

PLANNING & ZONING COMMISSION
TOLLAND, CONNECTICUT
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES OF AUGUST 23, 2010

MEMBERS PRESENT: Michael Cardin, Chair
Marilee Beebe, Vice Chair
Sue Errickson, Secretary
Jack Scavone, Regular
Dave Barrow, Regular
John Hughes, Alternate
Benjamin Stanford, Alternate

OTHERS PRESENT: Linda Farmer, AICP, Director of Planning & Community Development
Heidi Samokar, Planimetrics
Amy and Scott Fink, residents

1. **Call to Order:** Michael Cardin, Chair called the meeting to order at 7:30p.m. in the 2nd Level Conference Room A.
2. **Discussion with Planimetrics** – on revised Concept Plan concerning Tolland Village Area. Mr. Cardin said that since our last meeting with Planimetrics, Heidi Samokar and Glenn Chalder have done a lot of legwork reviewing the topography of the Tolland Village Area and meeting with property owners. He said that with the increasing scarcity of developable land in town, the multi-use, high density zone may offer more flexibility and creativity for developers. He reminded the Commission that the town is not developing the land, rather they are looking at potentials, and that this is a concept and not necessarily what we will see in town in the end.

Heidi Samokar of Planimetrics said she and Glenn Chalder met with Ms. Farmer and Mr. Cardin last week and they looked at various concepts. Her firm has also worked with CR3, a landscape architecture firm in Simsbury. She noted that it can be hard to avoid getting too detailed in the vision. She reviewed the general area behind the Subway and Papa T's restaurants noting this area is eyed for residential development. In this area, there would be a new road connecting Cider Mill Road to Route 195 and the Cider Mill Connector would be closed off. She said they may want to keep an emergency access route there. They looked at a proposal for 30 single family or 60 duplex residences which would amount to about 2 units per acre or 4.3 units per acre if townhouses. The proposal would be for all traffic to be moved through the residential neighborhood. Ms. Beebe said they might want to encourage the front open space on Route 195 to have commercial development. Ms. Samokar said they originally stuck close to the UConn study that was done earlier and asked the Commission if they would want to be open to commercial development in this area. There was also discussion around public safety and whether the Cider Mill connector might need to be left open, particularly during some sports seasons when the traffic to games is higher. Mr. Cardin said the connector road should have some traffic calming elements.

Ms. Samokar showed three variations on this area. The first option increases development from 30 to 35 units with slightly smaller lots and shifts the road. In another option, by having the boulevard on one side, they could then accommodate as many as 50 dwelling units. Ms. Farmer asked if in Incentive Housing Zones if wetlands and steep slopes are subtracted out of developable land. Ms. Samokar said they are, but Open Space is not subtracted out. In a third option, Ms. Samokar showed 40 units of townhouses and the boulevard back in the middle of

the development. She said parking would be challenging in this option, and would likely be placed behind the units.

Ms. Samokar asked for the Commission's thoughts on the variations. Mr. Cardin said he would strive for a mix, keeping single family homes where they abut the Cider Mill houses and with townhouses or duplexes closer to Route 195. He said he likes the idea of a drive through neighborhood if the road is through the center. Mr. Hughes questioned if people would still drive fast down the road if there were houses on both sides. Ms. Errickson said she likes the ideas of cul-de-sacs as it encourages people to socialize with their neighbors. She said she also would favor a mix of housing, but said she would find it a bit scary to walk down a road where the woods are all on one side. Mr. Scavone suggested they put a sidewalk and streetlights on the side where the houses are if they go with a street moved to the side. Ms. Beebe suggested they keep these scenarios open to the public as it would also reinforce the message that this is a concept plan. Ms. Farmer said she has talked quite a bit with Mike Taylor and he is aware that the proposed road is not engineered. Ms. Beebe said the stormwater will be a big deal to conform to LID regulations. Ms. Farmer said they also must maintain a buffer of trees in the wetlands area.

The Commission discussed Area B. Ms. Samokar said this would need to be a destination area because of its low visibility and not being able to capture drive-by traffic. The area is also made up of fill, up to 8' in some areas. She said they did meet with the Department of Transportation and have discussed the possibility of moving the commuter lot to this location. That could create the opportunity for commercial buildings next door that would cater to the commuter lot traffic. A big question would be what could locate here if the commuter lot did not move here.

