

PLANNING COMMISSION
MARCH 20, 2006
TOWN HALL ANNEX – COMMUNITY ROOM 2

I. ROLL CALL

Regular members present: Steinford, Pritchard, Munn, Roper (arrived at 7:09 p.m.)
Alternate members present: Kane
Staff present: Glemboski, Goodrich, Murphy, Stanowicz

Acting Chairman Steinford opened the meeting with roll call at 7:06 p.m.

Acting Chairman Steinford appointed Kane to sit for Sherrard.

II. SITE PLANS

1. Catherine Kolnaski Elementary School, 500 Poquonnock Road (CAM)

Rick Norris, Project Manager, Town of Groton, introduced Greg Smolley, Architect, JCJ Architecture, Scott Lindgren of Pare Engineering, and Evan Cowles, Landscape Architect of Ferrero Hixon Associates.

Mr. Smolley began by addressing some of the previously unresolved issues for the project.

There is a need for shade trees along the roadway. The road is either a cut or a fill, and not good for trees to take hold. The applicants have decided that a row of trees will not be of service, but groups of plantings may work better.

The roof top equipment and generators have been put on the technical drawings.

A revised parking plan was submitted to the Town today.

An application for the school signs will be submitted at a later date. Each school will be consulted on the school signs and a plan will be developed that will be consistent for all schools.

The applicants are asking for a waiver of installing frontage sidewalks. There is a very small amount of actual frontage for this property. Staff showed the Commission members the school property lines and the potential sidewalks to connect to the Patel property and the Electric Boat property. This connection to the west would require about 295 to 300 ft. of sidewalk. There are potential wetland issues and the sidewalk cannot be put in at this point without a wetlands permit. The sidewalks in the area of Poquonnock Road and the road itself, to the east of the project and north of the High Rock Road intersection, are scheduled for reconstruction with the Poquonnock Road redesign in the CIP over the next

couple of years. Staff is proposing that the applicants have three months to get a State Department of Transportation (DOT) permit and wetlands permit for this off-site sidewalk. The applicant may be able to complete the off-site sidewalks with site improvement funds from the project if project funds are available. Staff said the Town is willing to make those sidewalks a priority item for the 2008 CIP project. The site is in walking distance of a significant number of homes.

Steinford asked staff to show exactly where on the site plan the sidewalks are proposed. Using the site plan, staff showed the Commission the location of the existing and proposed sidewalks. Mr. Smolley clarified where the sidewalks will be installed from Eurocars to the Electric Boat site.

Munn asked staff if the regulations of all the zones in which this site is located, have been met. Staff said most of the site is within the RMF-8 zone, and the project has met all the regulations for that zone.

Kane asked Mr. Smolley to clarify all the property lines for the site.

Roper said he feels very strongly that sidewalks are necessary, and wants assurance from the applicant that they will be installed.

Roper asked about the Conservation Commission's five comments. Mr. Smolley responded to each.

- 1.) Enlargement of play field for town recreation programs. Mr. Smolley stated that this project is largely funded by the State, but the Town has some funding responsibility for the site, such as access into the site, utilities and sidewalks. Expanding the size of the play field would require Town funding because it is an improvement that is not necessary for this project. There was no request from the Town Parks & Recreation Department to build a bigger field than is designed. Enlargement of the field would also require the detention basin be moved.
- 2.) Install a sidewalk from Old Farm Road to new driveway. Mr. Smolley said that the sidewalks would connect all the frontage.
- 3.) Shift the building east and away from the steep slope. Mr. Smolley said the building needs to stay where it is for the site to work.
- 4.) Use the new waterline location as a trail connection between the school site and Pequot Village, and 5.) Develop trails on the site once construction is complete. The request for trails is a decision that will be addressed by the Town.

Pritchard asked for information on site expansion relative to this proposal, and where another building would be built.

