

MINUTES OF THE CHESHIRE PLANNING AND ZONING COMMISSION PLAN OF DEVELOPMENT MEETING, HELD ON MONDAY, APRIL 7, 2014, AT 7:30 P.M. IN ROOM 115, TOWN HALL, 84 SOUTH MAIN STREET, CHESHIRE CT 06410

Present

Sean Strollo, Lou Todisco, Gil Linder; Alternate Diane Visconti

Absent: Earl J. Kurtz, S. Woody Dawson, Vincent Lentini, Lelah Campo, John Kardaras, Edward Gaudio. Alternates Jon Fischer and Leslie Marinaro.

Staff: William Voelker, Town Planner

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 – S.M. 5/22/13; 6/5/13 (notes); 3/3/14 and 3/19/14.

No action taken due to lack of quorum

VI. DISCUSSION and REVIEW, PLAN OF CONSERVATION AND DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Voelker stated that one of the issues which the PZC must consider under the statute is “affordable housing”. There was a seminar session on this issue which Ms. Visconti attended.

1. Diane Visconti – Incentive Housing. Ms. Visconti reported that there is much help to assist towns with affordable housing. She said that the overall purpose of the meeting was affordable housing – which is being driven by the “brain drain”. She read an excerpt from an article into the record. In looking at the Cheshire census, 2000 to 2010, Ms. Visconti found that men, age 35 to 39, went down 35% in population in this time frame, which is 1/3rd of this population group. Part of the reasoning for this decrease is the economy, recession, high cost of housing. With regard to the high cost of housing, the State is trying to influence this problem in order to have a more vibrant state, and is responding to companies which report their employees cannot find affordable housing in Connecticut.

Copies of Section 8-30G will be given to Commissioners. Mr. Voelker noted this section was written in the 1980’s as a response to concerns and options for affordable housing.

In the seminar, Ms. Visconti advised that a speaker from Massachusetts explained how this state handled affordable housing issues, going town by town to get 2/3rds of people to agree. To get affordable housing into a community, people must be told what it is for, an image of what this housing actually is, that it is for retirees, younger people starting out, identify 10 known people in a town, have signs which say "keep young people/retirees in town". An important part of affordable housing is educating the public on what is trying to be done, and the need to be active rather than reactive.

Mr. Voelker said the real focus is on the 30+ age group for affordable housing.

Ms. Visconti said the State is willing to help get things moving forward for a community to build incentive housing, even giving money to a town.

In that regard, Mr. Voelker said it is one time money; it goes anywhere from \$15,000 to \$50,000 depending on the size of the project. The densities which must be included in the affordable housing zone are interesting. He read an excerpt into the record on the actual density requirements, which are high. The Commission has discussed the issue of affordable housing in the past.

The second part of the seminar had a panel of people from a number of towns who explained what is going on in their communities with affordable housing. Ms. Visconti reported that Wallingford CT has had some setbacks with approval by the legislative body while Old Saybrook CT has a lot of affordable housing units.

The Commissioners discussed affordable housing being provided for municipal employees, i.e. school teachers, policemen, etc. Mr. Voelker said there is no requirement that 20% of the units be affordable as defined in the regulations. Under Section 8-23 it allows for consideration of housing alternatives, including multi-family housing, and was not intended to break down any affordability issues. The Commission could do this, but the problem is finding places to do it, and there are not many places in town. To support this kind of density there must be public sewers. Mr. Voelker said he would never advise an affordable housing/high density development to have a community septic system. There is a huge responsibility on the community to have this system, but it can be done. He explained that DEEP has criteria on maintenance of the system over the long haul; eventually, such a septic system becomes the responsibility of the municipality; and if the system fails the municipality must provide sanitary sewers. Such a system is a huge burden hanging over the head of the municipality.

Ms. Visconti stated that in Massachusetts there has been redevelopment of structures such as churches into apartments.

This can be done with different areas with the adaptive use scenario, and Mr. Voelker said the harder you look the harder it is to find appropriate places for affordable housing. The housing should be on main roads for public transportation. The housing is not public housing projects; they are done by private developers.

If affordable housing is adopted, Ms. Visconti said the town also adopts design standards.

For an acre +1/3, Mr. Todisco said there could be 5 to 10 duplex buildings.

Mr. Voelker explained that for affordable housing there must be regulations adopted to enable it, and there is a different scenario for setback distances and other requirements. There are ways to do it, i.e. 2 story units.

Mr. Strollo commented on Old Saybrook on Route 1, where everything is tight and together, having been built up over years. In looking at the map, many towns have done nothing regarding affordable housing.

It is recognized that towns are competing against each other, and Mr. Voelker noted demographics and the linkage of affordable housing.

The towns of Wallingford, East Lyme, Colchester, Simsbury were cited by Ms. Visconti as locations for adopted or pending affordable housing. Ms. Visconti said Cheshire should consider what is available to us for the Plan.

Mr. Voelker pointed out the town areas (quadrants) and who owns them, i.e. W.S. Development owns the north quadrant. He said there can be something noted in the Plan about affordable housing, with qualifiers. Also, the State gives the municipality money, based on available funds, for affordable housing.

According to Mr. Todisco the real concern is schools, as people perceive a lifetime payment from the State of \$40,000 as a drop in the bucket. He said 6 houses on an acre of land pay their own way in a community.

State wide, school population is expected to go down.

Mr. Linder commented on affordable housing being a band-aid, and asked if this was correct. He said the economics of the state force people to leave.

In reply, Ms. Visconti said if a town offers enough alternatives there will be a more stable population base.

Regarding affordable housing in the Plan, Mr. Todisco asked if it was sufficient for the Plan to include more diverse housing, housing for moderate income people, and affordable housing, and areas where this housing can be located. He said the town must be sold on this being acceptable, and this could be a point of issue for a public hearing.

Mr. Voelker said it is possible PZC or a development entity may want to propose some additional affordable housing regulations of some kind, and one of the tests is whether it

is supported by the Plan of Conservation and Development. This is in the statute. He noted that the affordable housing program was not in place in 2002.

2. Preparation and Timing POCD Survey - Mr. Linder is working on the survey; will come up with survey questions; and there is the ability to do a survey on the town's web site (survey monkey software).

For the record, Mr. Linder explained that he expanded the listing of web sites with plans of development (on line). He has been concentrating on towns with published surveys, and there are many of them. There is a company that does the paperwork and plan for the town. He has run across the Town of East Windsor information which has an active survey at this time that can be accessed on line. The town of Greenwich CT has an excellent POCD, and Mr. Linder copied the town's planning primer. North Stonington CT has a more succinct web site on the POCD...why is it really needed, what can people do to get involved.

It was suggested by Ms. Visconti that prior to the survey there be information on the web site for people to know why there is a plan and why it is needed.

Mr. Voelker said there can be a video to introduce the plan, the process, the members of the Commission, etc. The questions on the survey must be carefully put together and composed by the Commission members.

At the last meeting a time line was distributed for the Plan for meetings and public hearing(s). The meetings of the PZC on the POCD will be scheduled, and department heads invited to attend and provide information relative to the Plan.

VII. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at 8:50 p.m.

Attest:

Marilyn W. Milton, Clerk
Transcribed from tape

