

Regular Meeting

The 1588th meeting of the Town of Stonington's Planning and Zoning Commission was held Tuesday, March 21, 2017, 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 for the meeting were Commissioners Curtis Lynch, Frances Hoffman, Gardner Young, and Shaun Mastroianni; Alternates Lynn Conway and Harry Boardsen; Town Planner Keith A. Brynes, and Director of Planning Jason Vincent.

Seated for the meeting were David Rathbun, Shaun Mastroianni, Curtis Lynch, Frances Hoffman, and Gardner Young.

Minutes:

Ms. Hoffman moved to approve with a correction, the minutes of the March 7, 2017 meeting, seconded by Mr. Lynch, all in favor 5-0 motion approved.

Administrative Review:

17-037ZON Goran & Aleksander Subotic – Zoning Permit application for change of mixed use commercial/residential to residential 2-family. Property located at 9 Allen St., Mystic. Assessor's Map 161 Block 18 Lot 7. Zone LS-5.

Mr. Brynes summarized the application and explained the recommended stipulations. The applicant is requesting a change of use from partially commercial to full residential as it has not been used as a commercial use for some time.

Ms. Hoffman moved to approve the application with the two stipulations recommended by staff, seconded by Mr. Lynch, all in favor 5-0, motion approved.

Stipulations:

1. Each dwelling unit is limited to no more than 4 unrelated people per the definition of "family" in Section 1.2.2.
2. Plans must conform to all relevant Building and Fire Codes.

Old Business:

PZ1701BR 30 Extrusion, LLC (Carl Bardy, Jr.) – Bond Release/Reduction application for work performed for the construction of a 28,700± square foot mini-warehouse storage facility. Property located at 30 Extrusion Dr., Pawcatuck. Assessor's Map 36 Block 4 Lot 2E. Zones M-1 & RR-80.

The Town Engineer has commented that although many of his original comments were addressed, the site has still not been fully stabilized. His recommendation is that only fifty percent of the bond should be released at this point due to outstanding erosion and sedimentation control issues. Due to the weather, the site has not been fully stabilized; this will be easier later in the Spring.

Ms. Hoffman moved to approve a bond release of fifty percent of the total \$15,800 bond amount, which is a reduction of \$7,900; seconded by Mr. Lynch. All in favor 5-0, motion approved.

The meeting recessed at 7:15pm and reconvened at 7:30pm.

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Public Hearing 7:30pm:

PZ1702ZC Stone Acres Farm, LLC – Master Plan Zoning Change application from the existing RR-80 zone to the Agricultural Heritage District (AHD) zone. The proposed master plan seeks to revitalize and preserve the property and to stimulate economic activity by creating a campus for food, education, and events. The subject site, Stone Acres Farm, is located at 381 North Main St., Stonington, CT. Assessor's Map 81 Block 1 Lot 2. Zone RR-80.

Applicant representative, Attorney William Sweeney, began by summarizing the application and its intent. The applicants' purpose is to preserve the farm but also to have a positive economic impact on the community. The farm has been in the family of the investors of the property for nine generations. The application is for a zone change to the Agricultural Heritage District (AHD) through the Master Plan process. To implement any phase of this Master Plan the applicant would need to return for subsequent Site Plan approval which also requires a public hearing. Mr. Sweeney provided a history of the farm and its work since the 1700s. Though the farm is currently still functioning, it does not allow for much economic growth and vitality. The owners are hoping to add ancillary uses to the property to stay economically viable while preserving Stonington's cultural landscape. Agricultural use will be the primary use of the farm even with Master Plan development. Additional uses will contribute to the life of the farm with small artisan shops, a farm to table restaurant, nano-brewery, teaching kitchen, and an outdoor tent for seasonal events. The homes on site will remain single family residences and will not be available for public rental. They also plan to begin a non-profit to focus on education of agriculture and cuisine.

Adrian Nial, landscape architect, reviewed the property in its current state and its relation to the community. Mr. Nial reviewed the layout of proposed uses on the site. Parking will be located away from the central uses on site to maintain a pedestrian friendly environment. The applicant is proposing some new buildings to house new uses to the rear of the existing buildings. Mr. Nial presented the proposed traffic circulation as well as an alternative that is more agreeable to neighbors which relocates the main vehicular entrance further to the south. Mr. Nial presented the 3-D renderings into the site from North Main Street.

