

MINUTES OF THE CHESHIRE PLANNING AND ZONING COMMISSION PLAN OF DEVELOPMENT MEETING, HELD ON WEDNESDAY, MARCH 19, 2014, AT 7:30 P.M. IN ROOM 207, TOWN HALL, 84 SOUTH MAIN STREET, CHESHIRE CT 06410

Present

Earl Kurtz, Lelah Campo, John Kardaras, Ed Gaudio

Absent: Sean Strollo, S. Woody Dawson, Gil Linder, Lou Todisco

Alternates Present: Diane Visconti and Jon Fischer

Staff: William Voelker, Town Planner. Council Liaison Patti Flynn-Harris, and Councilor James Sima

I. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 7:32 p.m.

II. ROLL CALL

The roll was called.

III. DETERMINATION OF QUORUM

Following roll call it was determined that a quorum of the Commission was not present.

IV. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The group Pledged Allegiance to the Flag.

V. APPROVAL OF MINUTES – March 3, 2014

No action taken.

VI. DISCUSSION and REVIEW, PLAN OF CONSERVATION AND DEVELOPMENT

- a. Cheshire PZC – POD resources submitted by Gil Linder.
Postponed to next meeting.

Diane Visconti informed the group that she has looked through the Plan, met and discussed the Plan with Mr. Voelker. Her focus of interest is “Affordable Housing”, Section 8-23, which mandates the need for affordable housing in the Town Plan. Ms. Visconti asked about Cheshire’s needs, and noted there is a food pantry in operation which shows there is a need. She looked at the most recent census and the one 10 years prior to get a picture of how things have changed, the affordable housing needs in Cheshire, and asked about population change.

Under Section 8-30G Cheshire is mandated to have 10% affordable housing, and is at 3%. Mr. Voelker said it will be impossible for Cheshire to get to the 10% level as there is not enough land, utilities, sewer system availability for this level of affordable housing.

It was suggested by Ms. Visconti that the PZC discuss the affordable housing issues with the Town Social Services Department. There could be coordinated effort to educate the public, lay the ground work, and discuss how to fill this housing need.

Section 8-23 has different ways to access and improve housing options, i.e. shared housing, accessory apartments, change the definition of a family. The issue is a potential controversy for the Town as people hear “affordable housing” and question what it means. Ms. Visconti wants to have a good educational discussion on the topic, hold a public hearing for public input, get people interested and educated.

Mr. Voelker recommended Ms. Visconti put together some things and Social Services staff can be invited to a Plan meeting to inform the group on what is going on.

Ms. Visconti agreed this was the way to go, meet in a small group and then go to a public information meeting. She said there is not much space in Cheshire for further development because of the sewer lines.

The PZC meets on March 24th, and Walter Gancarz, Town Engineer will be a guest at the meeting to talk about the Facilities Plan for the WPCD facility, and explain sewer and utility constraints. WPCA Chairman Pelton was invited but is unable to attend. The Commissioners will be able to ask questions of Mr. Gancarz.

Councilor Flynn-Harris suggested the committee contact Cheshire Interfaith Housing on the affordable housing issues. This original partnership group had a study done on income and statistics of the population, which were based on the census, and the data could be of help to the PZC.

Mr. Voelker explained that the State statute requires a municipality to explore a variety of choices...some could be about lifestyle, affordable housing and other issues. The sewer influences where high density housing can be placed, and multi-family housing is high density. There are very few places left in Town for this type of housing. While Section 8-30G is a complete override of local zoning it is not an override of the public utility. Mr. Voelker advised that a developer can look at 40 acres of land, put 8-30G housing on it, but cannot force sewers on the site. And, the operation of the treatment plant involves many issues in a community, and to do an override of the process is difficult to do. There are few pieces of land in Town where the sewer is in the road and it would be difficult to deny them sewers. If there is no sewer available and the site is not in the Facilities Plan, there is no automatic override under the statute.

According to Mr. Voelker, the Plan can make recommendations, and adopt those things over which there is control.

On page 67 of the Plan, Ms. Visconti said it talks about the Town looking pretty and the importance of trees. Driving through Town right now she sees trees being cut down. She asked what the PZC can do about this.

Stating he has met with the Public Works Department, Mr. Voelker advised they have met with people in the community. The Tree Warden is George Noewatne, and he is the person to speak to about the tree issues.

The committee was informed by Ms. Flynn-Harris about legislative action taken last week; that CL&P and UI were to halt all tree trimming in the State; and anything already approved can go forward. On personal property there is a procedure which residents can undertake on the trimming of their trees, but people have not taken advantage of it. CL&P wants to take down the trees, and if so, they leave the logs on properties. CL&P will return to pickup the wood.

