

**Planning, Zoning and Housing Committee (PZ&H)
of the
Darien Representative Town Meeting (RTM)**

Draft Minutes

Date: October 14, 2014

Place: Darien Town Hall, Room 119

Members Present: Liz Bacon, Carolyn Bayne, Lucy Fiore, Shedd Glassmeyer, Courtney Haidinger, Ted Hawkins, Joanne Hennessy, James Howe, Spencer McIlmurray, Seth Morton, John van der Kieft, Rob Young

Members Absent: Jose Cepeda, John McLean

Guests: Jayme Stevenson (First Selectman), Betsy Haggerty-Ross (Chair, BOE)

This was a Special Meeting of the Planning, Zoning and Housing Committee.

The meeting was called to order at 7:05 pm. Joanne Hennessy, PZ&H Chair, reviewed the agenda.

The first item on the agenda was to discuss and vote on the acquisition of 32 Hoyt Street. 32 Hoyt Street is a uniquely situated private property on .23 acres adjacent to Holmes Elementary School in which there is an easement through the school's parking lot providing access to the residence.

Ms. Haggerty-Ross explained that the primary reason for the purchase is to ensure the safety and security for Holmes School students, parents, teachers, and staff. Although school officials are able to control the flow of students arriving at and departing from the school, it cannot regulate private homeowners and guests who drive through the parking lot due to the easement. There is also no ability to control who goes in and out of the residence; it was noted that the residence on the property is located a mere 60 feet from the school's cafeteria doors.

A second reason given in support of the purchase is that it allows the BOE flexibility in facility planning. It was noted that Milone & MacBroom was recently hired by the BOE to complete a long-range facilities use study for all public school buildings, including an in-depth review of projected student enrollments. If an expansion was ever needed at Holmes School, the acquisition of this property allows it appropriate setbacks to do so. In the interim, this parcel could possibly be used as "swing" space for staff or storage of instructional materials and supplies. In deciding how best to utilize the property, potential costs of minimal alterations needed will be compared to the estimated cost (\$75,000) to demolish the current structure on the property.

It was also noted that purchase of this property is consistent with the Town Plan of Conservation & Development dating back to 1990, as it would complete the “footprint” of the school property.

A lengthy discussion ensued in which committee members raised many questions, mostly related to the purchase price of the property; how it was arrived at, whether or not the town is overpaying for the property, what future costs the town will bear in terms of renovations and/or demolition of the current structure, and whether projected enrollments suggest the need to acquire the property. Some members expressed concern that the town is paying a premium for the property; most found the safety issue justification for the purchase. It was noted that renovations made to Holmes School in the early 1990’s had to be altered due to the fact that negotiations to purchase the property at that time failed.

A motion was made by Seth Morton (seconded by Spencer McIlmurray) authorizing the acquisition of the property known as 32 Hoyt Street for a price of \$775,000. The motion passed unanimously.

The second item discussed was the Town Plan of Conservation & Development, which is updated every ten years by the Planning & Zoning Department. Last updated in 2006, the Commission will soon begin the process to update the current Plan and will hold the first of several public hearings on October 22 at 7:30 pm in the Town Hall auditorium. The chairman asked that members try to attend, and queried members to see what issues should be brought to the Commission’s attention. Issues raised included:

- possible new space (and permanent structure) for the Swap Shop at the Darien Recycling Center;
- approval of structured parking in some areas of town, such as the BMW dealership and train stations;
- the need for more sidewalks and maintenance of existing ones (and clarification on responsibility to maintain sidewalks along state roads);
- creation of bike paths;
- approval of accessory apartments;
- quality of life issues, such as limits on leaf blower use and delivery trucks;
- concern about town density;
- clarification on how the Edgerton Street property, former site of the Senior Center, might be used.

It was suggested that more resources be devoted to “planning” in town and less on “zoning,” and that the committee appear at the hearing with specific talking points.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:27 pm.

Respectfully submitted by Carolyn Bayne, PZ&H Clerk

