

Special Meeting

The 1692nd meeting of the Town of Stonington's Planning and Zoning Commission was held at the Stonington Board of Education District Office at 40 Field Street, Pawcatuck, on Tuesday, April 5, 2022. The meeting was called to order by Chairman Ben Philbrick at 7:01pm. Also present for the meeting were Commissioners Charles Sheehan, Ryan Deasy, Fred Deichmann; Alternates Marjorie Selinger, Gary Belke, and Andy Meek; and Town Planner Keith A. Brynes. Commissioner Lynn Conway was absent.

Seated for the meeting were Ben Philbrick, Fred Deichmann, Ryan Deasy, Charles Sheehan, and Andy Meek.

Minutes:

Mr. Deasy moved to approve the minutes of the March 15, 2022, meeting, seconded by Mr. Sheehan, the vote was taken 4-0-2, motion approved.

Roll call: Philbrick – approve, Sheehan – approve, Deasy – approve, Meek - abstain, Deichmann- abstain

Administrative Review:

22-055ZON 2 Lincoln Ave, LLC – Zoning Permit application for the expansion of a Retail Restaurant into adjoining Retail space. Property located at 2 Lincoln Ave., Mystic. Assessor's Map 174 Block 15 Lot 3. Zone LS-5.

Mr. Brynes summarized the application. This will be for the expansion of the existing Pasta Fresca Retail Restaurant into the space next door. Seating will remain under eight.

Mr. Deasy moved to approve the application, seconded by Mr. Deichmann, all in favor 5-0, motion approved.

22-064ZON Hunter Savannah, LLC – Zoning Permit application for a Change of Use from Auto Repair Garage to Office. Property located at 70 Alpha Ave., Stonington. Assessor's Map 79 Block 1 Lot 31. Zone LS-5.

Mr. Brynes summarized the application. The application is for the re-use of the former auto repair garage and gas station. The gas tanks and pumps were previously removed. A construction office is proposed which is a permitted as of right in the LS-5 zone. There is a tidal marsh adjacent to the property so they have recommended no clearing be allowed in that area. A proposed stipulation is also to screen the storage area. Mr. Philbrick asked about signage and lighting. Business co-owner, Christopher Smith, stated there will be no signage and the exterior of the building will have motion sensor lighting. Mr. Sheehan asked about activity near the wetlands. The applicant stated potentially storage of ladders, but no cars will be parked in that area. The propane tank is abandoned and their plans are to remove it. Mr. Deichmann asked about any activity in the state property area. The applicant would like to put in a fence and landscaping but must check with the state.

Mr. Deasy moved to approve the application with recommended stipulations, seconded by Mr. Deichmann, all in favor 5-0, motion approved.

Stipulations:

1. Adequate screening and landscaping shall be provided around storage areas prior to issuance of a Certificate of Zoning Compliance.
2. No clearing is permitted adjacent to the wetlands beyond that established in 2009 aerial photography.
3. Permit applies only to the 70 Alpha Ave. parcel.

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Old Business:

PZ2205SPA Sea Research Foundation Inc. (S. Cherenzia) - Site Plan Application for modifications of the Mystic Aquarium central courtyard including demolition/removal of the reflection pool, surrounding paved areas, walkways, and infrastructures in order to provide a more open layout and access deck. Property located at 55 Coogan Blvd., Mystic. Assessor's Map 164, Block 3, Lots 2-1 & 2-2. Zone TC-80.

Sergio Cherenzia, project engineer, opened the application. Nathan Fague, Sea Research Foundation, presented the existing conditions. The Aquarium is looking to improve the central courtyard by filling in the current pool and making it a consistent grade. They will be making the paths clearer for guests to move from exhibit to exhibit. Mr. Cherenzia presented the site plan for the renovations and reviewed the changes and stormwater management. The current area with the reflection pool does not have much use and would provide additional space for guests. David Holmes, architect, reviewed the architectural plans. They will be removing some of the canopies from the original master plan as they do not serve their original purpose and those remaining will be improved. The building is made out of concrete so they plan to install an aluminum sheeting system to add color and movement to the area. They will flatten the sawtooth office area for a cleaner look to the area. They are also proposing to remove one of the ticket booths from the front entrance during construction and then install a roll up door for easier access to the institution. Tim Gerrish, landscape architect, reviewed the proposed courtyard landscaping. There will be garden beds, seating, tables, and shade sails. The plantings are native and will bloom throughout the year. Mr. Philbrick asked about the drainage for seating underneath the sails. During a rain event the water will mostly sheet off. Mr. Deasy asked about lighting. They will have up-lighting to the shade sails and safety and security lighting. Mr. Sheehan clarified that the improvement makes ingress and egress clearer. Mr. Sheehan asked about ponding in the rain gardens. Mr. Gerrish stated they accommodate up to six inches in the smaller gardens. Mr. Cherenzia stated it has been modeled through a ten-year storm due to the limitations of the area. Additional information has been requested for the Town Engineer. The plants are designed to sustain inundation and seasonality. Mr. Sheehan asked the applicant about analyzing the effects of a 100-year storm. Mr. Belke asked how much space they are gaining through this improvement. The applicant stated that the pool is about 4,500SF and the landscaping will take up about 2,500SF.

