

PLANNING COMMISSION
APRIL 11, 2006
TOWN HALL ANNEX – COMMUNITY ROOM 2

I. ROLL CALL

Regular members present: Pritchard, Roper, Sherrard, Steinford
Alternate members present: Fitzgerald, Kane, Perez Pullen
Staff present: Cullen, Glemboski, Goodrich, Stanowicz

Chairman Sherrard opened the meeting with roll call at 7:04 p.m.

Chairman Sherrard seated Kane for Munn.

II. APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES OF March 14, 2006 and Special Meeting of March 20, 2006

MOTION: To approve the minutes of the March 14, 2006, Planning Commission meeting with the following modifications:

1. Page 3, 4th paragraph, first sentence, change to “Roper asked if there is a legal agreement between the three driveways’ users.”
2. Page 4, 1st paragraph, Line 7, “sidewalks exist on both sides of the road”.
3. Page 4, 4th paragraph, next to last sentence should read “They are asking for a waiver for a 5 ft. concrete sidewalk.”
4. Page 4, 5th paragraph, second sentence, after “file” insert “and the 10% fee would be \$23,400.”
5. Page 4, 5th paragraph, third sentence should read “The property abuts Avalonia Land Trust.”
6. Page 4, last paragraph, second sentence, change “does not have sidewalks” to “does not propose new sidewalks”.
7. Page 10, paragraph 5, remove word “of”.
8. Page 11, last paragraph, first sentence, change “budget reasons” to “budgetary”.
9. Page 11, last paragraph, 3rd sentence, change “to” to “of”.
10. Page 13, 4th paragraph, change “specials” to “special subject”.

Motion made by Steinford, seconded by Sherrard, so voted unanimously.

MOTION: To approve the minutes of March 20, 2006, as written.

Motion made by Steinford, seconded by Kane, so voted unanimously.

PUBLIC COMMUNUCATIONS

Staff distributed the SCCOG newsletter.

Staff distributed a Notice of Tentative Determination from the Office of Long Island Sound Programs for approval of a permit install a ramp, floating dock anchor restraint system and five tie-off posts at 270 Cedar Road, Mystic.

III. SUBDIVISIONS

1. Colonel Ledyard Estates, 0 Colonel Ledyard Highway

A public hearing for Colonel Ledyard Estates, 0 Colonel Ledyard Highway, was scheduled for April 25, 2006.

IV. SITE PLANS

1. The Woodlands, 0 Ronald Road (continued)

MOTION: To table the discussion until Greg Hammond arrives. Motion made by Roper, seconded by Sherrard, voted unanimously

Greg Hammond of Scochet Associates, the applicant, addressed some of the outstanding issues.

Mr. Hammond reviewed the walking paths connecting The Woodlands and the Country Glen Apartments. Mr. Hammond explained the school bus schedule for the Country Glen Apartments. The elementary students are picked up at the Community Center, and the high school students are picked up at Meridian Street Extension. Any children residing in The Woodlands would use the same buses. Mr. Hammond addressed the small number of children anticipated to be living at The Woodlands. The National Association Home Builders estimate that 60% of school children reside in three bedroom units. The Woodlands will not have any three bedroom units.

Brian Kent, Brian Kent Associates, addressed the bike rack issue. He feels the bike racks should be sheltered, secure and out of the way. He identified space in the breezeway of each building to accommodate simple bike racks. He said the Fire Marshal has not yet approved the location of the bike racks, and explained alternate locations for the bike racks if the current proposed location is not approved by the Fire Marshal. Roper asked if the breezeways are open to the outside. Mr. Kent said yes.

Roger Lemieux, Engineer, Northeast Engineers, addressed the foot trail/walking path. Mr. Lemieux showed pictures of ten different pieces of exercise equipment and reviewed their locations at four stations on the walking path.

