

PLANNING AND ZONING DEPARTMENT
QUARTERLY REPORT: APRIL 1, 2005 – JUNE 30, 2005

The Planning and Zoning Commission met nine times this quarter. They approved a number of new businesses, including Ching's Kitchen, Cosi, a new First County Bank building, the conversion of a residence on the north side of Grove Street to a back office for a real estate office, the relocation of Baskin-Robbins from downtown to Goodwives Shopping Center and a new dry cleaner in Noroton. The Commission has already scheduled and fully booked an extra meeting in July to accommodate the workload next quarter. In April, a property was rezoned to allow for a diagnostic imaging facility for Stamford Health Systems.

Work on the 2005 Town Plan of Conservation & Development continues. The Commission will be preparing the final draft of the entire document over the next month or so, and referring it out for review. A public hearing will be held sometime after Labor Day.

The Zoning Board of Appeals (ZBA) met seven times, with four of those meetings held in June. A total of 35 applications were processed--seven applications in April; twelve in May; and 16 in June. There were 21 applications granted; four granted in part/denied in part; eight denied; and two withdrawn. The number of June applications processed and the number of meetings in June is the most since prior to 1980 (over 25 years). It is quite possible that ZBA will process more applications this year than any year in its history, as 58 were acted upon in the first half of this calendar year.

The Environmental Protection Commission (EPC) met five times this period. Extra meetings were scheduled to accommodate the increased application workload. A total of 34 applications were acted upon this quarter. Of those, 28 were approved, two granted in part/denied in part; and four withdrawn. Our intern (see below) spent time preparing necessary State filings regarding recent EPC actions.

The Architectural Review Board (ARB) met three times this quarter. During this period, they approved ten applications for signs, awnings, and façade changes.

A total of 181 Zoning Permits were reviewed this quarter. Of those, 65 were approved in April; 69 in May; and 47 in June. The number of April permits and the number of May permits were the most issued in those respective months in over ten years. Seventeen permits were issued for new residences, with ten of those being "teardowns" and seven on vacant lots. Also, twelve permits were issued for swimming pools, and three for commercial signs. Overall, 638 zoning permits were issued in the 2004-2005 fiscal year, an increase of 11.5% over last year, when 572 permits were issued (see attached graph). There were also more permits reviewed and issued this quarter than in the January to March 2005 period—an increase of over 25%.

Arguably, this was one of the most successful quarters ever relative to litigation. In April, the Commission's decision regarding a change of zone application request was upheld by Superior Court judge. In May, a judge granted The Town's motion to dismiss relative to the *Windels v. Hart* case. The plaintiff's motion to reargue was denied by the Judge in June. This period, staff and the land use boards worked on settling three cases, and we expect that the paperwork on those will be finalized and filed with the Court in July or August.

Other projects which required significant staff time:

- On April 20th, the Planning and Zoning Director served on a League of Women Voters panel discussion entitled, “Downtown Darien: Next Steps”.
- On April 21st, the Planning and Zoning Director taught a Continuing Education class to fifteen registrants. The class was entitled, “Finding your Way through Darien Zoning and Building: Avoiding Common Pitfalls in the Zoning Process.” The class was well received, and will be held again in the fall.
- Seven GIS maps were prepared for the Connecticut Main Street Program Application. These maps reflected a modified study area which included Tilley Pond Park. Four color presentation-sized maps were produced for the presentation of the application by DRI in mid-May. By doing this work in-house, over \$2,000 was saved.
- On June 13, 2005, the Planning & Zoning Director explained a proposal to the full RTM to increase application fees for the local land use boards and to allow for the implementation of technical review fees. That proposal passed and will take effect on July 3, 2005. It is expected that the fee increase will generate upwards of \$50,000 annually for the Town. These changes were filed with the Town Clerk, and posted on the Town web site.
- Zoning enforcement continues, and this quarter the enforcement officer and code compliance officer have followed up on: wetlands violations; sign violations; illegal commercial activity within a residential zone; unregistered vehicles; boat storage; and violations of specific Planning and Zoning Commission approvals.

Land Use Software

This quarter, staff worked with John Crary in reviewing the proposed contract for the land use software from Municipal Software. The contract was signed in May, and funds allocated for the project. Municipal Software will be working closely with the IT Department in early July, and meeting with the Darien SMEs (Subject Matter Experts) in late July. This will be followed by an on-site project manager visit from August 15-18. This August visit consists of time spent with the department experts, examining the business processes in detail. This will also allow the software designers to gather all the relevant business process documentation and an example of the property data to be loaded. The implementation of this project is on-time and under budget.

Personnel

Nancy Sarner returned to the office part-time on April 20, 2005, after four months on maternity leave. Her return provided us an opportunity to resume GIS services to the other Town Departments and to the community in general. She then made a decision in mid-June to stay home with her child, and her last day of work was June 17th. The search is on for her replacement. We hope to have someone on-board sometime in late August or early September. In the meantime, David Keating will be providing staff support to the EPC (in addition to his usual work duties). Other staff will assist as necessary.

Mike Kelly, our summer intern, started work on June 13th, and has been very helpful in assisting us with various projects, including updating the Darien Zoning Regulations to reflect the new fee schedule, making copies for the general public, and preparing and analyzing data for this quarterly report.

Zoning Permits by Fiscal Year

