

Special Meeting

The 1591st meeting of the Town of Stonington's Planning and Zoning Commission was held Tuesday, May 2, 2017, at the Mystic Middle School, 204 Mistuxet Avenue, Mystic, CT. The meeting was called to order by Acting Chairman Gardner Young at 7:00pm. Also present for the meeting were Commissioners Curtis Lynch, Fran Hoffman, and Shaun Mastroianni; Alternate Lynn Conway, Town Planner Keith Brynes, and Director of Planning Jason Vincent. Chairman David Rathbun and Alternate Harry Boardsen were absent.

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

Minutes:

Ms. Hoffman moved to approve the minutes of the April 18, 2017 meeting, seconded by Mr. Mastroianni, all in favor 5-0, motion approved.

The meeting recessed at 7:05pm and reconvened at 7:30pm

Public Hearing:

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. *PH continued from 4/18/17.*

Keith Sorensen, SVP for Facilities and Capital Projects, opened and introduced Stephen Coan, President and CEO of the Mystic Aquarium and Sea Research Foundation. Mr. Coan introduced the executive staff of the Sea Research Foundation and reviewed the Aquarium and Foundation's mission to provide conservation education. He stated that the Sea Research Foundation and Mystic Aquarium do not intend to drive further attendance with this new building. In order for the Aquarium to maintain accreditation, the new facility is needed to address the current lack of space for animal quarantine and rehabilitation. The education component was added to this building to enhance opportunities to educate the community about conservation. 100,000 students are served a year through their education programs, but the current facilities are antiquated. The space gained by moving activities to the new building will be adapted to expand and update existing exhibits.

Mr. Sorensen presented architectural drawings of the proposed building. Mr. Lynch questioned how they decided on the exterior design. Mr. Sorensen explained that the angles and metal frame structure are consistent with the existing structures on the campus. Ms. Conway asked for clarification as to whether the proposed building would screen the existing animal care clinic. Mr. Sorensen responded that it would.

Mr. Sorensen stated that they have resolved the Town Engineer's concerns with the day tank discharges and the Town Engineer has provided new comments. Ms. Hoffman asked if they will be managing more water on site. Mr. Sorensen responded that they will, but not significantly. They avoid drainage on significant storm days. Dawn Holden responded that the new facility will have about 50,000 gallons additionally compared to the two million existing and they are only proposing to drain eight times a year.

Ms. Hoffman recommended a stipulation to add the stormwater management permitting information to the site plans in order to lay out how the water will be discharged. Ms. Conway questioned whether the application came before the Inland Wetlands Commission. Mr. Vincent explained that it does not fall under their review as it is not within the 100-foot upland review area. The applicant will return at a later date for approval of a signage plan.

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

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

Stipulations:

1. Final plans shall be recorded prior to the issuance of a Zoning Permit
2. Final plans shall be reviewed to the satisfaction of the Town Engineer
3. Proposed signage shall conform to Section 7.12 of the Zoning Regulations.
4. Final plans shall include reference to CTDEEP stormwater management permitting.
5. The location of the soil test performed by the Engineer shall be shown on the plans with accompanying test pit data. If the test pit is not in the location of the underground infiltration system, the Engineer shall perform a confirmation test hole in the location of the proposed infiltration system prior to construction. Final soil data and suitability assessment shall be provided to the Engineering department.
6. A note shall be added to the plans stating the design Engineer shall be responsible for inspecting the installation of the underground infiltration system by performing at a minimum, bottom inspection prior to system placement and a system inspection prior to backfill. This note shall be clearly shown on the drainage sheet as well as the detail sheet.
7. All yard drains located prior to proposed infiltration system and detention system shall at a minimum include a 2 foot deep sump for minimal pre-treatment.

PZ1705RA & ZC Stonington PZC – Regulation text amendment to create a new Heritage Mill (HM) Zoning District, and map amendment to change three properties from M-1 to HM (82 Mechanic St. Map 4 Block 7 Lot 15; 100 Mechanic St. – Map 4 Block 7 Lot 16; & 150 Mechanic St. – Map 4 Block 7 Lot 17), and change several properties from M-1 to DB-5 (2 Prospect St. – Map 4 Block 17 Lot 3; 66 Prospect St. – Map 4 Block 18 Lot 3A; 8-10 Palmer St. – Map 4 Block 17 Lot 2; 85 Mechanic St. – Map 4 Block 17 Lot 1; 87-89 Mechanic St. – Map 4 Block 17 Lot 9; 99 Mechanic St. – Map 4 Block 17 Lot 6; Mechanic St. – Map 4 Block 17 Lot 7; Mechanic St. – Map 4 Block 17 Lot 8; Mechanic St. – Map 4 Block 18 Lot 4; Prospect St. – Map 4 Block 17 Lot 4; Prospect St. – Map 4 Block 17 Lot 5), Pawcatuck.

Mr. Vincent explained the uses that would allow permitting by staff rather than the commission. Mr. Lynch recommended that there be some review made by the commission. Mr. Vincent recommended that staff update their report to let the commission know when permits have been issued for non-residential properties. The commission discussed changing several uses to require commission approval. Mr. Vincent discussed the mid-level discretion of a site plan application, noting that the commission could set square footage thresholds for review.

