

Special Meeting

The 1641st meeting of the Town of Stonington's Planning and Zoning Commission was held Tuesday, August 6, 2019, at the Mystic Middle School, 204 Mistuxet Avenue, Mystic, CT. The meeting was called to order by Chairman David Rathbun at 7:00pm. Also present were Commissioners Shaun Mastroianni, Ben Philbrick, and Gardner Young; Alternates Fred Deichmann and Lynn Conway; Town Planner Keith Brynes, and Director of Planning Jason Vincent. Commissioner Curtis Lynch and Alternate Peter Chomowicz were not in attendance.

Seated for the meeting were David Rathbun, Ben Philbrick, Gardner Young, Shaun Mastroianni, and Fred Deichmann.

Minutes:

Mr. Philbrick moved to approve the minutes of the June 17, 2019, June 18, 2019, and July 8, 2019, meetings, seconded by Mr. Mastroianni, all in favor 5-0, motion approved.

Administrative Review:

19-125ZON Thirty Eight, LLC (C. Georgetti) – Zoning Permit application for change of use from Office to Personal Services. Permit includes sign. Property located at 38 East Main St, Mystic. Assessors Map 174 Block 18 Lot 13. Zone LS-5.

The applicants are requesting a change of use in an area of an existing building. There is no change in parking demand and the proposal meets the bulk and use requirements of the zone. Signage will be changed for the new business.

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

19-144ZON Michael Lachance (J. Gibbs) – Zoning Permit application to construct an accessory structure (garage/studio). Property located at 4 Rossie St, Mystic. Assessors Map 173 Block 4 Lot 30. Zone MHD.

The applicant is asking to add a detached garage for an office/studio. The property was previously owned by Mystic Seaport Museum, therefore zoned MHD. The Seaport sold it and it is the current owner's residence. The MHD zone requires a 20-foot setback that the Commission has the option to vary, with additional screening required if necessary. The garage will not have a dwelling unit. Mr. Deichmann asked if there are objections from the neighbors. There was no comment received on the application. Mr. Philbrick questioned if it was a recording studio, the applicant responded it was not.

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

CGS 8-24 Review – Town of Stonington municipal improvements – sidewalks.

The commission must make a determination if the improvements are consistent with the Plan of Conservation and Development for municipal improvements. The town is exploring sidewalk improvement throughout town to connect neighborhoods and connect existing sidewalks.

Mr. Mastroianni moved that the plan conforms to the Plan of Conservation and Development, seconded by Mr. Young, all in favor 5-0, motion approved.

Special Meeting

Public Hearing:

PZ1916ZC Mystic Seaport Museum (C. Frost) – Master Plan Zone Change application for changes to current MHD properties/structures, including construction of 2 buildings for a Science & Exploration Center and demolition & reconstruction of a restaurant with a boutique hotel. Properties located off Greenmanville Ave., Rossie St., Williams St., & Bruggeman Pl., Mystic. Zone MHD.

Attorney John Casey summarized the application on behalf of the applicant. The site was rezoned in 2005 to better fit the property and allow the property to evolve. The applicant is presenting an amendment for the fifth time since its rezoning to the MHD zoning district. Twelve projects on site will be presented, some of which will require additional approvals should this application be approved. For example, the proposed demolition and reconstruction of the restaurant and boutique hotel, and construction of the science and exploration center are required to come back for a site plan level review prior to final approval.

Steve White, president of Mystic Seaport Museum, gave a brief overview of their operations and presented the thought behind the proposed projects. For the past three years, the museum has been undergoing a strategic planning process for the future to continue the life of the museum.

Chad Frost, presented the proposed master plan changes to the site. The first project is the science and exploration center proposed at the rear of the south parking lot next to the existing Mystic Williams college, which will house the Global Foundation for Ocean Exploration. Ken Wilson, Director of Facilities spoke about the center's desire to expand their presence at the museum for additional research and development. The building would be built in two phases of 6,000SF, the first moving their research from RI to the facility and the second to build a tank to test their submersible vehicles. The current height proposal is about a story and a half and would meet the 35-foot height requirement. They are still working on site plan level detail for the future application. No parking would be eliminated. The second project proposed is the demolition of the current Latitude 41 and reconstruction of a restaurant and construction of a boutique hotel. The larger building will be pushed back from the road and two smaller buildings would be located closer to the road to continue the look and feel of smaller buildings along Route 27 better. The new building would be built to current FEMA standards for the flood zone unlike the current building on site. The structure needs substantial improvement which triggers the requirement for FEMA standards. The building is not original to the site and was built by the Seaport in the 1960s. The commission discussed the height of the building. The applicants are still working on the proposed height for the site plan application. The commission expressed confusion over the two larger projects that need to come back for additional approval.

