have to reduce lot size to 10,000 or even 8,000 square feet. Staff said lot size doesn't impact the properties as much as setbacks or lot coverage for what a homeowner wants to do to improve their lot.

Sayer asked how sidewalks affect the setbacks in these neighborhoods. The topic was deferred to the next meeting.

The commission and staff briefly discussed the number and types of variances that would still be required with the recommended setback changes. The topic was deferred to the next meeting.

Motion to adjourn at 9:03 p.m. was made by Sayer seconded by Archer; so voted unanimously.

Susan Marquardt, Secretary
Zoning Commission

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