

Special Meeting

The 1645th meeting of the Town of Stonington's Planning and Zoning Commission was held Tuesday, October 1, 2019, at the Stonington Middle School, formerly known as Mystic Middle School, 204 Mistuxet Avenue, Mystic, CT. The meeting was called to order by Chairman David Rathbun at 7:00 pm. Also present for the meeting were Commissioners Ben Philbrick and Gardner Young; Alternates Lynn Conway and Peter Chomowicz; and Town Planner Keith Brynes. Alternate Fred Deichmann and Director of Planning Jason Vincent and were not in attendance.

Seated for the meeting David Rathbun, Gardner Young, Ben Philbrick, Lynn Conway, and Peter Chomowicz.

Minutes:

Mr. Philbrick moved to approve the minutes of the September 17, 2019 meeting, seconded by Mr. Young. The vote was taken 4-0-1, motion approved. Mr. Rathbun abstained.

Roll Call: Philbrick – approve, Chomowicz - approve, Conway – approve, Young – approve, Rathbun – abstain

Administrative Review:

PZ1833ZC & SPA Lattizori – Revised landscape plan for minor change to the Hartford HealthCare (HHC) entrance to make the ADA walkway in the front door all concrete rather than pavers. Property located at 100 Perkins Farm Dr., Mystic. Assessors Map 150 Block 2 Lot 5. Zone GDD.

Mr. Brynes summarized the request. The applicant is requesting to change to concrete for the whole walkway rather than pavers for better ADA accessibility. Ms. Conway was concerned with the continuous requests for changes. She also suggested stamping the concrete for a pattern.

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

Public Hearings:

Ben Philbrick was seated as the acting secretary.

PZ1921SUP Thirty Eight, LLC (S. Nousiopoulos) - Special Use Permit application to permit residential mixed-use in an existing commercial structure (ZR 6.6.21). Proposal is for an approximate 1,000SF one-bedroom dwelling unit. Property located at 38 East Main St., Mystic. Assessors Map 174 Block 18 Lot 13. Zone LS-5.

Stephan Nousiopoulos presented the application on behalf of the applicant. The proposal is for the conversion of an existing commercial unit in the property to a residential one-bedroom apartment, allowing for a reduction in the parking requirements. No additional plumbing fixtures are proposed, therefore, not adding to the sewer (WPCA) requirements. Mr. Young stated that is the jurisdiction of the WPCA. Ms. Conway asked what is currently in the building. The lower level is a Financial office, and there is an acupuncturist office (Personal Services) on the second floor. A portion of the second floor would be used for the apartment. Mr. Chomowicz asked if there would be any construction. There will not be construction to outfit the space. The owner intends to occupy the apartment at this time.

No Public Comment

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Mr. Brynes reviewed the regulations and recommended stipulations. Ms. Conway asked if they can limit it to single occupancy. Mr. Brynes stated he does not believe so, but the building permit cannot be issued without WPCA approval.

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

Ms. Conway moved to approve the application with stipulations, seconded by Mr. Young, all in favor 5-0, motion approved.

Stipulation:

1. Two parking spaces shall be signed as dedicated for residential use.

PZ1923ZC 1189 Pequot Trail, LLC (R. Valenti) – Master Plan Zone Change application from the existing GBR-130 zone to the Agricultural Heritage District (AHD) zone. The proposed master plan seeks to preserve the farm and buildings and to stimulate economic activity by creating a campus for agriculture, livestock, equestrian activities, education, and events. The subject site, the former Dean’s Mill Farm, is located at 1189 Pequot Trail, Stonington, CT. Assessor’s Map 135 Block 2 Lot 1. Zone GBR-130.

Robert Valenti presented the application and asked about submitting additional information. Mr. Valenti stated that they have purchased Dean’s Mill Farm and are currently operating an equestrian center and have renovated the fields. The farm has been operated as a farm since the 1800s. The applicant has received approval for a Bed and Breakfast, but feels that the Agricultural Heritage District will give the property a sustainable future. There is an opportunity for the center to be re-used for events and weddings that will allow them to bring in additional commerce to sustain the horse farm. The property fits the basic requirements of the zone. They do not plan any additional construction, but would like to be able to use the property in creative ways. There are 57 parking spaces, but additional parking can be available on the cleared fields for events. The conservation commission approved the application. The Police Chief and Police Commissioners have visited the property and made suggestions which have been incorporated. The fire department has visited as well and the property has a fire alarm system. The facility is set back a half mile from Pequot Trail and is far from neighboring properties. Mr. Young asked for clarification on which building is the main home. Mr. Philbrick asked about the forestry on property. Mr. Valenti stated parts were lumbered by previous owners, they have mostly focused on reclaiming the fields. Mr. Chomowicz asked the intent for changing the zone, because the current zone allows them to do much of what they are hoping to do. Mr. Valenti stated there are some more uses allowed by right in the AHD zone. Ms. Conway asked about the available parking. They can accommodate 88 spaces in the field. There is currently no lighting but temporary could be brought in. The existing parking does have lighting around the arena. Mr. Chomowicz asked about the animal waste. Mr. Valenti stated it is taken off site and Aquarion Water Co. has been monitoring it. Mr. Philbrick asked if they plan to use a tent for events. Mr. Valenti stated that based on space, it would be possible. He is unsure how often they would host events at this time, it will depend on demand and their resources.