Mr. Hughes asked if they have a need in town for a hotel. He said he understands the need in relation to their proximity to UConn. Ms. Beebe said this has become a controversial issue in town, and some people are adverse to people coming off the highway for prolonged stays in town. The Commission also discussed the possibilities of a hotel on the UConn campus or in the four corners area in Mansfield. The Commission also discussed the possibility of a Walgreens in the Area B location, as well as concerns that a less visible location for a commuter lot might invite unwanted activities.

Mr. Scavone said one of the great things about this concept plan is that it leaves the existing businesses in place, thereby proposing opportunities rather than making business owners feel they are being pushed out.

Looking at Area E across the street, Ms. Samokar pointed out the three biggest changes from previous plans. She said this area proposes an anchor destination such as a hotel with underground parking on town-owned property as well as a civic building that lines up with the green. It also works more with the topography with larger footprint buildings and spreads parking throughout the area. A unique rock structure would remain and be incorporated into a small park with pathways. The most challenging area in the long term would be in the lowest elevation where there are one story grade changes. On one side there would be retail on the lower level, with parking behind. On the other side, the main level would be a story up from the opposite side and could be two level. There would be about 50' between buildings with 15' drops between that could be handled with steps and outdoor sitting or garden areas. The proposal calls for 15 townhouses that would face the other residential area at the green.

Ms. Samokar said they took a courtyard approach with the 17 single family or 34 duplex development. She also proposed an option where density is bumped up for all townhouses in groups of about 7 buildings. Mr. Scavone suggested a mix of housing with the higher density development below and single family development facing toward the Woodfield development.

Ms. Samokar asked the Commission how they felt about town-owned land being used for a hotel. Ms. Beebe asked if anything other than a hotel could be done at this location, and if there was sufficient area for parking underneath. Ms. Samokar said almost anything but a hotel would likely require surface parking. Mr. Scavone said a hotel would work as an excellent shield to the highway.

Mr. Cardin said he has heard continued concern from property owners. He asked how Steve Williams would be able to develop his land when his slopes are on or encroach on others properties. Ms. Samokar said the vision would require some cooperation. Ms. Farmer said there are a lot of business owners on both sides of the street, and they would need to show potential opportunities for them. Mr. Scavone suggested they offer descriptions but shy away from using specific pictures. Mr. Hughes asked if they would want to attract one big developer to the TVA? Mr. Cardin said either way, they would still need the various landowners to be in agreement. Ms. Samokar said some business owners have expressed fears that if the area is rezoned, they will not be able to operate their businesses or even put up a sign. Ms. Beebe asked why people have made these assumptions. There was no known reason. Mr. Cardin asked if this vision might make a monetary incentive for property owners to buy-in. Ms. Samokar said it depends on whether the market is there for it.

The Commission discussed the challenges that would come with a slowly developing vision. Mr. Scavone said he would expect the Taylor property to develop first and that the hotel would be a catalyst for restaurants and other businesses.

In the final area (Area F), the concept plan proposes a new road for elderly housing and a green surrounded by single family dwellings on one side and townhouses on the other side. Mr. Stanford suggested the civic building in Area E could be a firehouse and training center. Mr. Barrow questioned why they would want to put a civic building on private property. There was discussion about a possible land swap between town-owned and private property for both the hotel and civic building. Ms. Samokar said there would need to be an incentive for a private land owner to give their land for a public benefit. Mr. Cardin asked if it was realistic to envision a hotel on public property. Ms. Samokar said there is a precedent as it has been done in both Simsbury and South Windsor. She also pointed out another potential area for the development of townhouses that the Commission might wish to consider.

Mr. Cardin said he wanted to reiterate that they need to find ways and create incentives and flexibility to encourage the cooperation of land owners. Ms. Errickson asked if they could offer tax incentives. Mr. Cardin said he was uncertain, but that would be the Town Council's purview. Ms. Farmer said they could look into grants for infrastructure costs. Ms. Samokar said some towns have used tax increment financing as an incentive.

Ms. Samokar said their scope of work calls for Planimetrics to do some alternative graphics and roll it out to the public next month. She said they might want to show this, however, to the property owners first and get their buy-in. Mr. Cardin said they may also need to meet with the Inland Wetland Commission. Ms. Farmer said the WPCA should see this too. Ms. Beebe said they need to be careful not to show something they cannot do and so they need to look at

stormwater requirements. Ms. Farmer said as this nears public review, they should first sit down with Steve Trinkhaus to review it.