Mr. Sheehan moved to approve the application with recommended stipulations, seconded by Mr. Deasy, all in favor 5-0, motion approved.

Stipulations:

1. Prior to issuance of a Zoning Permit, the final plans shall be signed by the Commission and recorded.
2. Final plans shall be reviewed to the satisfaction of the Town Engineer.

Public Hearing:

Adoption of the Stonington Affordable Housing Plan

Susan Cullen, Director of Economic and Community Development for the Town of Stonington, provided background information on the affordable housing plan's creation, and the process for adoption. Dr. Donald Poland presented the draft affordable housing plan. Mr. Poland spoke about the change in single household members and the increase in today's society compared to the 1960's. Mr. Poland reviewed the state statutes requiring towns to adopt an affordable housing plan, how the changes to the statutes impact zoning regulations and methods of approval, and reviewed the definition of affordable housing. Mr. Poland spoke about impact on existing properties and reviewed the current housing stock in

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Stonington and community needs. Mr. Poland reviewed the proposed strategies for affordable housing in Stonington and the proposed incentive programs. Lastly, Mr. Poland discussed implementation by different commissions.

Mr. Belke asked how the market doesn't correct for the changes in households. Mr. Poland explained that the home buying market is strong, but the home building market has substantially slowed since the 80s. Mr. Belke asked about demand for unit sizes. Mr. Meek asked about addresses affordable housing that balances environmental impact and design. Mr. Poland stated that objectively he believes modern affordable housing design is better than it has been historically. Mr. Poland talked about possibilities through an affordable housing trust fund to create what they would like to see. Mr. Deasy asked how applicants are managed for affordable housing. Mr. Poland explained the state has requirements and a third-party administrator is put in place.

Janis Mink, resident of Pawcatuck stated that she feels housing structure design is an important aspect and would like to see that as part of the venn diagram with environmental, social, and economic. Ms. Mink stated that she would like to see more craft affordable housing approach with a smaller number of units on a lot and asked what towns have done this.

Mr. Poland stated he has seen some in Wallingford and Meriden through modern duplex structures. On a national scale they have seen a movement of small houses and micro-communities. Mr. Poland spoke about challenges that exist with financing and finding developers for these projects, but municipalities can assist.

The meeting recessed at 9:07pm and reconvened at 9:15pm.

Leslie Driscoll, 59 Williams Street, Pawcatuck and member of the Architectural Design Review Board. Ms. Driscoll stated that she would like to see environmental concerns equal with social and economic concerns as addressed on page 15 of the Plan. She does not support the incentive programs presented on page 29. Ms. Driscoll also spoke about the design standards needing to be strong, noting that Pawcatuck is not post-industrial, rather property owners have neglected their responsibilities. She made recommendations for requirements to force upgrades to rental properties. Ms. Driscoll stated her support for mixed use development rather than larger apartment buildings.

Stephen Hobaica, 19 Velvet Lane, Mystic, stated he feels the plan will cause more crowding and parking issues in Mystic and focuses too much on the village districts. He endorses ideas for accessory dwelling units. He is also concerned with short-term rentals.

John Swenarton, presented comments from a group of former Planning and Zoning Commission chairs: himself, Lynn Young, Ben Tamsky, John Prue, and David Rathbun, which laid out recommended changes to the draft plan. The written comments were submitted for the record (Exhibit 8). Mr. Swenarton encouraged the commission to look at the 2008 draft plan.

Patricia Morris, resident of 5 Clark Street, the Threadmill Apartments. She spoke about the benefits of the development and re-use of the mill. She stated that the ten percent affordable housing required by the state is high. She also spoke about her granddaughters struggles with finding equitable affordable housing.

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Laura Graham, spoke against the current draft of the plan and spoke about the town's rejection of tax abatements. She feels that affordable housing is important, but feels that this plan does not fully address the issues. She recommended that developer incentives be removed, parking requirements not be reduced, and enforce blight issues.

Lynn Young, Wamphassuc Road, Stonington, spoke against the plan and feels that affordable housing is not a crisis and should not be shouldered by the town. She spoke about the disparity that is created between Pawcatuck and Mystic developments. Ms. Young submitted full written comments.

Phylcia Adams, Executive Director of the Stonington Housing Authority, spoke about their program and affordable housing eligibility requirements. They currently have a wait list of 42 households and often cannot accommodate those in emergency situations. Ms. Adams spoke about the need for assistance and affordable housing in the town.

