

MINUTES
TOWN OF GROTON
ZONING COMMISSION
MAY 2, 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, 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

MOTION: To modify future Zoning Commission agendas so that Public Communications will follow Commission Workshops on all meeting agendas (regular and special meetings).

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

V. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

1. April 4, 2018

MOTION: To approve the minutes of April 4, 2018 as amended.

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

2. April 18, 2018

MOTION: To approve the minutes of April 18, 2018 as amended.

Motion made by Hudecek, seconded by Sayer. Motion passed 4-0-1, 1 abstention (Marquardt).

VI. OLD BUSINESS

1. Commission Workshop – Zoning Regulations Rewrite Project

a. Parking

Nate Kelly, Horsley Witten, began the discussion on parking with the maximum and minimum requirements for the Table. Minimums have been reduced for most uses. He asked the commission whether all uses should have a maximum. He offered that if

there is a maximum, it should be for retail; large retailers tend to provide more than the maximum. Restaurants and medical office/clinics require a lot of parking, and maximums can cause issues for them. Staff asked about apartment parking. They are finding that there should be provisions for visitors at apartment buildings. Kelly said this should be a consideration at site plan review – fire marshal markings on curbs to prevent parking, which creates visitor parking issues in certain apartment complexes. Shared parking in mixed-use development or where a use is located 1,000 feet off-site must be shown through a site plan. Staff asked for some way to handle small changes (such as one space) to be dealt with administratively rather than through a site plan modification when a use changes in an existing building. Staff discussed how to address shared parking when a landlord changes or different property owners are involved. Kelly wasn't sure a ten year agreement would work. With regard to parking in the MDD, no loading zone should be required; re-occupation and insignificant alteration requires no net loss of parking. Additional or new residential or conversion to a restaurant would require compliance.

The intent of phased parking needs to be clarified. Staff said it has been used, and is a useful tool, but it may be because of our parking standards. It could be left as an option. The language for phased parking needs to be changed so that it works with the stormwater management.

The commission discussed 7.2-2, "Obligation". The commission felt the second sentence was too wordy. Staff will review it.

Shall and must: Kelly explained that the project attorney said great care needs to be taken in replacing shall with must because there are legal differences between these two words.

Davis said there is a column in the Use Table which will link to the parking standards. Staff said that none of staff has looked at these yet, so the details still need to be worked out. Sayer noted that "commerce" has been used in place of "commercial".

b. Signage

Davis reviewed the Reed v. Town of Gilbert case with regard to signage. He said there are acceptable ways to regulate while not differentiating between the content of the sign. The commission discussed the definitions of sign, sign area (how to measure the area of a sign); accessory vs. non-accessory signs. With the current language one needs to read the sign to know if it is an accessory. Staff said this was done to regulate billboards. Digital signs will be included in the commercial sign table. It needs to be decided where they would be allowed or prohibited, how often they can change, illumination limits, and any exceptions. The commission said they would not want them in downtown Mystic. They are currently used at schools and churches in residential neighborhoods. There could be stipulations, such as restrictions in residential zones. The commission needs to consider these options.

Standards for drive-through signs: the size needs to change from 4 sq. ft. to maybe 16 sq. ft. Canopy sign standards, window signs, free standing signs, and wall signs were reviewed. The commission also briefly discussed directly and indirectly illuminated signs and topper signs on fuel pumps. Staff said the Zoning Official still needs to review these proposed changes.

Sign illumination, hours, measuring and enforcement, colors, where they will be allowed, number of signs allowed per establishment, neon window signs, standard aggregate for coverage of windows, brand signs, advertising signs were discussed by the commission. Currently, signs located inside a window are not regulated. Further discussion ensued on whether coverage would be allowed over the entire window; staff would like to check with police first. They can't differentiate between an advertising sign or brand sign, and product display is not a sign. Staff would like to table this discussion until they have a chance to meet with the Zoning Official. Some commissioners would like a limitation on the percentage of window coverage allowed. Davis said this could also be regulated by zone.

Existing language about non-conforming signs (which was written over 40 years ago) will be removed.

The commission discussed "bona-fide" advertisement, permanent signs, and temporary signs for public safety and construction. Yard signs should be limited to a number such as four with no time limit. Private traffic direction and signs directing traffic movement need to be discussed with the Zoning Official.

The commission discussed temporary signs and possible time limits for signs advertising an event/action (such as a yard sale). Real estate signs have different limits. The language for temporary signs may be kept as-is.

Signs in residential zones: 24 sq. ft. not an issue; 8 ft. height signs – not an issue, but the commission may limit them to non-illuminated. The commission also reviewed the special IP signage for businesses that have frontage on I-95. Kelly recommended having standards for waterfront wall signs in the WW zone. The commission had no concerns with special large commercial building signage provisions.

VII. PUBLIC COMMUNICATIONS

Jeff Pritchard, 31 West Mystic Avenue, had a concern with upper and lower limits on parking. He recommended regulating maximum parking by limiting the impervious surface.

Catherine Young, Bushnell Street, Groton, asked about the signage in windows; she said it needs to be looked at from a fire safety aspect also.

VIII. NEW BUSINESS

1. Report of Commission

Sayer said that she objected to the commission not allowing duplexes in the small RS neighborhoods. She would like to revisit this discussion. She doesn't think the parking is really an issue.

2. Receipt of New Applications - None

VIII. REPORT OF CHAIRPERSON - None

IX. REPORT OF STAFF

Staff said the next meeting will be a public hearing for a fill permit, so there will not be a workshop.

Staff presented a draft of a public outreach program to inform and notify residents, businesses and community groups about the new proposed zoning regulations. The commission discussed whether certain items which they considered but opted to omit from the draft should be kept in the draft for public discussion. The commission asked staff to prepare one-pagers on some of those regulations that the commission opted not to propose, so that the public would be aware.

X. ADJOURNMENT

Motion to adjourn at 8:31 p.m. was made by Hudecek, seconded by Smith; so voted unanimously.

Susan Marquardt, Secretary
Zoning Commission

Prepared by Debra Gilot
Executive Assistant