

PLANNING & ZONING COMMISSION
TOLLAND, CONNECTICUT
SPECIAL MEETING MINUTES OF OCTOBER 18, 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 and Glenn Chalder of Planimetrics, LLC

1. Welcome. Michael Cardin, Chair, called the meeting to order at 7:30p.m. in the 4th Level-Conference Room C. He thanked Heidi Samokar and Glenn Chalder of Planimetrics for getting them to this point and noted that they will need to make some important decisions this evening.
2. Discussion with Planimetrics – Tolland Village Area. Ms. Samokar reviewed the updated concept sketch memo dated October 12. She said since their last meeting with the PZC, they worked with the landscape architect and had meetings with both property owners and developers Steve Williams and Mike Taylor. They held a third general meeting with other tenants and landowners that was attended by Tom Gotta, the owner of Subway and by Dereck Pacheco of Dunkin’ Donuts. They also met with the Economic Development Commission and with the Town Council. Lastly, they had a meeting with the Town Manager in which Mr. Cardin and Ms. Farmer also attended to assess where things were going.

Ms. Samokar said they now have three versions of the concept sketch, but stressed that rather than looking at the October 12 version as the final concept, they should look at all three in conjunction. The October 12 version considers a townhouse scenario. They went with a townhouse look also in the area closer to Woodfield Drive and the proposed hotel. The concept sketch shifts things a bit due to existing wetlands and draws on a 50’ green buffer between there and Woodfield Drive. Ms. Samokar said that Steve Williams believed that wetlands extended under the proposed hotel area, but after taking a closer look and discussing it with Steve Lowrey, they believe the wetlands are located behind the hotel. There may also be wetlands near the elderly housing area, and field checks will need to be done to verify this.

The concept sketch moves two buildings over from Dunkin Donuts. It also shows the commuter lot moving to a new location. Mr. Chalder said in this concept that the Main Street area would stay mainly intact, and this simply explores other alternatives for residential housing. He added that it is important to understand that none of this is fixed.

Ms. Samokar said it was no surprise that Mike Taylor was pleased with the concept and is ready to move forward. She said he was intrigued by the commuter lot idea and understands the tradeoff benefits. However, when they met with Steve Williams, his concern was that this would involve a very big project that will require cooperation between him, the town and the Pacheco property. She said he felt a lot of the weight was on his shoulders to pay for the necessary infrastructure so others would benefit from it. She said Mr. Williams also suggested that phasing might not work. Mr. Chalder said he felt that as the market evolves, they might be able to do things incrementally; however, Mr. Williams felt the blasting could not be done in phases and is a huge undertaking which might not be possible right now in a difficult economic climate.

Mr. Hughes said their job is to get things in place now for possible future development. Ms. Samokar said they will need to convey to the public when they roll it out to them, that this is not meant to happen tomorrow, and would take many years. She discussed the recent Channel 3 news story which was very focused on the hotel and not on the bigger picture. Since that report, the town has been receiving phone calls and they are hearing a lot more chatter in general, which prompted the meeting with Steve Werbner. She said it is important that the message does not get out of the PZC's control and they may need to do more public outreach on this. She suggested they may need to do a presentation to town staff, as well as other boards and commissions.

Mr. Cardin agreed that they need to be in control of the message, and they need to help people to understand that this concept evolved over six or seven years. He said they talked with Mr. Werbner in their meeting about taking this concept in phases, understanding that Mike Taylor in the southern side of the Tolland Village Area will be the first to move. The hotel would likely be a Phase II project. With the hotel as an anchor, others might join on and become players.

Ms. Samokar said in talking to the public, they need to share the story of Tolland—that it was once an active green that has changed over the years. Ms. Farmer said they need to put things in the context of what good planning entails with respect to smart growth and infrastructure and transportation.

Ms. Samokar reviewed three possible options for the next steps with price tags, which includes a need to determine which kinds of graphics the Commission would like to see. In Option A, additional graphics would be prepared and there would be one public workshop meeting before reviewing the results and preparing an amendment to the Plan of Conservation and Development (POCD) and drafting new regulations and design guidelines. Option B includes those same items, but adds two separate presentations beforehand to town staff and to boards and commissions seeking their input. Option C takes a more extensive approach and includes the items from Option B, but breaks up the public presentation into two separate meetings. The first meeting with the public would include a visual preference exercise, using the styles that resonated well in this exercise for additional graphics. The second public meeting workshop would review the updated concepts and graphics to solicit additional feedback.

Ms. Errickson asked what groups they had in mind to be included in the presentation to boards and commissions. Ms. Farmer said she would expect to include Inland Wetlands, the Economic Development Commission, possibly the Zoning Board of Appeals, as well as the Recreation Advisory Board, the latter which might weigh in on linkages and pathways. Ms. Errickson suggested they might want to include the Historical Society or Historical District Commission. Ms. Farmer said the public meeting should also reach out to all groups. Mr. Chalder suggested that the staff and board/commission meetings should be team building exercises, inclusive meetings that share Tolland's history and how they got to this point and the opportunities awaiting as they move forward. Mr. Scavone said they can show where they evolved from when they had a similar meeting in August of 2007, emphasizing that the PZC "listened" to their concerns back then in this new concept. He said they need to emphasize that they have been working on this for more than six years.