Carlene Donnarummo, presented her comments and considerations for the plan. Ms. Donnarummo does not support some of the incentive programs, but supports a fee-in-lieu of affordable housing and a trust fund. Ms. Donnarummo supported tax abatements in the right circumstances. Lastly, she pointed out some typographical errors and understanding where the graph statistics come from. Ms. Donnarummo discussed the qualified affordable housing calculations and better understanding what is included in the stock as well as working with property owners to amend deeds to include these units that already exist. Ms. Donnarummo submitted written comments.

Ashley Gillece, spoke about the paragraph on tax abatements in the plan and stated that it feels the plan is written from a developer perspective rather than the municipality's goals. She recommended that they create an affordable housing sub-committee under the planning and zoning commission. She asked the commission to consider other options for tax abatements.

Janis Mink, encouraged re-forming an affordable housing commission.

Kevin Bowdler, EDC member, encouraged the commission to endorse the plan as it offers a menu of options for the commission to consider and ultimately decide what to implement. He spoke about single person occupied households and diversifying the housing stock. He stated that his favorite strategies were around accessory apartments, duplex requirement changes, and inclusionary zoning.

Virginia McCormack, 50 Renee Drive, Pawcatuck, agreed that there is a housing shortage and agreed with development around the Exit 92 area. She is supportive of tax abatements for quality projects. She is concerned that the majority of the plan is too beneficial to developers. She is also concerned with the lack of regulation around short-term rentals. Ms. McCormack submitted written comments.

Ben Tamsky, expressed his concern around the Exit 90 development encouraged in the plan and use of tax abatements and fee waivers. Mr. Tamsky expressed that short-term rentals and gentrification are the larger issues for affordable housing. Mr. Tamsky also encouraged looking at the 2008 draft plan.

Paul Sartor, 12 Jackson Ave, supported comments from previous speakers and recommended denial of the current draft of the plan. Mr. Sartor stated the issue of short-term rentals in Mystic. He suggests that the required minimum to meet the deadline be done now, followed by an attempt to form an advisory committee for a more comprehensive plan.

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Rob Marseglia, former chair of the Planning and Zoning Commission, spoke about balancing the rights of property owners with the neighbors. He feels this plan does not protect the residents of the town and they should reconsider the 2008 plan and distance EDC from land use. He recommended continuing to control floor area ratios. He expressed his agreement with the comments expressed by the former chairs of the PZC.

Chris Donohue, Pawcatuck resident, expressed his support of other speakers and that the plan will put a burden on the Pawcatuck Fire District and will increase disparity between Pawcatuck and the rest of the town. It also tempers necessary oversight from the commission.

Dave Hammond, Chair of the EDC, reminded the group they are a 12-member volunteer commission that makes recommendations to the best of their abilities. He expressed their support of the plan and the ability for it to provide of a variety of tools that could be used in the future. He spoke about workforce retention being supported by affordable housing.

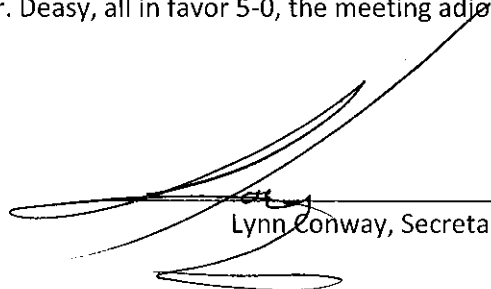
Jim Lathrop, member of the EDC spoke about growing the grand list, supporting local businesses by putting customers in walking distance, and boosting stability by allowing people to live where they work. Mr. Lathrop stated that the plan can be adopted, but the real work comes in for implementation. Mr. Lathrop stated that 8-30g applications will continue to proceed if the town continues to be under the ten percent threshold. Mr. Lathrop encouraged the commission to adopt the plan through the use of these creative strategies to take control back from 8-30g applications.

David Brown, stated his support of the Campbell Grain project and expressed concern with misinformation surrounding the development. He stated that he does not have an opposition to tax abatements and they have been used successfully. He expressed his support of the recent affordable housing developments and the plan.

Town Planner, Keith Brynes, clarified that this plan is not being proposed to be part of the POCD and will be a standalone guidance document. The plan does recommend tax abatements for existing homeowners. It does not address Stonington Borough, just the Town. Mr. Brynes recommended a special meeting to give time for ample discussion by the Commission. A date and place for the meeting will be arranged.

Mr. Sheehan moved to close the public hearing, seconded by Mr. Sheehan, all in favor 5-0, motion approved.

Mr. Meek moved to adjourn, seconded by Mr. Deasy, all in favor 5-0, the meeting adjourned at 11:00pm.



Lynn Conway, Secretary