Staff gave a brief overview of the project. The applicants are asking for a waiver of the 5 ft. frontage sidewalk requirements. The site constraints along the frontage on Ronald Road and Clarence B. Sharpe Highway were reviewed. Internal sidewalks throughout the site connect to Meridian Street Ext. A waiver of a common laundry room in each building is requested, as a washer and dryer will be provided in each unit. The dead storage waiver for Building C was reviewed. The required storage for Building C is proposed in Building A. The Inland Wetland Agency and the Fire Marshal have approved the plan. No secondary access is required because sprinklers will be installed in each building. The dumpsters will be screened and fenced in. Easements for the utilities will all be in place before building permits will be issued. The site utilities were reviewed. A permit application has been submitted to the State Traffic Commission. The applicants will submit a separate application for signage.

Chairman Sherrard asked for clarification of the Building C storage issue.

Staff reviewed the dead storage for Building C which was moved to Building A due to site constraints. There will be 20 sq. ft. of dead storage in each unit in Building C, and 80 sq. ft. in Building A for each unit in Building C. Sherrard asked if alternatives were explored for the storage area. He asked if eliminating one unit in Building C would give them the square footage necessary to provide storage according to the regulations. Mr. Hammond stated that he would prefer not to lose a unit in Building C.

Kane asked about the number of 3 bedroom units. Staff said there are none proposed. Kane asked how many handicapped accessible apartments are provided, and the location of the storage for those units. Mr. Hammond said the handicapped accessible units are located on the ground floor. The access to storage units for the handicapped accessible units was discussed. It was stated that some of the Building A storage units are handicapped accessible, but storage in Building B is not handicapped accessible.

Steinfeld asked about the reciprocal use of recreational facilities at Country Glen. Staff said the applicants will allow reciprocal use but that cannot be considered because this must be treated as an independent application. Steinfeld asked if the plan meets the Town requirements for recreation without the reciprocal use of the facilities. Staff said it does. Steinfeld stated he is concerned that there is no indoor recreational facility.

Roper expressed concern about the storage area for Building C being in other buildings. Roper asked about the gate at the Lighthouse Square connection to Country Glen. Roper asked if it was difficult to get a bike through there. Staff said no. Roper confirmed the number of 1 and 2 bedroom units.

Pritchard asked staff if there are any requirements for indoor or outdoor active recreation. Staff said that the regulations do not stipulate indoor or outdoor recreation space. Pritchard asked if the regulations require the dead storage to be in the same building. Staff said yes.

Fitzgerald asked if the applicants would consider building an outbuilding behind the complex to house all the storage spaces for Unit C. Staff explained the site constraints due to the wetland buffer and that it would still require a waiver because it would be outside of the building. Mr. Bates addressed the lack of area to add a building.

Sherrard asked if they would consider using one of the units in Building C for storage, and add one more unit to Building A with the storage space removed. Mr. Hammond explained that due to the grade of the site, they would not be able to put a unit in Building A in the location of the storage. Staff commented that the topography would mean that this unit would have no windows.

Staff read the regulations regarding dead storage space to the Commission.

Kane asked the applicant about using the utility room in each unit for storage. Mr. Hammond said the utility room contains the boiler, hot water tank, air conditioning and ventilation. Mr. Hammond said a portion the balconies could also be used to accommodate some storage space.

Sherrard stated that he felt the storage space as required by the regulation is important.

MOTION: To waive the requirement under Zoning Regulations Section 7.5-1 for a five foot frontage sidewalk along the entire frontage of Ronald Road and Clarence B. Sharpe Highway. The Commission finds that the internal connections to adjacent properties support the spirit and intent of the Regulations.

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

MOTION: To waive section 6.7-6 (a) for indoor laundry facilities within a common area accessible from inside the building as they will be provided within each individual unit. The Commission finds that the laundry facilities provided within each individual unit satisfies the spirit and intent of the Regulations.

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

MOTION: To waive section 6.7-6 (a) to reduce the requirement for 100 sq. ft. of dead storage within the same building to instead allow for 100 sq. ft. of dead storage within the complex.

Motion made by Sherrard, seconded by Steinford, motion fails 2 – 3, 3 against (Roper, Sherrard, Kane).