Joeb Moore, project architect, presented the campus plan and the thought behind it. The applicant is proposing four different key areas of focus, heritage, artisanal work, agrarian practices, and market place. Mr. Moore reviewed each building and its proposed uses. Mr. Moore explained that the National Department of Interior's historic preservation guidelines recommend that new structures that are part of a historic property should not try to match the design of existing historic architecture. Such buildings should show a clear progression of the past to the present.

Mr. Sweeney reviewed the general plan for stormwater management which will be further developed in the Site Plan process. The applicant proposes to have the minimal site and building lighting that is needed for safety and lights will have the ability to be turned off when not in use. The applicant is also working on managing utilities on site. The applicant is proposing 161 permanent and overflow parking spaces located off of the main vehicular circulation drive. The Police Commission has reviewed the Master Plan, including the parking layout and issued a favorable review. The applicant has studied its future uses and peak times for visitation. In the unlikely event that additional parking is needed there is additional space on site. A traffic study has been completed determining that during the peak times there will be three cars per minute coming in or out of the property. This level of visitation will not adversely impact area intersections. The applicant does not plan to seek any access to Route 1 as it is not feasible and would disrupt the layout of the property.

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The applicant's fiscal impact study determined that the project will have a positive fiscal impact to the Town of \$70,000 in taxes annually. The project will also provide 20 full time positions as well as many seasonal employees. There will be a great deal of economic benefit from the activities supported by the property. A subdivision of single family homes on this property would create a negative economic impact to the Town due to education costs. The application has been reviewed favorably by a 3rd party planning consultant with several detailed comments to be addressed at the Site Plan stage. Mr. Sweeney reviewed the proposal's conformance with the Town's Plan of Conservation and Development through its preservation of cultural and natural resources. The Master Plan dictates the property's uses and binds any owner of the property to those uses without additional Commission approvals.

Mr. Rathbun asked for clarification on the proposed outdoor tent. Mr. Sweeney stated that the tent will be up for special events in June through October and taken down when not in use so the grass can be maintained. Mr. Sweeney clarified that the zoning remains with the land regardless of ownership and cannot be changed without approval of the Commission. Ms. Hoffman clarified that the water and septic must be reviewed in detail to ensure that the property will support the activities for the site plan. Mr. Young raised the question of whether the applicant would operate AirBnB/short term rentals in the residences. Mr. Sweeney stated the applicant will not have the residences available for public rental. Should they plan to change that, the applicants should consult with the Commission on whether it would be required. Ms. Conway asked for clarification on the applicants' plan for events and its economic impact to the project and whether the use qualifies as an ancillary use. Mr. Sweeney stated that the percentage of income from events is not known at this time. The events are ancillary due to their limited time (approximately 20 per year) and limited location on the site. Ms. Conway questioned whether the farm will produce the products for beer production. Mr. Sweeney responded that a partner will be responsible for production, but it is a possibility that products will come from the farm.

Public Comment in Favor:

Joyce Resnikoff, owner of Olde Mistick Village, spoke in support of the application and its homage to the history of the land as well as the advantages it brings to the community.

Chris Regan, resident of Stonington and co-owner of Olde Mistick Village, spoke in support of the application and its innovative use, which is a better alternative than solar farming done on many farms. The use will also support the tourism industry, bringing visitors and economic growth to the community.

Larry Davis, owner of Davis Farm in Pawcatuck, spoke in support of the application and explained the difficulties of keeping a farm economically viable. In order for farms to be preserved they must be economically sustainable.

Lisa Konicki, president of the Ocean Community Chamber of Commerce, spoke in support of the application and stated that agri-tourism business is on the rise and can benefit the community. Ms. Konicki emphasized that events take a small percentage of the hours of work put into the property compared to farming.

Bill Middleton spoke in support of the adaptive reuse of the property and its benefit to the community.

Juliet Hodge, Town resident and Town Planner in North Stonington spoke in support of the application and the planning that went into it as well as the plan's ability to attract and retain a younger demographic to support the vitality of the community.

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Tim Murray, business owner and resident in town spoke in support of the application and its example of the goals of the Plan of Conservation and Development for quality development.

