

PLANNING & ZONING COMMISSION
TOLLAND, CONNECTICUT
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES OF JANUARY 8, 2007

MEMBERS PRESENT: Marilee Beebe-Kostrun, Chair
Sue Errickson, Vice Chair
Judy Schachner, Secretary
Roseann Gottier, Regular
Gael Stapleton, Regular

MEMBERS ABSENT: Skip Copeland, Alternate
Robert Quick, Alternate

OTHERS PRESENT: Linda Farmer, Director of Planning & Community Development

CALL TO ORDER: Ms. Beebe-Kostrun called the meeting to order at 7:00PM in Council Chambers.

PLANNING DISCUSSIONS

- 1) Citizen Survey – Review draft survey and prepare comments. Ms. Farmer said she noted that questions about pedestrian facilities were not addressed in the survey. Ms. Stapleton noted there were no questions about the 195 restructuring in the survey. Ms. Errickson took issue with Questions 13 and 14, which asked about satisfaction with the Fieldstone Commons project and what kinds of businesses residents would like to see at vacant locations within town shopping plazas. She said Question 13 is too vague, as it does not give them any direction, and Question 14 might leave residents thinking that the PZC has the power to bring in desired businesses. Ms. Beebe-Kostrun agreed, saying questions need to be specific to certain attributes. The Commission would like to remove Questions 13 and 14 from the survey. Ms. Stapleton said she would like to see a question added about the level of lighting at Fieldstone Commons.

Referring to Question 16, Ms. Beebe-Kostrun said the question is somewhat leading and needs to be reworded. She said they need to be careful about putting out questions that appear to tell the public how to think, and that this question would not sit well with some of the public. The Commission also agreed that Board of Education services and Town services should not be combined together when addressing such issues. Ms. Schachner suggested that Question 16 be eliminated all together because the questions preceding it already address the issue.

Ms. Stapleton said she would like to see questions that address any possible need for technological services—who needs them, who has access to them, whether or not the respondent considers him/herself computer literate. She would like to see a question or questions that address computer literacy, possibly in relation to the library, and what the town might be able to do to provide access like making laptop computers available to borrow, or possibly providing computer classes at, for example, the community room at Winding River. Ms. Farmer said the survey will be mailed to 2000 random households and the cost of the UCONN survey would run about \$5,200. Ms. Beebe-Kostrun asked if the survey will identify demographics, and Ms. Farmer said that it will.

Ms. Errickson said that Question 21 answers a lot of questions, but she hesitates to endorse the format and would prefer it follow the box format used in the previous questions. In the section on Land Acquisition, she said they should drop a few of the questions in favor of more on agricultural preservation. Ms. Beebe-Kostrun said Bullet 5 under Land Acquisition about

whether Tolland should purchase land to limit future economic development might be confusing for people.

Ms. Stapleton said the survey in general is too long and they may lose people with it.

In the Affordability/Housing section, Ms. Farmer suggested eliminating Bullet 3 asking if residents felt the town should encourage opportunities for private development of 55+ housing, as they presently have many units in town that are not yet sold.

Several questions were raised in the Economic Development section. Ms. Beebe-Kostrun said Bullet #1 is a leading question and suggests the town already has a diverse tax base when they do not. She suggested the question be reworded to say: The town should diversify the tax base by encouraging non-residential development within areas best suited for such usage. The Commission also suggested that Bullets 2 and 3 in this section be removed. On Bullet #5 which addresses commercially developed family entertainment opportunities, the Commission favored removing the example in parentheses, because while they can do outreach, they do not want the public to be led to think they have the power to bring in any particular type of business. Ms. Farmer said this question will need some fine tuning.

George Mantak, one of several members of the Economic Development Commission that attended the meeting, said that a sizeable portion of the questions on the survey were taken from the previous town survey for comparison purposes. He said Town Manager Steve Werbner wanted to keep the questions similar so the town could develop some baseline statistics.

On Bullet #9 in the Economic Development section, the PZC determined they would like to see the wording changed to remove “to help offset property tax increases.” They also suggested removing Bullet #10 all together, as sewer expansion will be continuing. The PZC also suggested adding another Bullet to ask if the town should encourage small-scale, owner-occupied businesses on the green.

Regarding Bullets 12 and 13 referring to drive-thru businesses, Ms. Stapleton said this question should not be on the survey as drive-thrus are already prohibited in the regulations. Mr. Mantak said the questions were put on the survey to get an idea on what the public would want. Ms. Beebe-Kostrun said the problem with posing questions of this kind is that it is not clear that the public understands that if they approved drive-thru food services, that they would then be opening the door to making Route 195 a strip of fast-food franchises. She said, however, that they should not want to avoid asking a question because they are afraid of the answer they might get. Both Ms. Beebe-Kostrun and Ms. Schachner said the question might better be stated as “Should the Town continue to prohibit drive-thru services in order to influence the type of commercial development.” The Commission also suggested that if Bullet 12 referring to non-food service drive-thrus did remain, that the example (i.e. Pharmacy) should be removed.