MOTION: To approve a site plan for The Woodlands, 0 Ronald Road, for a multi-family complex in three buildings, with the following modifications:

1. The twenty four square foot sign for The Woodlands located at the entrance of the property shall be set back 10 feet from the property line.
2. Dumpsters will be screened with evergreen plantings (minimum of six foot) and opaque fencing (minimum six foot). They will be sized to accommodate mandatory recycling requirements.
3. Easements for Access and Utilities through the Country Glen property shall be in place prior to recording of the plan.
4. STC permits have been applied for and their approvals shall be documented prior to the issuance of a building permit.
5. Provide stairs from the Building “C” parking lot to the proposed pump station to provide maintenance access.
6. Install chain link fence along sidewalk at crossing C.
7. All technical items by staff shall be addressed.

The Planning Commission encourages the applicant to work with staff to find a solution to increase the amount of storage space within Building C to meet the regulations.

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

2. Hilton Garden Inn, 224 Gold Star Highway

Harry Clarke, Engineer, DiCesare-Bentley Engineers, represented the applicant, Groton Hospitality LLC. The proposal is for a new four story, 128 room hotel with a one story pavilion in the lobby. The first floor includes a full service kitchen, lobby, indoor pool and meeting rooms. Hotel rooms will be on the upper three floors. The basement will house the maintenance for the building. The property is a wooded 5.26 acre parcel on Route 184, east of Wal-Mart. The location and zoning were reviewed. Mr. Clarke said past applications submitted for this property were a for Leiser store, and a Staples in 2000.

There will be a small restaurant for guests. It will not be a destination restaurant. The restaurant will be 740 sq. ft, with a 740 sq. ft. lounge. The hotel will have two small meeting rooms but it will not be a conference center. The main intersection would be across from Winding Hollow. The applicants are asking for a shared parking allowance for the meeting rooms and hotel rooms. The maximum shared parking calculation is 141 spaces, based on 100% meeting room occupancy and 80% hotel room occupancy. The plan shows 159 spaces on the site. There is 660 ft. of frontage sidewalk along Route 184. The applicants are asking for a waiver of the final 65 ft. of sidewalk at the eastern end of the site. That area is rough terrain, and the road curves sharply. The applicants will be connecting to the existing sidewalk at Wal-Mart. Internal sidewalks are provided. The applicant addressed the WRPD requirements and the drainage plan was reviewed. The site is served by public water and sewer. Yankee Gas will be installing their lines down Route 184 and the hotel will connect to the gas lines. The site lighting plan shows 33 ft. high poles. All the adjoining properties are commercial. There will be a 12 ft. berm to screen the parking lot from the highway. The landscaping in the buffer areas was discussed. A landscape architect has been hired to do a final landscape plan. The plans show a road connection to the Wal-Mart parking lot.

Bill Vliet, a traffic engineer with Vliet & O'Neill Traffic Engineering, Manchester, Connecticut, presented the traffic report. Mr. Vliet said the cars entering and leaving the hotel will not generate major traffic. He estimates the traffic to be about one tenth of Wal-Mart's traffic. The applicants are proposing to leave the new intersection as unsignaled with an exclusive right-turn lane westbound, controlled by a stop sign. Based on 100% occupancy, the amount of traffic generated by the hotel does not warrant a traffic light at the driveway. Sight lines allow exiting drivers to see up to the Wal-Mart traffic signal. The applicant is proposing to eliminate the road connection to Wal-Mart. They feel the two sites are not compatible uses, and the connection would divert traffic from Wal-Mart through the hotel site.

Clarke said the Poquonnock Bridge Fire Marshal does not need the connector road for the fire equipment.