Public Comment in Favor:

Peggy Roberts, president of the Greater Mystic Chamber of Commerce spoke in favor of the application. The project will preserve open space as well as have a positive impact on the community. Stone Acres has been operating well since their approval.

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Debbie Valenti stated that the project began with her desire to have a horse and they have worked hard to maintain the health of the farm. She would like to have educational programs on site in the future to benefit the community. The events on the property would allow them to be able to financially maintain the property and give back to the community.

Jennifer Brinton, chair of the Ocean Community Chamber of Commerce and owner of Grey Sail Brewing, spoke as a wedding and event planner about the importance of facilities like this, noting there is a significant amount of clientele looking for the opportunity this property can provide.

Lisa Konicki, president of the Ocean Community Chamber of Commerce, spoke about the positive impact of Stone Acres Farm and its benefit to the community. This project will do the same for the community and is thoughtful and balanced. She attended a wedding there in 2001 and it had no negative impact on the community. Ms. Konicki spoke to the character of the Valenti family and their dedication to the community.

Chris Regan, resident of Stonington and owner of Olde Mistick Village stated he lives about a mile away from Stone Acres Farm and has not been impacted by their events. They sit so far back from the road it is unlikely to have a negative impact.

Maureen Fitzgerald, CEO of the Ocean Community YMCA, spoke about the Valenti family's support of the region and their idea to have some collaborative learning at the farm.

Public Comment Against:

Michael Urso, resident of 35 Deer Ridge Road, stated they moved here three years ago for the peaceful community and is concerned with the community's quality of life being diminished as well as traffic in the area.

Greg Broadbent, currently building a home at 1215 Pequot Trail, stated that though he understands the Valentis are good people and have good intentions but is concerned with the longevity of the property with future owners and the uses that are possible in the future. He is concerned with the potential for the business to fail and what could be done after that. He does not feel it has been continuously operated as a farm, and the neighborhood has seen it as a forest. He feels it will devalue the neighborhood by losing the quiet nature of the surrounding area. He is also concerned with traffic in the area and accidents. He has been circulating a petition for property owners against the application. He requested that the hearing be continued for more time to research and speak with property owners.

Lou lovino, resident of 9 Jacobs Way, stated his property is near a rear access road and was concerned with the impact on the neighborhood were it to become used as a thoroughfare. He is concerned about future owners being allowed to make significant changes to the property.

Christian Rollins, resident of 27 Deer Ridge Road, stated they were in favor of the horse farm and bed and breakfast. He is concerned about the wedding potential and music traveling through to their property.

Karen Rollins, stated they are in favor of the intention of the property but are concerned with noise traveling to their property and the potential traffic generated because people cut through their neighborhood.

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General Comments:

Chuck Sneddon, spoke about his support of the floating zone and this zone's benefit to protect the property. Mr. Sneddon stated that at the site plan level the commission can then make detailed changes to control the use of the property and handle neighbor concerns.

Stephen Coan, resident of Stonington, asked the commission to focus on the zone change tonight and address the issues in the master plan process to protect the neighbors. The parcel is well suited to be designated under this floating zone.

Public Comment Against:

Kim Urso, resident of 35 Deer Ridge Road, stated that she is concerned with the noise and traffic and that there is too much focus on the events.

Rebuttal:

Rob Valenti thanked the public for their comments. Project attorney, Rich Cody, spoke about the exhibits they would like to submit about the history of the farm as rebuttal evidence. The property has been part of the State of Connecticut Division of Forestry PA-490 program since the 1960's and was harvested as recently as 2014.

Mr. Chomowicz asked about the standards to qualify for the Forestry designation. Attorney Cody explained that it is certified by the state. Mr. Valenti stated they survey the property and itemize the available trees. Ms. Conway asked if they had evidence of harvests over the past 25 years.

Mr. Brynes discussed the zone change and master plan process. Mr. Brynes stated there is not currently a policy on a number of weddings/events for a threshold. Mr. Brynes discussed the petition and whether it forces a supermajority vote. The petition will need to be certified by staff.

Mr. Chomowicz moved to continue the public hearing to November 4, 2019, seconded by Ms. Conway, all in favor 5-0, motion approved.

Ms. Conway moved to adjourn, seconded by Mr. Young, all in favor 5-0, the meeting adjourned at 8:45pm.



Ben Philbrick, Acting Secretary