

MINUTES
TOWN OF GROTON
ZONING COMMISSION
DECEMBER 2, 2015 – 6:30 P.M.
TOWN HALL ANNEX – COMMUNITY ROOM 2

I. ROLL CALL

Regular members present: Hudecek, Marquardt, Sayer, Sutherland
Alternate members present: Smith
Absent: Bancroft, Middleton
Staff present: Allen, Glemboski, Jones, Reiner, Gilot

Chairperson Sutherland called the meeting to order at 6:32 p.m. and seated Smith for Bancroft.

II. APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES

1. September 2, 2015

MOTION: To approve the minutes of meeting of September 2, 2015, as written.

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

2. September 30, 2015 Special Meeting

MOTION: To approve the minutes of the special meeting of September 30, 2015 as amended.

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

The Commission added “Public Communications” as Item III on the agenda.

III. PUBLIC COMMUNICATIONS - None

IV. OLD BUSINESS - None

V. NEW BUSINESS

1. Draft Zoning and Subdivision Regulation Audit – Discussion

Staff provided an overview of the Market Analysis and Zoning Audit project, which included a regulatory audit, a market analysis, and special projects and marketing materials to promote the Town.

Staff is looking for feedback on the draft Zoning Audit document, which was submitted to the commissioners. There may be another focus group meeting in December or January with Town staff for feedback on the analysis and audit. Staff expects to present the final product to the Town Council in March.

The Commission and staff discussed whether staff could handle the workload of rewriting the regulations without the assistance of outside experts. Staff said the workload of the staff is full right now, and they might not be able to give the time to the project that it would require. The Commission asked how the changes would be handled. Staff said the consultants' report was recommendations only, and the Commission and staff would be able to review each part individually and decide which items they want to move forward.

Staff said the Zoning Commission, as well as the Town Council, would have to have additional discussions on establishing a work program. Discussion ensued on how the regulations will be rewritten. Staff said the amount of support from the Council will drive how much of the work gets done at one time.

Staff said the appendix will be emailed to the Commission. The commissioners and staff concurred that the audit identifies problem areas in the existing zoning document. Commissioners noted that it was important to get the form right first, and to add graphics to the document. The importance of an applicant's development process guide, and fillable application forms on the website were discussed. The Commission hoped that staff would make the development guide a priority, or at least complete the project in 2016. Staff said finishing the POCD is a priority; it must be completed by July. The Lean Six Sigma process was discussed as a means for staff to map the application process.

Staff and commissioners reviewed and discussed the draft audit, and made the following comments.

Pages 3-4, Summary of Recommendations

"Town will need to change negative perceptions..." has been brought up before, but the Commission still have not heard any examples.

"...new development within the Town and surrounding region are anything but robust." could be a better organized paragraph. Staff noted there are negative perceptions of the application and review process and sometimes the expectations of developers are unrealistic. The Commission thought it would sound better if the document said "there is a strong desire to improve the process that is shared by staff and commissions".

MX Zoning: It was thought that the consultants were recommending "spot" MX zoning. Staff noted the entire MX regulation should be reviewed with the goal of promoting mixed use, making it easier, and maybe incentivizing MX development. The Commission discussed permitted uses in the MX, special permits vs. permitted by right, and the adoption of MX as a zone. They noted the consultant's recommendations will need to be reviewed for determining the best way to proceed with changes to the MX.

Recommendations 1.B, 1.C, 1.D and 1.E: Commission questioned who is doing what – staff, or Commission, and if these items should be part of the Zoning and Regulation Audit.

Page 5-6, Stakeholder Interviews

MacKenzie Decision (2013) mentioned but not detailed. Some details on this item should be provided somewhere in the text.

“Past successes with Pfizer...” - sense of complacency. Commission questioned relevancy of this statement. Staff noted the items in this list are from the interviews.

Page 8: Zoning Implications chart: Were millennials overstated due to the SUBASE population?

Incentives: Commission and staff believe they need to incentivize what you want. Tax Increment Financing and redevelopment discussed.

Page 10:

Table of Permitted Uses: The Commission wants to continue to combine some of the uses. They should decide on the format first, and then eliminate or combine to make more general uses. Also, parking standards must echo the Table of Permitted Uses. Changing the use tables, zoning districts, and remapping the town were discussed. Consolidation of zones is the first step, with a better explanation of each zone in the table.

WRPD: Discussion of what best management practices (BMPs) are. Many towns use more than one zone around their reservoir. Staff expects a draft product from Horsley Witten with regard to the WRPD regulations in the near future.

The Commissioners would like to come back to the next meeting with each of their lists of priorities for working on sections of the regulations.

Page 11:

Item 11: The Commission noted that the development related commissions include: Zoning, Planning, Historic District Commission, Zoning Board of Appeals, and Inland Wetlands Agency, and not “many of which” of the 28 as stated. Review requirements are typically based on State Statutes. Commissions cannot give waivers of their zoning regulations. Planning Commission has waived a lot of requirements in the past, but that was challenged with the MacKenzie rule, so now everyone must go to Zoning Board of Appeals, but many of the requests do not meet the hardship requirements, and adds another layer to the development process. The Commission discussed adding some quick fixes to the Waterfront Design District and the Downtown Development District to revise certain standards, because they are slowing down development. The five-eighths rule for parking in downtown Mystic and other parking issues should also be fixed.

Page 12, Section 2: Definitions:

Definitions: The Commission expressed concern that the subdivisions (Noank, City) don't use the same definitions that the Town uses.

Page 14, Section 3:

Staff noted that they and the Commission might not completely agree with the recommendation. The Commission discussed combining existing districts, or creating new districts, amending the zoning map, creating a table of permitted uses, and how all of this fits together. They noted that the zoning district probably needs to be addressed first. They agree that districts need to be combined, and this is one way to do it but there may be other ways that are more appropriate for the Town. The Zoning Commission will have the ability to change districts, as appropriate. They noted that the zoning table must be clear and consistent.

Staff will send a memo to the Town Council with the document and explain that these are the findings of the audit and the recommendations of the experts. Staff said the document does not become the role of the Zoning Commission.

The Commission feels the report is very scattered.

The Commission would like graphics, pictures in the new document. A lengthy discussion ensued on whether the Commission does the whole document at once, or by sections.

Page 33: Threshold for historic/institutional reuse (#35) - Who designates something as historic - national, state or local? And it is it only in certain districts.

Page 41:

1. Target areas identified as opportunities for economic revitalization. The Commission discussed what areas should be targeted and how. The Downtown Gateway project was briefly discussed and staff noted that there are no zoning recommendations, just road reworking/streetscape for the Kings Highway area associated with this project.

The document should be hyperlinked with links to forms.

For the January meeting, the Commission will establish priorities, mark up the things they don't want to do, or don't like in the document.

Staff said there may be something to review in January for the WRPD.

2. Report of Commission – None

3. 2016 Meeting Schedule

MOTION: To adopt the 2016 meeting schedule as presented.

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

4. Receipt of New Applications

1. An application for a text amendment to the “WF” zone was submitted by West Mystic Marine. A public hearing date set for February 3, 2016.

VI. REPORT OF CHAIRPERSON - None

VII. REPORT OF STAFF

VIII. ADJOURNMENT

Motion to adjourn at _____ p.m. made by _____, seconded by _____, so voted
unanimously.

Susan Marquardt, Secretary
Zoning Commission

Prepared by Debra Gilot
Office Assistant III