Staff distributed to the Commission the portion of the Wal-Mart plan from 1993, which showed what had been required at that time for the connection road. The approval stated that the connection shall be built if the Planning Commission decided there is a need. Staff said patrons of the hotel may want to go to Wal-Mart and other retail stores in the next shopping center without going onto the Gold Star Highway. Without the road connection to the Wal-Mart site, the applicant does not have to get a permit from the State Traffic Commission. The Town Zoning Officer has not given a final approval of the parking calculations, how the restaurant and lounge will operate on this site, and what the applicant proposes for shared parking. Staff recommends continuing this application until the next meeting. The site is in the WRPD. The Inland Wetlands Agency

approved the project with a number of conditions. Some minor design issues are still outstanding including adding internal sidewalks along the parking lot, adding several trees, and assuring that all utilities, generators and above-ground tanks meet the Town's containment regulations for the WRPD. Staff also does not have a photometric plan. Staff is asking for 20 ft. light poles with cut-off fixtures. Staff read a letter from the Fire Marshal dated April 11, 2006 which stated that the Chief will accept the plan with one entry with a sprinkler system.

Fitzgerald asked about the traffic patterns for Wal-Mart. Mr. Vliet reviewed the traffic flow from Wal-Mart, and the anticipated traffic from the hotel. Fitzgerald asked if four stories is an allowable height for this site. Mr. Clarke said yes since the setback has been increased. Mr. Clarke said the parking will be self-contained on site with 159 spaces. The Zoning Officer is concerned with the restaurant use and has requested 17 more spaces to accommodate the restaurant to provide enough parking on the site.

Pritchard asked why the parking calculations are based on 80% occupancy rather than 100% occupancy. Mr. Vliet said the standard is to not design to full occupancy and less parking will decrease the amount of impervious surface. Pritchard asked how many spaces would be required at 100% occupancy. Mr. Vliet stated 167 plus 17 for the restaurant, for a total of 184 spaces.

Roper asked if the restaurant would be advertised as a restaurant. Mr. Clarke said it will not be in the telephone book, it is to service hotel patrons, and they are not anticipating much walk-in use. Roper asked staff if the use of the restaurant changed, would they need more parking spaces. Staff said yes. Roper asked about the signage. Mr. Clarke reviewed the signage plan. Roper asked what type of events would be taking place in the meeting rooms. Mr. Clarke said smaller business meetings, not convention – type events. He showed the meeting rooms, restaurant and lounge on the plans. The total capacity for both meeting rooms is 117. Roper stated he sees a need for the connector to Wal-Mart as it would allow a second means of egress and provide for spillover parking.

Steinford said the connector road is important to the area. Patrons would have access to the Groton Square Shopping Center as well as Wal-Mart, without having to go onto Gold Star Highway. Steinford said he does not think traffic from Wal-Mart will use the hotel's exit, and will not create any additional traffic at the hotel. Staff said Groton Utilities has approved the technical designs for the plan, but wants to review final plans and best management practices for monitoring stormwater.

Kane stated he supports the connection to Wal-Mart. Kane asked for clarification of the waiver for a portion of the frontage sidewalk. Mr. Clarke reviewed the slope. The sidewalk will not connect to another sidewalk. The closest sidewalk is at the bottom of the hill, across the street. Kane asked for the signage plan. Mr. Clarke reviewed the sign plan. Kane asked about the parking calculations. Mr. Clarke said the restaurant was not considered in their

calculations. Kane asked if there is a sign outside the building advertising the restaurant. The applicant said no.

Perez Pullen discussed the traffic patterns and expressed concern about the left-hand turn out of the hotel site, and asked if there will be buses going to the casino. The applicant said it is possible. She asked if there will be a gift shop, or outside access to the restaurant. Mr. Clarke said no.

Sherrard asked Mr. Vliet to clarify the traffic calculations. Sherrard stated he is also a strong proponent of the connector road. Discussion ensued on the benefits of the connector road, and the possibility of making the road one way. Roper stated he feels there should be a light at the new intersection.

Perez Pullen said she supports the connector road being a one-way connection.

Sherrard said he would like the connector to allow two-way traffic, but be designed to dissuade people from wanting to use it. Mr. Clarke said the connector is shown on the plan.