Mr. Smolley showed on the map the potential location to build another Town building, either a school or municipal building. The geometry of the entry road has been designed to provide a loop at the top to connect to a second site. The utilities are acceptable for a second building. Mr. Smolley said that according to a Town study done in 2003, a middle school may be developed on this site in the future. A small wetland area may be slightly affected by the future development.

Pritchard asked if the entry road would be able to accommodate the traffic of another building. Mr. Smolley said yes, it was designed to accommodate that traffic.

Pritchard asked about sign location. Staff said the signage would be submitted as an Administrative Site plan, reviewed and approved by the Planning Department, based on the Zoning Regulations for signage. The size of the sign is decided by the Zoning Regulations, not the size of the school. If a variance is needed, it would be submitted to the Zoning Board of Appeals, and the Planning Commission would review the referral from the ZBA.

Pritchard asked about the requested waivers. Staff said the frontage sidewalk was the only waiver requested.

Steinford asked if there would be enough space on the site to accommodate a full-size field for a middle school. Mr. Smolley said the present layout of the plan would accommodate a full-size soccer field for a middle school.

Steinford asked Mr. Smolley to review the emergency access into the school area. Mr. Smolley reviewed with the Commission the emergency egress for the site and the ability of the emergency vehicles to be brought into 3 or 4 staging areas, as approved by the Fire Marshal.

Steinford asked about the line on Mr. Smolley's PowerPoint presentation that connects the school property to Pequot Village. Mr. Smolley said it is the water line, and it is not being finished to be driveable. There will be a minimal amount of trenching because of concern for the wetland area to the north. Groton Utilities may want to mow the area, but there are no plans to grade it to make the path driveable.

Steinford asked Mr. Smolley to review the Groton Utilities' access to the overhead lines. Mr. Smolley showed on the map where the water line comes in. Groton Utilities can use this as an access ramp to their lines. Groton Utilities and Groton Public Works are comfortable with the proposal for the access.

Pritchard asked staff about the shade trees along the entry road, and if access would be lost if the trees fall over in a storm. Staff said the distance and exact location of the trees hasn't been finalized, but they can be put beyond the

snow shelf and the multi-use path. The main purpose for the trees is to provide shade in the area of the path. Staff said the size and location of any tree plantings can be reviewed to accommodate any concern.

Roper asked Mr. Norris to explain the sidewalk proposal again. Mr. Norris explained that whatever funds may be available in the project will go to the sidewalk. If the funds are not available or if they haven't received a wetlands permit, the sidewalk project will be put into the CIP plan. Mr. Norris and staff assured Roper that the sidewalk request will be recommended by the Directors of Planning and Public Works to be put in the CIP as a priority project. By 3 months into the project, Mr. Norris should have a good idea about what contingencies they will need, and know what they will be able, from site improvements funding, to do with the sidewalks.

Roper asked if staff looked at the possibility of a trail along the water line. Staff said it is the site of a possible future trail connection with the Master Trails Plan, but was not being built with this project, at this time.

Wes Greenleaf, Facilities Director for the Groton Board of Education, explained to the Commission members the Board of Education is responsible for all students when they enter the Town property. Any future paths would be a concern of the school's because of the safety of the students on the school grounds. The perspective is different than if they are at a park. They are under the Board of Education's complete care when they are on school grounds.

MOTION: To approve the site plan for the Catherine Kolnaski Elementary School at 500 Poquonnock Road with the following modifications:

1. A note shall be placed on the plans stating " Any modifications and/or mitigation required by a State EIE (Environmental Impact Evaluation) or any other State review process shall be reviewed by Town staff. Any required modifications to the site plan, based on required modifications or mitigation, shall obtain the necessary approvals from the appropriate agencies."
2. All site lighting shall use "cut-off" fixtures and the design and details shall be approved by the Town of Groton Planning Department and shown on the final plans.
3. A minimum of 25 total shade trees (minimum 2" caliper & 6' in height) shall be planted along both sides of the access drive. The species and locations shall be approved by the Town of Groton Planning Department and the Tree Warden prior to planting on the site.