Mr. Casey explained that they are trying to be transparent about what they are planning and prepare the commission for what they are going to be proposing. They are only hoping for approval on the ten smaller projects. Once the items are removed from the approval there are no time plan issues. Mr. Philbrick raised questions on access and parking to the hotel/restaurant. They are proposing a valet loop for drop off access. Mr. Deichmann asked the applicant to address the easement and access with the neighboring property. Ms. Conway requested that the future application have very detailed views from all four sides and how it would look with the existing property. The proposed building is 115 feet closer to the water than the existing building. There will be a reduction in the number of seats in the new restaurant so even with the hotel addition the parking demand of the two facilities will be reduced. The south lot will be reconfigured for the exploration center which may result in a net gain of spots as well.

Special Meeting

Project three is a proposed expansion of the existing Galley building on site. With the removal of Latitude 41 restaurant, additional space is needed for preparation for that restaurant. The proposed addition will match the current architecture of the building. It will be a single-story structure of about 1,000 - 1,200SF. They will bring back the details for site plan level review. Mr. Vincent explained they can stipulate height in the approval. Mr. Wilson explained that they must come before the commission for master plan approval and then submit site plans prior to construction.

Project four is to renovate the interior of Rossie Mill building so that the public can tour the building.

Project five is a temporary staging area for the tent that has been used for the Mayflower restoration which they would like to repurpose for storage during the Rossie Mill renovations. They will work with staff on a suitable location. The tent will be shorter by 14 feet and be up for only 1-3 years.

Project six is a handicap ramp for the building that is currently onsite, interior to the museum.

Project seven is for signage updates to remove several small signs and install two monument signs and remove the large sign in front of Rossie Mill.

Project eight is for the Catboat shed expansion to further the education space for wooden boat building. It will be a single-story addition.

Project nine is for the removal of the gazebo on the green.

Project ten is for the sale of the Balestracci property which has been sold and redeveloped by the owner.

Project eleven is for solar panels to be located behind the Rossie Mill. The panels will not be visible to the public.

Project twelve is for the relocation of the north and south restrooms for ease of access.

Mr. Casey summarized the application and reviewed the requested waivers. Mr. Casey explained how the project conforms with the plan of conservation and development. Mr. Casey reviewed the water dependent use study and comment by DEEP that they are adding another non-water dependent use on the waterfront. There are already overnight guests on site on boats and they currently have that use. This application will be for a non-water dependent use for something that is already a non-water dependent use they are not planning to take away something that is existing. There are multiple water dependent uses on site already as well.

Mr. Brynes read DEEP's comments into the record.

Mr. Casey responded to the comments though they are not requesting approval for the hotel/restaurant and Science and Exploration Center buildings tonight. Though DEEP states the use will be intensified, the restaurant will be much smaller and the banquet facilities will reduce the number of weddings. The building is only proposed to be moved 100 feet, which is not significant and the building will be built above FEMA standards which will be much more compliant in comparison to the existing building. Hotel guests are transient and can return to their homes in a storm event or be relocated to other properties. This building will not prohibit water dependent uses of the docks in front of the building and a walkway is

Special Meeting

likely along the water with possible connectivity to the neighboring site. Pushing the building back from the road actually opens up sightlines from Route 27. Ms. Conway asked about current guests on site. Mr. White explained that some are staying on boats, students are staying in the Williams Street Buildings or the James Konrad ship currently. Mr. White explained many boaters come to them for storm events due to the safety of the harbor which may rise but does not experience waves or surges. Route 27 has flooded during some major storm events such as Sandy and Irene. There is no other place on site to relocate the use that is not in the flood zone. Mr. Vincent discussed the definition of coastal flood hazard area for the Town of Stonington as compared to the DEEP. If the hotel were to be located there would be an extensive emergency response plan. The WPCA moratorium would also be something to be addressed before an application can be made. The proposed hotel/restaurant is proposed for construction January 2021. The exploration center is planned to come in the next few months. The WPCA expects the moratorium to be lifted by fall 2020 which is around the planned time of occupation. Restrooms on site could possibly be swapped if necessary and it was their recommendation to have the applicant move forward. Ms. Conway asked how the waterfront would change with the proposed hotel for boat dockage. It will remain the same because it is bulkhead access, not slips.

The meeting recessed at 9:02pm and reconvened at 9:08pm.

Public Comment in Favor:

Peggy Roberts, resident of Stonington and president of the Greater Mystic Chamber of Commerce, whose offices neighbor the museum, spoke in favor of the application as an important economic driver for the community and the reputation of the Greenwich Hospitality Group. The building being pushed back with easier drop off access and possible connectivity to the neighboring park would be positive.