Staff discussed what still needs to be addressed on the plan, including the parking, which has not been approved by the Zoning Officer. There is no place on the site to add more parking because of the wetlands. Staff stated that the applicant must grant an extension or a decision must be made tonight. Mr. Brown said the applicant could reduce the number of meeting room spaces to accommodate the parking spaces required by the Zoning Officer for the restaurant. He stated the timing concerns so the applicant could move forward with the STC process.

Roper asked about the sidewalks and the Town's priority for this area. The Town Master Trails Plan was reviewed. The applicant stated they would grant an extension.

Steinford asked if there will be removal or addition of earth products. Clarke said about 12 to 15 ft. of ledge will need to be removed from the site and to grade the parking lot.

MOTION: To table the Hilton Garden Inn, Gold Star Highway.

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

3. Country Glen Fitness Center, 600 Meridian Street

Greg Hammond, Scochet Associates, presented the application for an addition to the Country Glen Fitness Center. They would like to increase the weight room by 750 ft.

Brian Kent, Brian Kent Associates, showed the location of the Fitness Center within the Country Glen complex. The expansion is an addition to the existing footprint. The maintenance garage in the basement will be expanded. The driveway would remain the same. Mr. Kent explained the planting plan and the new retaining wall that will be installed. The new room will have large windows looking out onto the landscaped area. The access to the fitness complex is only through the main entrance of the building. There is no outside entrance. Roper asked if there are showers. Mr. Hammond said yes. Mr. Hammond explained the exercise machines being added.

Staff reviewed the location of the site and the history of Country Glen. The retaining wall is less than 4 ft. tall. The applicants are providing landscaping in the area.

Pritchard asked about the impact on drainage. Staff said the adjacent catch basin would need to be protected.

Roper asked the hours of the fitness center. Mr. Hammond said it will be accessible to the residents until 10 p.m., as it is now. Under-age children must be accompanied by a parent. There are existing rules and regulations.

Kane asked if there will be outdoor lighting between the two complexes. Mr. Hammond said yes. Kane asked for bike racks to be included.

Perez Pullen asked what the space is now. Mr. Hammond said a landscaped area. She asked about the Woodlands agreement. Mr. Hammond explained the agreement between the two properties.

MOTION: To approve a site plan modification for Country Glen Fitness Facility Expansion, 600 Meridian Street Extension for an expansion to the community center, with the following modifications:

1. Emergency Access shall not be impeded by construction staging area.
2. All technical items by staff shall be addressed.

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

V. NEW BUSINESS

1. Report of Commission

Roper stated that the Mystic Cooperative Task Force was meeting Monday morning, April 17, 2006.

Steinford requested a discussion of the Town's notification procedures to abutting property owners for subdivisions for the next meeting.

2. Inland Wetland Agency Referral for April 12, 2006 Public Hearing

The proposed wetland application fee schedule was explained by the staff. The Planning Commission strongly supports the new IWA fee schedule.

3. City of Groton Referral for Zoning Regulation Amendments

Staff explained the referral.

MOTION: The Planning Commission does not support the Zoning Regulation Text Amendments, Section 2.7 and 2.8, because they are not consistent with the City Plan of Conservation and Development, do not allow for public access to open space, and do not address open space, environmental and resource protection, density requirements, coastal impacts or design criteria.

Motion made by Sherrard, seconded by Steinford, so voted unanimously.

4. New Applications

- a. Marine Science Magnet High School Sewer Line (CAM), 155 Thomas Road
- b. Groton Highpoint Subdivision, 245 Hazelnut Hill Road

VI. REPORT OF CHAIRMAN – None.

VII. REPORT OF STAFF

The Central Hall building proposed for downtown Mystic was discussed. A Special Permit application has not been submitted yet.

Steinford asked about Ledges II and the rock pile still on their site. Staff said the Town holds a bond.

Mystic Weigh and the sewer lines to the subdivision were discussed. The Commission expressed concern about the condition of Flanders Road.

IX. ADJOURNMENT

Motion to adjourn at 10:47 p.m. made by Roper, seconded by Steinford, so voted unanimously.

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Respectfully submitted,

Margil Steinfeld