4. Fencing and walls on the site shall be as shown on Sheet L-110. Appropriate details shall be provided on the final plans.
5. The final plan shall show locations and details for all roof-top equipment, fuel tanks, and generators and shall show how the units are adequately shielded and/or screened, as appropriate.
6. Adequate parking for this site shall be provided as determined by the Zoning Official for the Town of Groton.
7. Signage shall meet all Zoning Regulation requirements.
8. A note shall be added to the plans stating that the applicant agrees to pursue, in good faith, the construction of frontage sidewalk(s) from the entrance drive westward to the existing sidewalk at the Electric Boat Corporation property. The applicant intends to apply for a wetland permit within three months of site plan approval for the construction of a 5-foot wide concrete sidewalk along this section of Poquonnock Road. In the event the wetlands permit is not granted, or other unforeseen circumstances arise in the project, that do not permit the application for, and the construction of the frontage sidewalks, only the frontage sidewalk shown on the approved site plan will be constructed under this site plan approval. In this event, the Director of Planning and the Director of Public Works shall commit to the submission of this sidewalk project as a priority project in the 2008-13 Capital Improvement Program for FYE 2008.
9. All Inland Wetland Agency permit requirements shall be addressed on the final plans.
10. All of the Fire Marshal comments shall be addressed. Any significant modifications may require additional review by the appropriate agencies.
11. All Groton Utility comments shall be addressed. Any significant modifications may require additional review by the appropriate agencies.
12. The final Coastal Area Management report shall include and address coastal use policies for General Development and coastal resource policies for Shorelands and Freshwater Wetlands.
13. Technical Items raised by staff shall be addressed.

Motion made by Steinfeld, seconded by Pritchard, so voted unanimously.

MOTION: To approve the Coastal Area Management application for Catherine Kolnaski Elementary School, 500 Poquonnock Road because, as modified, it is consistent with all applicable coastal policies and includes all reasonable measures to mitigate adverse impacts and causes no unacceptable adverse impacts.

Made by Steinford, seconded by Roper.

Pritchard moved to amend the motion to insert “by Modification #12” following “because as modified” in the main motion.

Motion to amend made by Pritchard, seconded by Munn. Motion passed 4 in favor, 1 opposing (Roper).

MOTION: To approve the main motion as amended. Motion passed, 4 in favor, 1 opposing (Roper).

Pritchard voiced his concern regarding the amount of technical modifications for this project.

2. Fitch High School, 1010 Groton Long Point Road (CAM)

Mr. Smolley, Architect, JCJ Architects, introduced to the Commission Rick Norris, Town of Groton Project Manager, Wes Greenleaf Director of Facilities, Groton Board of Education, Scott Lindgren, Pare Engineering and Evan Cowles, Ferrero Hixon Associates.

Mr. Smolley described the location of the site, which is in the RS-20 zone. A portion of the site lies within the Coastal Boundary and a CAM application was submitted. He stated that two variances were granted by the Zoning Board of Appeals: one for height to accommodate the stair tower and one for relief of the side yard setback.

Mr. Smolley reviewed the site. It is an existing high school with over 70 acres and includes a football field, track, baseball field, and soccer field.

The school has frontage on Groton Long Point Road. There are a number of conditions that affect the site. There is an adjacent cemetery dating from the early 1900's with 43 well-marked graves. There are no indications of gravesites outside the defined walls of the cemetery. To the north is St. Mary's Church. There is a residence on the southern boundary of the site owned by Mrs. Franklin.

The proposal is for a three-story addition to the school for added classrooms. The proposal includes a new school entrance, bus drop-off location, parking lots and associated landscaping and lighting.

Mr. Smolley reviewed the site plan issues.