Ms. Beebe-Kostrun questioned why they should have a Customer Service section in a planning document at all, and suggested removing this set of questions. Ms. Errickson concurred saying it was too general and a resident’s one bad experience with any one service in town could result in an unfavorable rating for all departments. It would not be helpful because they would not be able to determine where improvements might need to be made. Ms. Stapleton said she would like to see a question about whether residents felt Town staff was adequate in terms of size for the current population.

The Commission discussed adding some items to the January 22 meeting agenda, including putting he Municipal Facilities Plan on this agenda and adding a poultry discussion speaker at 8:00PM.

- 2) Route 195 Improvements – Discuss proposed plan and draft a position statement. Ms. Farmer said a Special Joint Meeting will be held Tuesday, January 16 here in Council Chambers. She said coming out of that meeting, the Town will have needed to come to a consensus on the plan. Ms. Beebe-Kostrun asked her where they stood on sidewalks in front of Meetinghouse Commons. Ms. Farmer said they will be on the plan, but DOT is still negotiating right-of-way. She said as the plan now stands, there is a 5' multi-use pathway on one side and an 11' irrigated, planted median. She said the Goose Lane intersection will be a fully actuated intersection. Ms. Beebe-Kostrun said she would like to see if the road could be graded to drain to the median instead of irrigating it. Ms. Beebe-Kostrun also asked about the relocation of curb cuts at the gas station. Ms. Farmer said they are proposing adding landscaping at Sammy's gas station and street trees on the Stone Pond side. The recommended changes do not require a conversation with Wetlands. Ms. Farmer said they still need to get copies of the environmental investigations done on all the gas stations impacted by the excavation project, which will include Getty, Sammys, and Tolland Citgo gas stations.

Ms. Stapleton said it is important to document in the minutes that sidewalks are wanted on both sides of 195, as DOT left that information off the drawings.

Ms. Farmer said Tom Maziar will be at the January 16 meeting and will present a history of the development of the project. Ms. Beebe-Kostrun suggested that if they do a lighting plan, then they might want to do away with some of the spotlights. Ms. Farmer said the Landscape Architect from DOT is developing a plan for the median, ramp area, street trees, and adjacent to the river.

Jack Scavone, from the Economic Development Commission, said he was not pleased with the town newsletter as he felt the proposed plan outlined suggested it was a done deal. He said because they have not come to a consensus yet, the information given is too specific. Ms. Farmer said the goal of the Town Manager was to raise public awareness of the project early on to get their participation, and the information does indicate that it is only the proposed plans from the DOT.

Mr. Scavone said the EDC would like the PZC to endorse their recommendation to have two commuter lanes coming into Tolland from the direction of UConn. The reason is because of stacking issues coming off the highway, and that adding a second lane from that direction would allow local residents to be able to move through the area from south to north with fewer encumbrances. He said it is an opportunity to plan now for the future, for the convenience of local residents, and as a safety issue for emergency vehicles.

Ms. Beebe-Kostrun questioned what the EDC would be willing to give up to allow for that additional lane. Mr. Scavone said they could give up the sidewalk on the north side of the road, as his Commission feels sidewalks are not necessary on both sides of the road. Ms. Beebe-Kostrun said the PZC endorses pedestrian access on both sides of the road and that she felt the Commission was unanimous in favoring pedestrian access over vehicular access.

Bob Stewart, Chair of the EDC, suggested that when pedestrians are on the sidewalk on the Stone Pond side, that they can easily cross over to the developed side. Ms. Beebe-Kostrun said they want the pedestrian access on both sides because they are planning for future commercial development on both sides of the road. Kevin Bouley of the EDC suggested that the PZC require future developers to pay for the addition of sidewalks when they build on that side of the road. Ms. Beebe-Kostrun said the PZC can ask for sidewalks in front of the properties, but they cannot require off-site improvements from developers. Ms. Farmer said they are not just concerned about pedestrians, but bicyclists and skateboarders, too. She said there has been strong town support for a multi-use pathway. Mr. Bouley said he is an avid bicyclist, and that he feels bikes

are safer in the road than in the pathway. Ms. Beebe-Kostrun said they would prefer bicyclists and skateboarders to be off the road.

Ms. Beebe-Kostrun said it was not feasible to ask that they give up pedestrian access for a convenience two or three nights a week during rush hour and on UConn game nights. Mr. Mantak said most people in town drive to where they want to go, and adding sidewalks will not change public habits. He said he would not expect to see a lot of increase in pedestrian traffic. Ms. Beebe-Kostrun said pedestrian traffic would increase with the addition of sidewalks. She added that building another lane would move traffic faster and this might create a safety issue. She said at this point it is speculative to say that the added lane would become a local travel lane and she would want to first look at calculations from a design engineering perspective that would show the duration of stacking and the number of cars per hour going through the area.