Public Comment in Favor:

Glenn Frischmann, resident of Stonington, spoke in favor of the application and is supportive of the benefit to Pawcatuck.

Blunt White, member of the Economic Development Commission, spoke about indoor boat storage as a use permitted by staff, and adding automotive repair as a use.

Bill Middleton, resident of Pawcatuck, raised question about the strenuous process of the Special Use Permit.

General Comment:

Gail Shea, resident of Pawcatuck, stated that she is in favor of making Pawcatuck a better place, but has concerns with draft regulations and the lessening of uses coming before the commission.

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Carlene Donnarummo was concerned about the removal of a statement regarding signage and notification to the commission of permits issued. She was additionally concerned about DB-5 references in the staff report that are not being addressed in this application.

Public Comment Against:

Mr. Brynes read the comments of Dora Hill into the record that stated she was in opposition to additional uses being permitted by staff.

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

PZ1707RA Martin Olson Irrevocable Trust – Regulation Text Amendment to increase the maximum height and floor area ratio permitted within the Tourist Commercial (TC-80) zoning district.

Attorney William Sweeney presented on behalf of the applicant. The applicant is proposing to change the maximum building height and floor area ratio for the TC-80 zone: proposing an increase in the maximum building height from 40' to 50', with a note to allow 65' through a special use permit. The second modification would be to increase the floor area ratio from 0.30 to 0.75. The applicant is considering a boutique hotel project for the property and would need the height to make the hotel feasible. The current FAR standard is low for a commercial and higher density zone. Permitting this throughout the zone allows for redevelopment of existing properties resulting in growth for the town. This area has the resources to support higher density projects. Mr. Sweeney explained the task areas of the Plan of Conservation and Development that align with this regulation amendment.

Mr. Lynch raised concern with deciding on these two bulk requirements without an overall redesign of the zone as planned. Mr. Sweeney stated that they have waited a year, and now time is of the essence and they see this as a way to move forward in the interim.

Public Comment in Favor:

Peggy Roberts, president of the Greater Mystic Chamber of Commerce, spoke in support of the application and its benefit to tourism in Mystic.

Stephen Bessette, resident of Mystic, spoke in support of the application and the expansion of the economic base in Mystic.

Stephen Clemente, president of the Olde Mistick Village Merchants Association, spoke in support of the application and submitted written testimony.

Bill Middleton, owner of Jealous Monk in Olde Mistick Village, stated that there are no neighbors being affected and the area is prime for redevelopment. After ten years of little investment, now is the time to move forward.

Dave Hammond, chair of Economic Development Commission, spoke in favor of the application and stated that the tax revenue could be tripled through redevelopment of the TC-80 zone.

Todd Brady, resident of Groton, stated that they are attempting to build a boutique hotel on the Groton side of the river but are stuck due to a rewrite of Groton's regulations, making it very difficult for developers as they must sit on the property and wait. Mr. Brady stated that allowing exception to the height allows for a better, more attractive design.

Phil Biondo, resident of Stonington spoke in favor of the application.

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Rob Valenti, local business owner, spoke in favor of the application and the potential for improvement to the area.

Stephen Coan, president and CEO of Mystic Aquarium, spoke in favor of the application and praised Olde Mistick Village's work to develop the area. There is much of the TC-80 still to be redeveloped, noting that tourism is a large industry, very beneficial for the region, but there is growing competition from other destinations, driving the need for investments to the area in order to keep up.

Blunt White, EDC member, stated that the increase in height above 50' will require a special use permit, giving the commission the ability to entertain the application, but still mitigate risk.

Lisa Konicki, president of the Ocean Community Chamber of Commerce, spoke in favor of the application and its benefit to the tourism industry for the region. Ms. Konicki also asked for urgency to support this change.

Michael Dunn, property owner in the TC-80 district, spoke in support of the application that will encourage upgrades in the area, noting that the increase to GFAR is necessary for development.

Sal Ritacco, attorney in Pawcatuck, spoke in favor of the application and benefit to the region.

Mr. Lynch recommended holding a workshop to hear the public's ideas for the area. Mr. Brynes stated that the area can support additional development. He explained that the commission has sixty-five days to make a decision on the application once the public hearing is closed. Mr. Vincent stated that the exercise previously done to investigate updating the TC-80 zone did not result in a recommendation. He also stated it can be easier to update the regulations in smaller steps in order to focus on detail.


Attorney Sweeney said he agrees there is a need for reprioritization of the TC-80 zone including a workshop to redevelop it further, however, they have waited for a significant amount of time and are asking for a modest change to regulations in order move forward.

Mr. Mastroianni moved to close the public hearing, seconded by Ms. Conway. Ms. Conway withdrew her second.

Mr. Lynch moved to continue the public hearing to the May 16, 2017 meeting, seconded by Ms. Hoffman, 4-1, motion approved.

Roll Call: Conway – favor, Lynch – favor, Hoffman – favor, Young – favor, Mastroianni – deny

Mr. Lynch moved to adjourn, seconded by Ms. Conway, all in favor 5-0, the meeting adjourned at 10:19pm.



Frances Hoffman, Secretary