Ms. Beebe said they also need to be careful about how they convey private uses on public land and vice versa to show that they are not taking or giving anything away. The Commission discussed potential visuals including streetscapes, cross-sections, and 3-D models. Mr. Cardin suggested using Photoshop to show potentials. Ms. Samokar said the challenge of doing Photoshop is that it generally works better when modifying an already existing area. Mr. Scavone said he feels it would be important to show street views. Ms. Farmer agreed saying they would want to show both sides of the road leading to a hotel, and a cross section.

Ms. Samokar said she feels landowners for the most part were okay with a concept plan. Ms. Farmer said it is important to show the plan is qualified. Ms. Samokar said they would also want to show various options. She said she anticipates that they will show the visuals to the PZC then prepare to roll it out to the public. Some of the work can be done in house and some would require working with CR3 or another architecture firm. Mr. Scavone said that when they meet with the stakeholders, he would expect they will just want to look at what is proposed at this point. He said business owners should not feel threatened by this plan because no one is being pushed out. Ms. Samokar asked if when they present to the stakeholders, should it just be Planimetrics or would anyone from the PZC wish to attend? Mr. Cardin said he would like to be there. Ms. Farmer said she felt she should not attend because of her regulatory role with the town.

Ms. Samokar asked when they would like to discuss regulatory options. She said the most difficult part will likely be determining what type of regulatory approach to take. There are benefits and drawbacks on each side.

Mr. Hughes expressed concern that they need to get more involvement from the public. He said he feels most of these public meetings don't draw a big enough attendance. Ms. Samokar said they are fortunate to be getting quite a bit of coverage lately from the Hartford Courant. Ms. Farmer said they do have some discretionary money in the budget for more advertising. Ms. Samokar said in some cases they have built 3-D models that can be put in a public place for viewing and to generate interest. It is a little more expensive, however. Ms. Farmer said if they went with a model, they might want to do something mobile that could be moved to various areas that get a lot of traffic such as the Big Y, the Senior Center, and Rockville Bank. Mr. Cardin agreed that moving it every 2 or 3 days over a 3 to 4 week period may create some momentum. Scott Fink of 46 Marlborough Glade suggested an option to create a Styrofoam model that stayed in once place and creating flyers inviting people to come and view it.

Ms. Farmer said that at some point they will need to quantify their infrastructure needs with both the WPCA and the Connecticut Water Company. Ms. Samokar said she has some numbers she can share with her, although she has not run any trip generation numbers yet. Mr. Barrow asked if there are other properties in town that could sustain a hotel. Mr. Scavone said there is, and Mr. Barrow noted that there is nothing stopping that from happening at this point.

3. **P&Z App. #679 – Nordic Builders (Deer Run Estates, LLC)** – Request for a subdivision extension for construction of public improvements. Expiration date: August 29, 2010. Location: extension of Joe Sabbath Drive. Sue Errickson/Marilee Beebe motion to grant a 60-day subdivision extension, but requiring Nordic Builders to provide the PZC with a new cost estimate for public improvements. Motion was unanimously approved.

4. **Upcoming meetings/events**

- September 2, 2010 – Town Council workshop to discuss implementation of the Plan of Conservation and Development, commencing at 7:30p.m. in the Town Council Chambers. Ms. Farmer said she will be attending this workshop and said it would not be inappropriate for any PZC members to attend. Mr. Cardin also asked if they could send a letter to the Town Council encouraging the Town Council liaison to return to their meetings or to send a new liaison if a conflict exists.
- September 25, 2010 – 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. at Tolland High School – “Celebrate Tolland – 27th Best Small Town.” Check the Tolland website for more details. Mr. Cardin suggested that if the model for the TVA was completed by this date that it could be displayed at this town celebration.
- Mr. Cardin said that Barbara Danforth would like to be put on the agenda at the next meeting to discuss the cleanup of the Page property on Gehring Road. Mr. Barrow asked about the status of this issue. Ms. Farmer said things were put on hold as Amy and Richard Page sold their home. That property has been cleaned up. Ms. Farmer said Jodi Schmidt from the Health Department has found no public health violations but is working with the town from a public health standpoint. The Commission discussed their options with moving the cleanup along. They agreed to add this item to their next agenda.

5. **Adjournment:** Jack Scavone/Marilee Beebe motion to adjourn and pay the clerk at 9:11p.m. Motion was unanimously approved.

Respectfully submitted,

Annie Gentile
Clerk