Public Comment Against:

James Tennant, resident of 16 Hinckley Street, raised concern with potential increased commercialization and overnight accommodations. He feels it would be outside their mission and is concerned with potential height of the building and access. He also is concerned with traffic and congestion at that point. He is concerned about access and egress to the exploration center from the neighborhood potentially. He recommended not approving the first two projects as proposed. He questioned the placement of the tent and staff reviewed the potential location in the lot.

Mary Henderson, resident of 20 Rossie Street, stated she attended the Seaport's neighborhood meeting and another commission's meeting and is concerned with traffic potential. There are currently extensive issues and entrances/exits should be examined. She agrees with DEEP comments on the hotel being in a flood zone and is also concerned with height.

General Comment:

Joan Balestracci, resident of 20 Hinckley Street, stated her admiration for the museum but expressed her distaste for a hotel being located on site. She is concerned with the potential limitation to the weddings on site and if there is one on site, that it be low and keep with the town. She also stated issue with traffic getting to I-95.

Ben Tamsky, resident of Mystic, restated comments from DEEP and his concern with the hotel. Mr. Tamsky raised concern with placement of a hotel in a flood zone and lack of water dependent use.

Steve Hobaica, 19 Velvet Lane, stated he would like language on a timeframe for the tent to be erected and that the tent be for storage only and not work and the least amount of visibility.

Special Meeting

James Short, resident of Denison Avenue asked the commission to consider traffic on Route 27.

Sansie Evans, resident of Old Mystic, environmentalist, spoke about her concern with the hotel and flooding onsite due to sea level rise. She stated her support for the museum, but does not agree the hotel is appropriate for the site. She feels they need to be more forward thinking for the future of the area.

Jim Stanton, questioned whether the hotel will be paying property taxes. The applicant responded they will. Mr. Stanton also asked that the applicant work with the park to align the access with the stoplight.

Rebuttal:

Mr. Casey addressed the traffic concerns and explained that they asked for the waivers for this application, however a complete traffic study will be done for the future applications for the hotel and the exploration center. They will be working with the neighboring boat park facility on egress as well as the state traffic authority. Mr. Wilson explained the tent is an existing structure designed for the Mayflower but they are removing the section that they are able to, to make it 35 feet. It would be erected for 2-3 years. Mr. Casey reiterated that there will be water dependent uses on site and the diversification of uses keeps the Seaport able to function for years to come. There are requirements in the zone to keep tourism on the water side and administration on the other side of Route 27. Stormwater management would be a part of the plan for the new building which would be an improvement over the existing site. The Seaport does not feel there would be an increased risk to people on site with the hotel. The applicant is requesting full master plan approval for projects three through twelve as proposed. Projects one and two will come back before the commission for master plan and site plan approval.

Mr. Brynes reviewed the statement of purpose for the Maritime Heritage District. Mr. Brynes also reviewed outside agency comments. Mr. Brynes reviewed the height limits for the future application. Mr. Brynes reviewed the recommended stipulations to removed projects one and two, location and time duration of the tent, and height limit of the galley addition.

Ms. Conway stated that the realistic renderings of the view will be imperative for a future application as well as a light pollution study.

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

Mr. Mastroianni moved to approve the application with five stipulations, the requested waivers, and its conformance with the Plan of Conservation and Development and Coastal Management Act, seconded by Mr. Young, all in favor 5-0, motion approved.

Stipulations:

1. Master Plan approval does not include proposed changes #5.1 and #5.2 (hotel/restaurant building and Science and Exploration Center).
2. Temporary tent shall be up for a maximum of 2 years and used only for storage.
3. Master Plan may include relocating the temporary tent further to the south.
4. Proposed detached signs shall not be illuminated.
5. Proposed change #5.3 shall not exceed the building height of building #50 (of which it is an addition to). Architectural design shall be contemporaneous to building #50.

Special Meeting

PZ1915SUP Whaler's Inn Acquisition, LLC (W. Sweeney) - Special Use Permit application to increase existing seating in former restaurant from 60 to 100 seats and operate under a hotel liquor permit, with the possible merger of the two lots. Properties located at 20 East Main St. and 9 Cottrell St., Mystic. Assessors Map 182 Block 4 Lots 13 & 3. Zone DB-5.

The applicant has requested that the Public Hearing be opened and immediately continued to the 8/20/19 meeting.

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

Mr. Mastroianni moved to adjourn, seconded by Mr. Deichmann, all in favor 5-0, the meeting adjourned at 10:14pm.



Shaun Mastroianni, Secretary