

Regular Meeting

The 1726th meeting of the Town of Stonington's Planning and Zoning Commission was held at the Stonington Board of Education Office, 40 Field Street, Pawcatuck, May 16, 2023. The meeting was called to order at 7:01 PM by Chairman Ben Philbrick. Also present for the meeting were Commissioners Ryan Deasy, Charles Sheehan, and Fred Deichmann; Alternate Gary Belke; and Acting Town Planner Samuel Alexander from the Southeastern Connecticut Council of Governments. Commissioner Lynn Conway and Alternates Marjorie Selinger and Andy Meek were not present.

Seated for the meeting were Ben Philbrick, Ryan Deasy, Chuck Sheehan, Fred Deichmann, and Gary Belke (seated for Lynn Conway).

Before beginning the agenda, Commissioner Philbrick said thank you to Samuel Alexander for his service as Interim Town Planner as this was his last meeting for this Commission. His work was hugely helpful in bridging the gap for this position.

Gayle Phoenix, Planning & Zoning Specialist, was also given huge thanks for her work during this time. She has been essential to keeping these processes and meetings running smoothly.

Minutes:

Mr. Deasy made a motion to approve the minutes of May 2, 2023. Mr. Deichmann seconded, all in favor, 5-0.

Correspondence

Mr. Alexander recommended a letter from the staff report from previous P and Z Chairs regarding short term rentals and housing affordability within Stonington. It was suggested that this be considered during the zoning regulation rewrite meetings.

Administrative Review:

23-101ZON Stonington Housing Authority – Zoning permit application for placement of a 12' x 20' pavilion at the Edythe K. Richmond Homes. Property located at 45 Sisk Drive., Pawcatuck. Assessor's Map 14 Block 14 Lot 19. Zone RH-10.

This was mentioned before the Commission as it is a structure in accessory to a single-family dwelling. It is straightforward and complies with zoning.

Mr. Deasy made a motion to approve, seconded by Mr. Sheehan, all in favor 5-0.

PZ2235SD Old Stoneridge, LLC (N. Thibeault) - Modify Stipulation of Approval #10 to indicate that the Open Space fee is payable upon the sale/transfer of ownership of both lots.

This concerns the application that was approved on April 18th. Late Friday staff received a brief from Atty. Ladwig concerning stipulation #10, which was read by Mr. Alexander. The Town Attorney felt the stipulation was improper and the commission did not have the authority to uphold the way it was written. There was a discussion about the payment schedule for the fee in lieu of open space. No action was required to be taken by the Commission, and they confirmed that the fee is payable as each lot is sold.

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Atty. Ladwig was concerned that no action will be taken. He believes stipulation #10 shall be rescinded and posed in a better form, with less vagueness. As written, it complicates matters for the building and zoning departments and the schedule of receiving the necessary permits.

The Commission had a discussion regarding their authority with this issue. Mr. Alexander states that the Town Attorney should be consulted. This discussion will continue at the next meeting once Atty. Ladwig and the Town Attorney have spoken.

Public Hearing(s):

PZ2307SUP & GPP Mystic Sahajanand, LLC (S. Cherenzia) - Special Use & Groundwater Protection Permit applications for construction of a new 80-room hotel (40,000+ sq ft) with associated landscaping & parking. Property located at 321 Liberty St., Pawcatuck. Assessor's Map 17 Block 3 Lot 4. Zone HI-60.

The Public Hearing began at 7:17 PM. Seated were Ben Philbrick, Ryan Deasy, Chuck Sheehan, Fred Deichmann, and Gary Belke.

Sergio Cherenzia, 99 Mechanic St - Mr. Cherenzia discussed the location of the lot, the approval from the Inland Wetlands & Watercourse Commission, and the location of the water course on the lot relative to the building. He discussed the challenge of wastewater pumping due to the lower elevation of the building site. The owner of the Tractor Supply lot did not allow for an easement to tie into their system. Mr. Cherenzia discussed the plan to tie into the Route 2 sewer system for a majority of the rooms that are at higher elevation. The front side of the building shows four stories, however due to being built into a slope, the rear has a fifth story built into that slope. The plumbing on that lower level will require pumping however it mostly consists of offices and a small laundry room. Mr. Cherenzia showed new plans that accommodate suggestions from the Fire Department. The applicants plan on continuing the sidewalk from Tractor Supply until the other abutting lot is reached. The lighting will be reduced to accommodate nearby properties. The stormwater basin that serves Tractor Supply is designed to also treat a development on this subject lot. The Town Engineer requested a hydrodynamic separator be used and Mr. Cherenzia confirmed that this can be accommodated. There was a discussion regarding the lack of maintenance on the property and around the stormwater basin. The handicap parking spot measurements were discussed; some are larger to accommodate handicap vans.

