

**PLANNING AND ZONING COMMISSION
MINUTES
GENERAL MEETING
July 13, 2009**

Place: Room 206
Town Hall

TIME: 7:30 P.M.

PLANNING & ZONING COMMISSION MEMBERS ATTENDING:
Conze, Bigelow, Spain, Hutchison

STAFF ATTENDING: Ginsberg, Keating, Sangrey
RECORDER: Ginsberg

GENERAL MEETING

MEMBERS OF BOARD OF SELECTMEN ATTENDING:
Klein, Bayne, Santarella, Morton & Sullivan

Chairman Conze read the first agenda item:

Meeting with Board of Selectmen to discuss downtown planning.

First Selectwoman Evonne Klein said that the Planning and Zoning Commission's 2006 Plan of Conservation and Development and the Downtown Darien CT Main Street Report and the Fitzgerald & Halliday Parking Study have all been completed. A thorough analysis needs to be conducted to see what parts of those reports can and should be implemented to improve the downtown area. She said that she has an upcoming meeting with the Department of Transportation officials to discuss expanding commuter parking facilities near exit 12 of the CT- Turnpike (I-95). There is a possibility of constructing parking facilities using a combination of State, local, and private developer funding. This is all to encourage walkability in the downtown area. She said that everyone needs to consider what assets we have in the community, and how we can work with those features to enhance the downtown. Everyone needs to take advantage of the attributes to make a better community. If the Commission is inclined to make a more detailed master plan for the entire downtown, it should not be done on an ad-hoc basis. The DRI study has a conceptual plan for the entire downtown, but the community cannot have the private developers guiding what happens to the rest of the community. She cautioned against studying only a small area of the downtown, instead of the entire downtown business district.

Mr. Bigelow said that zoning is an important factor in the eventual development of any properties. The focus of the Commission has been on the eventual goal of the redevelopment of the downtown and the Commission has been "thinking outside of the box" from the traditional zoning. Mr. Spain said the Commission has been working with private property owners and within the regulations to make sure that the good projects have been developed so that they can have a positive impact on surrounding properties and upon the entire downtown. He added that private action by private property owners is the most important development for future growth; he noted that responsible developers are capable of doing a good job that benefits both the private property owner and the community as a whole. He said that the existing Town Plan of Conservation and Development sets

PLANNING AND ZONING COMMISSION
MINUTES
GENERAL MEETING
JULY 13, 2009
PAGE 2.

out a broad view of the business area and it would be appropriate for the Commission to study the downtown to create a more clarified image of that picture as needed; and the existing Plan provides the overall goals of what the development in the downtown area should be.

Mr. Bayne questioned whether it is more appropriate to start at a macro level or a micro level. Ms. Sullivan said that there needs to be actual priorities. Mr. Conze said that some development that has occurred downtown works great. He said that the Old King's Highway South buildings are now in need of redevelopment and the market is right for these changes—they are now “in play”. He noted that this proposal to study that section of town is a focused task. Mrs. Klein said that now is the time for the Commission to do proactive master planning for the entire downtown before the property owners propose individual redevelopment plans. She said that the Commission and Town need to take a longer term view of the situation, rather than just quick fixes and short term development. She noted that one item which could be included in a more macro study is the possible connection of Old King's Highway North and South. She said that commercial tax base is an important factor in the development of the downtown area. Mr. Bayne said that the Commission should take a longer picture and overall view.

Mr. Spain said that the reason why we have a downtown commercial area is to support and enhance the primarily residential character of the rest of the Town. He noted that the Town Plan states that the purpose of the downtown is to serve the needs of the residents.

In the discussion that followed, Mr. Morton mentioned that the various planning documents and reports are interrelated and need to be integrated and pulled together. Mr. Bigelow thought that this might mean a rewriting of the Town Plan, but it was noted that instead, it would mean just a coordination of efforts to make sure that everyone was working toward the same main goals. Mrs. Santarella noted that the Town needs individual property owners and developers to redevelop properties, but the policies and regulations of the Town need to be coordinated so that future owners and applicants know what the Town wants. She said that whatever is decided will likely become part of the Town Plan of Conservation & Development. Ms. Klein asked what items have been implemented from the Fitzgerald & Halliday Parking Study.

Mr. Conze said that the Town might want to create incentives for private developers to create or expand common parking areas. He said that one of the studies talked about the possibility of creating new streets and changing the traffic pattern. However, given the developed condition of the community, it is not reasonable to expect that new streets can be created in the downtown area.

It was suggested that without having a master plan, the traffic conditions in the downtown area will get even more jammed, as there is more development. Mrs. Klein noted that this is not a “one horse Town” and we have our predecessors to thank for the many positive attributes that we have in the community. She said that the Town now has opportunities to shape the Town for the next 50 years, and that it is the Commission and Board of Selectman's responsibility to see those possibilities and challenges, and to make them into opportunities.

Mr. Conze thanked the Board of Selectmen for meeting with the Commission, and indicated that further meetings would be held to coordinate actions by the Commission and the Board.

PLANNING AND ZONING COMMISSION
MINUTES
GENERAL MEETING
JULY 13, 2009
PAGE 3.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

At about 8:15 p.m., Chairman Conze read the following agenda item:

Executive Session with Town Counsel to discuss pending litigation.

The following motion was made: That the Commission go into an Executive Session to discuss pending litigation with attorneys, Town Counsel Wayne Fox, and his associates, John Louizos and Edmund Schmidt. The motion was made by Mr. Spain, seconded by Mr. Bigelow and unanimously approved.

During the executive session, no motions were made and no actions were taken. At the end of the executive session the following motion was made: That the Commission conclude the executive session and adjourn the meeting at 9:35 p.m. The motion was made by Mr. Spain, seconded by Mr. Bigelow and unanimously approved.

Respectfully submitted,

David Keating
Assistant Planning & Zoning Director

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