- 3) Adult Oriented Business – Discuss amending Zoning Regulations and sending a letter to the Town Council to request an amendment to the Adult Oriented Business Ordinance to include retail “Sex Shops.” Ms. Farmer said she spoke with the Town Attorney, Rick Conti, and he said the sex shop ordinance in Manchester as written could be used in Tolland. She suggested the PZC write a letter to Town Council recommending that the Town amend its ordinance to classify adult oriented retail. Ms. Farmer said Mr. Conti also said the town could stipulate that only one adult oriented business be allowed to locate in any single building. Also the definition of a sex shop should be included in the ordinance. Ms. Errickson said she felt a sense of urgency on this topic. Ms. Farmer said she will set the Public Hearing for Adult Oriented Businesses for the first meeting in February.

A brief recess was taken at 9:20PM, and the meeting reconvened at 9:25PM. Ms. Farmer asked if she could add an item to OLD BUSINESS to add a request from St. Matthew’s Church. Errickson/Schachner motion to add a discussion on the phasing of the St. Matthew’s Church Addition and Renovation to the agenda. Motion unanimously approved. The Commission elected to move the order of the Agenda to discuss this item next.

OLD BUSINESS

- 1) St. Matthew’s Church: Ms. Farmer reviewed the January 5, 2007 letter from Luke McCoy of Friar Associates requesting that the project be completed in phases, putting off the expensive repaving of the parking lot until a later time. She said Staff’s main concern is the walkways, landscaping, and light replacement. Ms. Beebe-Kostrun said to make sure the applicant is made aware that the islands need to go in, that landscaping and lighting in the parking lot are to be part of Phase I. Errickson/Gottier motion to approve the applicant’s request to phase the renovation project subject to town staff approval. Motion unanimously approved.

PLANNING DISCUSSION

- 4) Signs – Discuss possible revisions to sign regulations. Ms. Beebe-Kostrun noted that at the last meeting, it became apparent that they do not have a design standard that is consistent with a village gateway design. Ms. Gottier asked that they add to the next agenda or one in February, a discussion on how to encourage certain uses such as office buildings and hi-tech businesses along Route 195. Ms. Farmer said there has been discussion to take the Neighborhood Commercial Zone on 195 and encourage hi-tech, de-emphasizing retail businesses. She added that a group of business owners have hired an engineer to begin a design for sewers up Baxter and Anthony Roads.

Returning to the sign discussion, Ms. Stapleton questioned how a building can have two fronts, and that this issue needs to be addressed. Ms. Beebe-Kostrun said legally a building can have two frontages on two different roads. She said it is not unusual, and is quite common, for double frontages to exist.

The Commission discussed the notes on Signs that Ms. Farmer provided. In general, they favored prohibiting internal and channel lit lettering, and allowing uplighting and downlighting with design performance standards. Ms. Farmer said that halo lighting would be considered external illumination. Mr. Stewart recommended that the PZC find some signs they like in Tolland and other areas and moving forward from there, rather than immediately eliminating things they don't like.

Regarding Window Signs, Ms. Farmer suggested they look at other towns and the overall coverage they allow, restricting the number of signs they allow in a window. Ms. Beebe-Kostrun said that if they allow only one sign in a window, they will need to define a window. Ms. Gottier suggested making the standard "Open" sign allowable, but any artistic sign requiring approval by special permit. Ms. Schachner would like to eliminate the lit outlines that are found at some businesses around doors and windows. The Commission agreed to look further at restrictions on illumination.

Ms. Farmer was asked to look at the size of the Johnny Appleseeds, Rockville Bank, and Jake's Auto signs as these were all examples of signs the Commission found attractive.

In the Sign Review and Concept Plans—Section B—Simsbury's requirement to have a "unified sign plan," and Glastonbury's requirement to have a coordinated theme for the entire building were seen as two good items the Town might adopt that could potentially resolve a lot of issues surrounding signs.

Ms. Farmer was asked to put together a draft of the evening's discussion for further review.

BUSINESS MEETING: Errickson/Schachner motion to approve the minutes of the December 11, 2006 regular meeting. Motion unanimously approved.

GENERAL:

- 1) The Commission discussed the Public Forum slated for January 30. Ms. Farmer said it was discussed at the staff level, but they don't yet know the format. Mr. Stewart said it was brought up at the last EDC meeting and he said Steve Werbner said it will be partly about the capital improvement budget and the future general direction of Tolland.
- 2) Ms. Stapleton asked that it be noted that there will be a Planning and Zoning Commission meeting on February 12. This date was not on the schedule.
- 3) Ms. Farmer said a discussion on windmills will be going to a public hearing in Ellington and that they will want to keep an eye on this.

Stapleton/Gottier motion to adjourn the meeting at 10:35PM. Motion unanimously approved.

Respectfully submitted,

Annie Gentile
Clerk