Mike Dion, Traffic Engineer, BL Companies, 355 Research Parkway, Meriden - Mr. Dion discussed the reasons for a traffic report, the methods of gathering data, projected traffic counts out to 2024, and the number of trips in the mornings, evenings, and weekends. This project meets the site distance criteria for intersections. The Commission discusses with Mr. Dion the line of site when taking a left onto Liberty Street, as well as the effect of the intersections to the north and south.

Mr. Cherenzia read comments from the DOT.

Tim Gerrish, Landscape Architect - Mr. Gerrish discussed the location of trees relative to the curb, the use of red maples, and their location relative to parking lot light posts. Mr. Gerrish discussed the walkway alignment and the use of signage. The Commission discussed with Mr. Gerrish the safety measures around retaining walls and the sloping of the lot; there will be approximately three-foot high vegetation in areas that are not intended for pedestrian access. The Commission discussed adding a condition for the above grade walling, and whether wheel stops should be used as an additional safety measure.

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Richard Jones, Jones & Jones Associates Architects, PC - Mr. Jones discussed the exterior wall materials and coloring that will be used. They will use 'downlights' which will not project light upwards. The ground level which requires pumping will consist of two public restrooms and a laundry room. They have removed the lights on the southern side which face a residential property.

The Commission questioned Mr. Cherenzia regarding their communication with the abutting neighbors to the south. Mr. Cherenzia stated that they spoke and the subject lot was actually purchased from the same family as those neighbors.

Public Comment in Favor: None

Public Comment Against:

Dennis Maynard, 311 Liberty St, Pawcatuck - Mr. Maynard mentioned that a meeting with Mr. Cherenzia occurred the night prior and it was the first that they were hearing of this project. He is concerned with the effect on their quality of life, lighting and noise management, traffic, water lines, and incorrect property lines on the submitted plans. The activity area submitted in the plans is adjacent to their backyard. There is no lighting buffer. Mr. Maynard was also concerned about the stormwater retention capability of the subject lot. According to Mr. Maynard, it is already nearly impossible to take a left onto Liberty Street from their driveway; there was concern regarding the higher risk of a traffic accident.

Terry Chiaradio, 311 Liberty St, Pawcatuck - Ms. Chiaradio reiterated that the left turn is already extremely difficult. Those that are inexperienced with the speed of travel on this road will be in greater danger. Ms. Chiaradio feels that they were not given ample time to prepare as they were notified the night prior to this meeting and the project has been ongoing for more than two years.

General Comments:

Carlene Donnarummo, 22 Oakwood Ave, Pawcatuck - Mrs. Donnarummo was glad to see development on Route 2 and thanks Mr. Alexander for the report. Her concern was the incomplete application and possible regulation issues. The application should be done right with the proper information; it should be amended and the new Town Planner should be allowed to analyze the application.

Ben Tamsky, 16 Broadway Ave Ext - Mr. Tamsky recommended to the commission that they receive a complete application before anything is approved.

Rebuttal:

Mr. Cherenzia - This was a complete application and this meeting was in response to staff comments. They were unable to submit the final plans in a timely manner due to awaiting comments from the Fire Department. They have been in constant contact with Mr. Alexander. Mr. Cherenzia did not agree that this application was incomplete. He understands the neighbors' concerns, however their family sold this lot to Mr. Patel, a hotel developer. The plot line issues with the driveway have been resolved, and the survey conducted through Mr. Cherenzia's office is accurate. Mr. Cherenzia is happy to further discuss the issues with the neighbors and come to resolutions. They can add a dust management system to the E&S plan. They will follow the noise ordinances. Mr. Cherenzia confirms that Westerly Water had been notified.

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Mr. Dion, Traffic Engineer, explained why a traffic light at a nearby intersection is not necessary nor is it decided by themselves. Mr. Dion discussed the recent history of accidents in this location, or lack thereof. Their speed data stated that the 85th percentile of drivers was 45 miles per hour at this location.

Ms. Chiaradio clarified that the land was sold to Mr. Patel from her relatives, not herself.

Mr. Alexander read his comments and concerns from the staff report, especially regarding the loading docks.

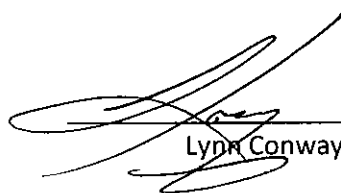
The commission would like to see a nightscape of all four sides of the building. The loading dock requirement is also a concern. An opinion should be gathered from the Town Attorney.

There is a discussion regarding retaining walls and the permitting that is associated with their construction.

Mr. Cherenzia agreed that three loading docks are not needed for this property; that requirement should be addressed in the zoning rewrite.

Mr. Deasy made a motion to continue the public hearing, seconded by Mr. Sheehan. All in favor, 5-0. (9:42 PM)

Mr. Deasy made a motion to adjourn the meeting, seconded by Mr. Deichmann. All in favor, 5-0. The meeting was adjourned at 9:43 PM.


Lynn Conway, Secretary