

PLANNING AND ZONING DEPARTMENT
QUARTERLY REPORT: APRIL 1, 2009 – JUNE 30, 2009

The Planning & Zoning Commission met seven times this quarter—twice in April; twice in May; and three times in June. The Commission acted upon sixteen applications and issued five Mandatory Referral reports per CGS 8-24. Among the applications approved were an addition to Darien Diner and a new coffee shop in the space formerly occupied by JD Cosmetics on Grove Street. It is expected that both projects will be implemented within the next two quarters.

Actions by type this quarter:

Site Plans/Business Site Plans: 2 approved
Amendments to the Zoning Regulations: 1 adopted
Amendments to the Subdivision Regulations: 1 adopted
Coastal Site Plan Review: 4 granted
Flood Damage Prevention: 5 granted
Land Filling/Excavation: 6 approved
Special Permit: 4 granted
Subdivision: 1 approved

Total Number of Projects*: 16 applications

*Total number of projects does not equal number of actions, because some applications include multiple permits.

This quarter, the Planning & Zoning Commission adopted the proposed amendments to the Zoning and Subdivision Regulations regarding Stormwater Management. Those took effect on June 7th. Significant time was spent incorporating into the books and on the Town web site four zoning regulation amendments which took effect from April to June.

The Planning and Zoning Commission is scheduled to meet with the Board of Selectmen on July 14th to discuss the possibility of a downtown Master Plan. Also on the 14th, the Commission will be meeting with Town Counsel in Executive Session to discuss pending litigation. The public hearing to be held on July 28th will include an application by Thomas Golden Realty to modify the Zoning Regulations relative to Noroton Heights. At this time, there are no meetings scheduled for August.

The Zoning Board of Appeals (ZBA) met five times this quarter--three times in April (15, 22 and 29), once in May, and once in June. At those three meetings they acted upon 16 applications—seven in April; four in May; and five in June. Of those applications, 11 were granted, two granted in part/denied in part, two denied, and one “other”. The July 15 public hearing agenda has seven agenda items. A joint meeting of the ZBA and ARB was held on April 15, where issues of mutual interest were discussed.

Polly Davis, ZBA Alternate, resigned in May 2009, and a replacement is needed. John Ashburne and Ruth Anne Ramsey were reappointed as ZBA alternates by the Board of Selectmen on June 15.

The Environmental Protection Commission (EPC) met three times this quarter—once each month. At those meetings, they acted upon nine applications—granting eight--four in April; one in May; and three in June--and one application was withdrawn. They also approved one application amendment. Two of the approved applications were for pond dredging. On June 3, 2009, they set

the public hearing date for Stony Brook Tributary Flood Control Project of July 1. That agenda item has since been withdrawn.

On May 6, 2009, the EPC held a public hearing on, and adopted a new wetlands map, which took effect on May 14, 2009. In the upcoming few months the Commission will be working on updating the Inland Wetlands and Watercourses Regulations to conform to changes in the Connecticut General Statutes and the Department of Environmental Protection's Model Regulations. Because the CT General Statutes enable and override their regulations, the Commission follows procedures that are required by law but may be different than described in their local regulations. It is important for all local wetland agencies to periodically update latest requirements. Staff is also spending time working on a required returns of record in one EPC matter which is due in mid-July.

The Architectural Review Board (ARB) met twice in April (once was the aforementioned joint meeting with the ZBA) and once each in May and June. At those meetings, they approved nine applications—one in April; three in May; and five in June. Among the applications approved, include new signs for Tibbetts Keating & Butler, Salon Vlas, and Jade Nail & Spa; and the conversion of Sunoco to Gulf at the intersection of Corbin Drive and Boston Post Road. The ARB also approved a replacement gymnasium at Pear Tree Point School, and an addition to the Darien Nature Center.

This quarter, 106 Zoning Permits were acted upon. In April 35; May 34, and 37 in June. Of those, eight were for new houses and eight for new pools and/or spas. Of the eight new houses, six were “teardowns” and two were on vacant lots (both on St. Luke’s property). The chart on the following page gives a further breakdown of type of permits and review times. Staff continues to focus on review times, and improved coordination with the Health and Public Works Departments has been accomplished. The number of Zoning Permits is down 37.5% during the January – June 2008 time period versus January – June 2009. Because the number of permits is down over past years, we are able to process them in a more timely manner, with about ½ of all permits acted upon in three days or less. For the fifth month in a row, Zoning Permits for each month were the least that they have been since 1996.

On April 14th, staff attended the SWRPA ½ day Housing Summit held at Darien Town Hall. Also in April, staff attended a CT Main Street seminar “Understanding the Municipal Role in Main Street Revitalization.” Two staff members attended the “Visualizing Density” ½ day session in Bridgeport. In June, the Director reviewed applications for summer intern with the HR Director, and hired Colleen Clark, who started in late June. Throughout April, May and June, staff spent significant time working on the new Town web site including posting of zoning regulations, the updated zoning map (adopted March 29), inland wetlands map (adopted in May), quarterly reports, etc. This includes a new section on the web site on parking. The Department is fully responsible for posting of all information on not only the Department page, but those of the local land use boards, DAHAC and the Advisory Commission on Information Technology. Staff worked on better defining the number of net new residences constructed since the 2000 Census. This will allow us to determine exactly how many points will be needed for a moratorium.

This quarter, the Manager of Community Development Services coordinated with and submitted an application for a CT Main Street 2009 Awards of Excellence for the 1020 Boston Post Road project, and that project did win that CT Main Street award. In April we received notice from FEMA that

Darien received FEMA grants and the RTM voted to receive the grants and fund the 25% match for the acquisition/open space project. We are in the process of working closely with the property owners on implementing those projects. Staff served on a selection panel and selected a consultant to perform the Route 1 Corridor Study, which is led by SWRPA.

Research was performed on intersection improvements as well as accessory apartments, with a meeting with DAHAC scheduled for July 7th to discuss the issue. The new blade sign regulations went into effect and we developed a press release and will continue to work with property owners and tenants regarding these new provisions which allow additional commercial signage in certain zones.