Mr. Voelker stated the committee could invite PW Director Noewatne to attend a meeting and speak to the tree trimming issue. He could be invited to a full PZC meeting.

Mr. Gaudio also commented on the tree trimming crews not picking up after themselves.

Ms. Campo informed the committee she also met with Mr. Voelker and she plans on going through the +75 pages of the Plan. She will work on an internal progress report on the goals...those achieved, in progress, or abandoned or unsuccessful. Once completed, she will have a copy of her report for the Commissioners.

To assist Ms. Campo, the Planning office will check and find the Plan in a word document, and get it to her.

In discussions between Mr. Voelker and Ms. Campo the following issues/questions were discussed.

Is the Town Hall still adequate

Police Department expansion goes back to 1990; is another addition planned

Police and Fire Chiefs will be invited to a Plan meeting

BOE representative Masciana will be invited to a meeting to talk about BOE issues such as enrollment, capital facilities, projections

Environmental Coordinator Simone will be invited to a meeting to discuss open space inventory, its growth since 2002, passive and active recreation areas, management plans adopted for open space

Parks and Rec Director Ceccolini will be invited to a meeting

Human Services Director will be invited to a meeting

Gerald Sitko, Economic Development Coordinator will be invited to a meeting

Mr. Linder's information was submitted to Mr. Voelker and forwarded to Commissioners.

b. Review of scheduling narrative.

Mr. Voelker read sections of his staff report into the record. The PZC must adopt the Plan in July 2015. The statute refers to PZC holding a public hearing on the entire Plan. Under the statute, there is 65 days before the public hearing for the Plan to be referred to the Town Council and regional planning agencies.

There must be a "public hearing prior to adoption". After the public hearing the PZC can adopt the Plan. Working backwards from the dates, the Plan must be adopted by

June 22, 2015; May 27, 2015 could be the public hearing date; March 21, 2015, the Plan goes to the Council and Council of Governments. The Council should receive all materials to be discussed at the public hearing.

Mr. Voelker invited Commissioners to contact him and schedule a visit with him to discuss the Plan.

The committee was told by Mr. Voelker that Commissioner Linder did a comparison of towns which conducted surveys and the questions. A survey in Cheshire could be on the web site for public to complete and this will be coordinated with Ms. Talbot.

Ms. Campo is working on the summary document; Ms. Visconti is working on the affordable housing section; and there are other sections of the Plan which Commissioners can take for review and discussion.

There is economic based information and this involves commercial and industrial parts of the community which Commissioners could undertake to review.

Ms. Campo commented on the fact that Cheshire does not have a problem with its Plan. Many towns are having issues with blight. She asked about a chapter on town blight.

Many suburban communities have isolated cases of blight, and Mr. Voelker said no formal policy is adopted for Cheshire.

At the State level there is a lot of talk about PILOT funding, non-profit ownership of property and what it does to the grand list of a town. Ms. Campo knows Cheshire has acquired a lot of open space, and wondered about the affect of this land acquisition on the grand list, and if more land acquisition is planned.

The current plan and practice encourages the Town to protect as many natural resource areas as possible, and Mr. Voelker said there must be linkages such as water shed, reservoirs, water courses, habitat areas, ridge lines etc. The Plan does this well. With the review of land acquisition from Ms. Simone the committee will see the linkage of the Town's open space. He explained it is up to the decision making bodies including PZC and Council. Any time there is an open space purchase, the Council makes a decision, but there is referral to the PZC under 8-24. The Commission can consider parameters and tests as to what makes land acquisition valid and for a purpose. Cheshire does have some brown fields in the industrial areas.

The issue of the Ball & Socket property was raised, and Mr. Voelker clarified that the zoning regulation which was adopted did not relate to a specific property. But, it would likely be used by the people who want to develop the Ball & Socket property.

Ms. Campo stated that adaptive reuse is a good focus for the Plan.

Regarding the tree trimming, Ms. Visconti asked if there could be a policy in the Plan related to tree trimming.

This cannot be put into the Plan, and Mr. Voelker stated that the Plan is a broad recommendation about various issues on land use in the community, and is not legally binding for anyone. A limitation of utilities to cut trees is beyond the legal authority and scope of the Commission. Utilities have a broad exemption under federal law, and PZC does not have the authority to limit utilities.

The Commissioners requested they receive a copy of the FY 14-15 Budget summary book.

Mr. Fischer stated he would look at the Community Facilities section of the Plan, review it and discuss with the committee.

VII. ADJOURNMENT

MOTION by Ms. Campo; seconded by Ms. Visconti

MOVED that the meeting adjourn at 8:33 p.m.

VOTE The motion passed unanimously by those present.

Attest:

Marilyn W. Milton, Clerk