The entrance drive will be relocated and widened. There will be two lanes in and two lanes out, each 12 ft. wide with a central median and plantings on either side and in the center median. He reviewed the traffic circle. The traffic circle will not be planted due to the location of the utility lines, and visibility concerns. Various plantings will be scattered around the site. An evergreen buffer is proposed along the Franklin property. The applicants are proposing a modification to the buffer requirements to allow for a dense evergreen buffer in this location

Mr. Smolley reviewed the pedestrian circulation through the site. The applicants propose to move the entrance sidewalk to the north side of the entry road. The majority of walkers to the school come from the north. All parking lots will have sidewalk access to the building. The applicants are asking for a waiver for the construction of a frontage sidewalk to the south. There are wetlands issues and the sidewalk would not connect to existing sidewalks.

Mr. Smolley reviewed the parking layout. Currently there are 450 parking spaces on the site. During construction the number of spaces will decrease. If the Merritt property can be used for temporary parking they will be able to provide 400 spaces during construction. After the project is completed there will be 450 spaces on the site, 569 if there is enough in the budget to build the additional parking lot.

Mr. Smolley reviewed the changes proposed to the loading area. Compactors and a lift are being added.

Mr. Smolley reviewed the proposed stormwater management system. The applicants are proposing to add drainage lines, catch basins and stormceptor units to improve the quality of storm water discharged to the wetland. The plan has been approved by the Inland Wetland Agency. There is an existing water line to the site. Some hydrants will be added at the request of the fire marshal. The site is served by sewer.

Emergency vehicles will access the school from Groton Long Point Road. A second emergency egress on the church property has been granted by St. Mary's. All of the roadways and walkways around the entire building will be able to support a fire truck.

Mrs. Franklin is the nearest residential neighbor. Mr. Smolley reviewed the acoustical report. The night- time sound standards established by the state are 45 decibels at night. The acoustical study shows that 40 decibels crosses the property line. Rooftop units will be shielded to lower the sound impact.

Mr. Smolley reviewed the photometrics plan. They are working on the location of the light poles for the southeast corner parking lot, in the gymnasium area. Some light may migrate onto Mrs. Franklin's field.

The building footprint and plans were explained to the Commission. The plan will add 54 classrooms, 18 on each floor, and 12 science classroom-labs. The old section and the addition will be joined with a large corridor. A 2-hour firewall separates the building into 2 halves. The queuing for the existing cafeteria will be revised by turning the kitchen serving area 90 degrees. This satisfies the concerns of the fire marshal.

Mr. Smolley showed the floor plans for the proposed addition. The floor plan is almost the same for all three levels in the new addition. The stairways will comply with the building code. Mr. Smolley reviewed the location on the roof top of the 5 roof top chiller units, which will have enough capacity to serve the entire building. They will also have the ability to tie into the auditorium and cafeteria to provide cooling which the school does not have now.

Mr. Smolley reviewed the site utilization plan for the construction of the project. He reviewed the proposal to have temporary parking spaces on the Merritt property during construction. Following the project the parking would be removed and the site would become recreational fields. The State Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) must give approval for this use.

Staff explained that this project is an addition and reconstruction rather than new construction, and the site must remain safe and usable during the entire project. The site must work during the construction as well as when completed, and staff has requested construction sequencing plans for review.

Staff reviewed the buffer requirements for the Franklin residence and St. Mary's Church. The Franklins want the buffer as dense as possible, so evergreens make sense. The Town will be working with the church to look at the best way to develop a buffer to provide safe screening for the students.

The Merritt property is critical in order to provide parking during construction. The approval hasn't been formally received from the State DEP. Mr. Norris said the letter should be here next week.

Staff addressed the construction phasing plan. There will be fencing to protect the construction area. Staff said they are meeting with the applicants this week to address the student access to the football field area during the construction phase and to review the traffic flow on the entire site.

Steinford asked if they are relocating the school entry road at the beginning of the construction, and if it will be built permanently at that time. Mr. Smolley said half of the new road, two lanes, will be the first part of the

construction project. The existing drive will remain as a construction entrance only.

Staff said they are not recommending the frontage sidewalks be built. This has been a high school for decades. The population ranges between 1,400 and 1,600. There has been no significant increase of pedestrian movement at the site. It is more than 3,000 feet south to any logical connection. If the sidewalk becomes an issue, it could be considered as a future Capital Improvement Project. A wetlands permit would also be required.