Dave Hammond, chair of the Economic Development Commission, spoke in support of the application and submitted the EDC's written letter of support.

Erica Lindberg Gore, resident of North Main Street, spoke in favor of the application.

Elizabeth Wood, resident of Stonington, spoke in support of the application and its historic preservation.

James Wayman, chef and owner of two restaurants in Mystic and business partner of co-applicant, Dan Meiser, spoke in support of the application. The applicants have invested in the local community and will continue to focus on quality local food at this location.

Jennifer Rothman, new resident of Mystic and educator with a history in farm-based education, spoke in support of the application and its impact on their decision to move to this community.

Beth Tillman, co-owner of Firefly Farms, spoke in support of the application and the Commission's care in creating this tool. Ms. Tillman also expressed her admiration for the applicant's constraint in not taking this request too far. The Commission should not include specific restrictions to their operations.

Dan Brown, co-owner of Firefly Farms, spoke in support of the application and spoke about the difficulty of farming. Mr. Brown commended the preservation of the historic integrity of the as well as its new uses that compliment the existing buildings and uses.

Wendy Bury, resident and Executive Director of the Southeastern CT Cultural Coalition, spoke in support of the application and its benefit to the community through its cultural and heritage based uses.

Public Comment Against:

Kevin Blacker, resident of Noank and farmer in Stonington, stated that he is concerned with the precedent this sets for production farms that rely on rented land and potential negative impacts on other farms. Mr. Blacker also asked whether tax exemptions were calculated into the fiscal impact study.

Rebuttal:

Mr. Sweeney stated that personal property exemptions were taken into account in the fiscal impact study calculations.

Mr. Brynes stated that the application has met the minimum standards of the new AHD zone and the rest of the Master Plan review is up to the discretion of the commission. A 3rd party planning consultant has reviewed the application and provided comments, many of which would be addressed at the Site Plan level. Mr. Brynes reviewed the recommended stipulations by staff. Mr. Boardsen asked to hear from the counsel of the neighboring property.

Paul Geraghty, attorney for the neighboring property owners at 435 N. Main St., spoke in support of the application with the alternate vehicular access and traffic circulation further to the south.

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

Mr. Lynch moved that the plan is in conformance with the Plan of Conservation and Development and Comprehensive Plan; seconded by Ms. Hoffman. All in favor 5-0, motion approved.

Ms. Hoffman moved to approve the application with six stipulations recommended by staff; seconded by Mr. Mastroianni. All in favor 5-0, motion approved. Effective date of the approval is 4/10/17.

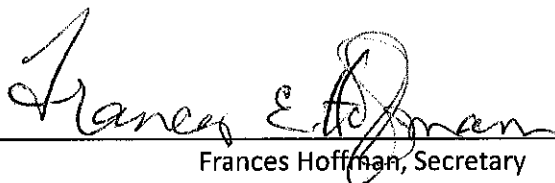
Stipulations:

1. Approval does not preclude future access to Route 1. Should access to Route 1 be sought by the applicant, a Site Plan Amendment and CT Department of Transportation approval would be required.
2. Unreasonable light pollution / glare from any farm implements (e.g., greenhouses) will be mitigated by the property owner upon an instance of documented proof of impact (e.g., photograph) and independent verification.
3. The main vehicular access drive shall be relocated to the alternate southern location presented by the applicant at the 3/21/17 hearing; the direction of traffic flow shall be reversed from the original proposal.
4. Any additional electrical and/or utility lines shall be located underground.
5. Maximum number of guests for events shall be 250.
6. All outdoor events shall end by 10:00PM.

PZ1706SUP Sea Research Foundation, Inc. – Special Use Permit application for a new 18,050 SF office building, installation of a walk-in freezer, relocation & expansion of propane tanks, parking lot modifications, landscaping and associated site improvements. Property located at 55 Coogan Blvd., Mystic. Assessor's Map 164 Block 3 Lot 2. Zone TC-80.

Mr. Lynch moved to continue the application to April 18, 2017; seconded by Mr. Mastroianni. All in favor 5-0, motion approved.

Mr. Mastroianni moved to adjourn; seconded by Mr. Young. All in favor 5-0, the meeting adjourned at 10:09pm.



Frances Hoffman, Secretary