Mr. Hughes said he feels a key component is getting the word out to the public so they have a big turnout and suggested making the boards and commissions presentation open to as many groups as possible. Mr. Cardin said they could work with the town manager to cast a wider net for the general public meeting. Mr. Chalder said the better the word gets out, the more likely they can avoid any criticism that they were not being inclusive. He recommended that Planimetrics lead the staff and boards/commissions meetings as they understand the dialogue that needs to go on and they are at a delicate stage to get public opinion. Then they can widen the circle each time as they go forward with the message.

There was consensus that Option C would be the best choice. Ms. Errickson said the more outreach they can do, the better. Mr. Scavone's concern was whether they had enough money in their budget

to cover the costs. He did not want them to get almost to the finish only to find out they ran out of funds. Ms. Farmer said she does have some additional monies in their professional services budget that could help. Ms. Samokar said there may be a way to save dollars in the later steps without having to ask for more financial help from the town. Mr. Chalder said he would recommend they consider Option C and then rather than Planimetrics drafting the regulations for them, they could have Ms. Farmer do that part with their models and guidance. Ms. Farmer agreed that that would be a workable approach. Mr. Chalder added that they try to be a full-service company, but understand fiscal constraints and feel they can provide the most value to the PZC in the public input portions. There was consensus to go with Option C.

There was further discussion on which boards and commissions to include in the boards/commissions meeting. Ms. Farmer said she feels including Inland Wetlands would be critical. Ms. Beebe suggested they present at the same time to both Wetlands and the Design Advisory Board who both meet on the same night. Their next meetings are on November 4. Ms. Farmer said the Town Council and Economic Development are also critical. She said she could meet with the Zoning Board of Appeals and some other boards individually herself. There was consensus to set the meeting with the public for November 30.

Mr. Chalder suggested they get a list of all boards and commissions from the Town Clerk, then categorize them into three tiers, possibly running two meetings, one for the power boards and another for the rest. Ms. Farmer said she feels it is beneficial to have multiple groups in the same meeting, as it often forces groups to look at an issue from multiple perspectives. Ms. Beebe and Mr. Scavone agreed that the interplay between boards creates better dynamics.

The Commission discussed what types of additional graphics they would like to go with. Mr. Chalder had some samples from illustrator David Carico. He said Mr. Carico has an uncanny eye and is well-versed in the new urbanism concept, adding that people have an affinity for his style. On the pro side, his hand drawn sketches are inviting and attractive. On the con side, there is no ability to manipulate the view. What you see is what you get.

Another option for graphics is a computer model. On the pro side, Mr. Chalder said that once built, you can zoom in on the view from different angles. On the con side, you don't get nearly the same inviting and attractive look that you get from hand drawn illustrations.

The Commission discussed the possibility of taking aerial views of the site and then generating computerized images of what it might look like as it evolves over the years, in 2010, 2015, 2020, and so on. The Commission has \$6,000 allocated for graphics. Mr. Cardin said a sketch-up could show two architectural styles that people could determine their preference for.

Ms. Beebe agreed that it would be good to link the graphics to a timeline. She said they should emphasize what the regulations in place now would allow to be done in Tolland and that what they get isn't necessarily what they might want. She said many people don't understand that the town is trending toward strip development and that the PZC cannot prohibit development. So, it will happen. She said they need to convey that they are trying to shape development and this is a golden opportunity to do so. Ms. Errickson said that at the same time, they need to emphasize that this would be a Village Center. Ms. Farmer added that they can point to their previous exercises that showed the people in the community want to see more diverse housing stock in town.

Mr. Chalder said their office can take a digital topography of the Village Area and make a platform of the site in terms of grading. They also have a digital library where they could then slot in different types of buildings for people to get an idea how things would look. Once that model is created, they could then update it as the situation changes. Mr. Scavone saying they should then create several modules showing a progression over five-year blocks. There was consensus to go with the sketch up style, and Planimetrics was encouraged to start right away on this determining the contours from the site plan.

Mr. Barrow asked to discuss the proposed hotel. He said he cannot see a developer using a model where there would be underground parking at that site. He asked if there is a way they could show surface parking on a smaller scale. Mr. Chalder said it would be economically advantageous tax-wise for the town to transfer out the land eyed for the hotel to a private developer. He said parking will be challenging on that site, and it would be worthwhile to look at alternatives for surface parking if the original model does not work. Regarding the potential height of the building, Mr. Scavone said they should be careful not to propose development of something the town does not have the public safety equipment to care for. That being said, he suggested public safety be included in a presentation. Ms. Farmer said they would be included in the staff presentation.

Ms. Beebe said it will be important to tie the need for a base of residential development to potential commercial development. Ms. Farmer agreed that the viability of the Tolland Village Area is contingent on having adequate numbers of people living in the area. Ms. Beebe also asked if there is a way to create incentives to get the infrastructure built to get to the hotel, so they could take some of the weight off of Steve Williams' shoulders. Mr. Scavone said the town can play an important role and suggested it might tell a developer that they could have the property to build the hotel, if the developer pays for the infrastructure to get there. Mr. Chalder noted they might need to seek special State legislation with the transfer of the hotel property. He will provide some newspaper articles about towns that have done this. He also said it would be advantageous for the town to leverage its location as a transit node to UConn and bringing the commuter buses from Hartford up one more exit.

3. Adjourn: Marilee Beebe/John Hughes motion to adjourn the meeting and pay the clerk at 9:08p.m. Motion was unanimously approved.

Respectfully submitted,

Annie Gentile
Clerk