Staff reviewed the traffic report. Even with the expansion there will be little change in the traffic. The traffic is heavier at specific periods of day and police would still be required onsite at those times to direct traffic. It is unlikely that a light would be put there as the problem times are only 20 minutes in the morning when students arrive and 20 minutes in the afternoon at dismissal. The State has proposed a light and additional turning lanes be added at the intersection of Route 215 and Route 1.

Staff reviewed the location of the internal entrance sidewalk. The Public Works and Planning Departments requested the sidewalk be placed to the north side of the road. With the current plans, pedestrians would have to cross the road to get to the school. There are constraints created by the graveyard that need to be accommodated in the final plan.

Staff said the height of the light poles and the construction at the base of the light poles has not yet been finalized.

Roper questioned the lack of landscaping in the roundabout. He asked if low grasses or junipers could be planted there. Mr. Smolley said that could be considered. A sewer line is right under that area, so they don't want to install plants with deep roots.

Roper asked about the cost efficiency of the proposed educational model that calls for the creation of three schools within Fitch High School. Mr. Smolley explained that many schools are now dividing their high schools into smaller schools. Mr. Greenleaf said there would be no increase in staff. The evidence shows that by dividing larger high schools into smaller schools, there are better educational results.

Roper asked for clarification of the temporary and permanent parking plans. Mr. Greenleaf explained that the student parking needs peak out at 408 spaces in June. Currently, 170 parking spaces are used by the staff and roughly 240 spaces are used by the students. They would like to increase the number of available spaces to 500. They may use a lottery system if there is not enough parking spaces for the students.

Kane asked about the science lab space shown in the plans. Mr. Smolley explained the difference in the design of the science classrooms versus the science labs.

Kane asked about the division of the addition into three floors with identical layouts. Mr. Smolley explained the educational benefits of dividing the students into three different “schools”. Each level will have classes covering the general curriculum and its own set of administrators. Each level will have approximately 500 students, who will be chosen randomly. The entire student body will interact in the gym, cafeteria, and elected courses. It is expected that educational results will improve.

Munn asked if the teachers would rotate between the three levels. Mr. Greenleaf said the majority will stay on their respective levels, but the International Baccalaureate and AP Calculus teachers and students may have to move to different levels.

Munn asked if the state does not approve the temporary parking plan on the Merritt property, could the Town use the lot at St. Mary’s. Mr. Norris said that will not be an option. Further discussion ensued on the possibility of using the access behind St. Mary’s to ease the potential temporary traffic issues during construction.

Munn asked if there is any reason to keep the rear access road and not restore it to a path. Mr. Smolley stated the Board of Education would prefer it be returned to a path.

Steinford asked about the increase in impervious surface, not including the temporary parking lot resulting from this project. Mr. Smolley said there is an increase of 4,300 ft., most of this for detention basins and stormwater management. There will be a decreased impact on the coastal area as a result of the installation of the proposed drainage and stormwater management.

Steinford asked if there is any concern about getting medical equipment closer to the building. Mr. Smolley reviewed the fire department’s staging for emergency vehicles at the location of the loading area. He explained that with smaller incidents, the nurse’s office, located in unit 8, is easily accessed from the back of the building. This entry is out of view of the main entrance and will provide discreet and controlled access.

Steinford asked if there will be a new school sign. Mr. Smolley said the Board of Education will be working to provide a uniform signage plan for all the schools and that the plan will be submitted to OPDS at a later date as a separate application.

MOTION: To table the site plan application for Fitch High School, 101 Groton Long Point Road, until the next regular meeting on March 28, 2006.

Motion made by Roper, seconded by Munn, so voted unanimously.

IX. ADJOURNMENT

Motion to adjourn at 9:56 p.m. made by Pritchard, seconded by Roper, so voted unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,

Margil Steinfeld