

# December 11, 2008

## Special Meeting

**Present:** First Selectman Mark E. Lyon, Selectmen James L. Brinton and Nicholas N. Solley. Land Use Coordinator Martin Conor.

**Public:** Tony Bedini, Janet Hill, Dorothy Hill, Steve Wadelton, Mike Ajello, Valerie Friedman, Frank Adams, Addie Roberts, Wendy Federer, Brad Sedito, Joe Gitterman, Chris Charles, Ron Chute, Phil Markert, Dimitri Rimsky.

**Call to Order:** First Selectman Lyon called the meeting to order at 7:02 p.m.

Report on Land Use Consultant's Study – Recommendations: by Martin Conor  
See below:

December 7, 2008

Mark Lyon, 1st Selectman  
Town of Washington  
2 Bryan Plaza  
Washington Depot, CT 06794

Re: Recommendations for Washington's Land Use Office

Dear Mr. Lyon:

I have completed my study of Washington's Land Use Office. I have reviewed staffing levels, division of tasks, and overall organization of the Land Use Office. I have met with the land use office staff, Commission members, former office staff, Building Official, applicants and met with the Selectmen. Interviews were contacted in person, by phone and a great deal of input was received by e-mail. It was amazing how many Commission members felt it was important to provide their input and how many e-mails and phone calls I received. People really care about the performance and effectiveness of their land use office. The folks I met with and talked to, including the staff, all want this study to result in changes that will make the office perform in a fashion that can be a better resource to the commissioners in performing their duties and in assisting the general public in the land use process.

As a result of my study of Washington's Land Use Office I have the following recommendations.

### **Organization of Land Use Office**

The current set up is loosely organized with no chain of command and employees are not certain who they report directly to. The staffing has increased over time but without careful thought as to how to run the office in the most efficient manner and how to make the most effective use of personnel and resources.

### **Land Use Coordinator**

A job description for the Land Use Coordinator is required. This position should report to the First

Selectman and the Commission Chairmen. I would recommend a new title for this position "Land Use Administrator." The Land Use Enforcement Officer and land use secretary positions all need to report to the Land Use Administrator. This position should be the highest paid position with the most authority and responsibility. The Land Use Administrator should be the primary staff person for the Zoning, Planning & Inland Wetlands Commission. The Land Use Administrator will supervise the daily activities of the land use office including the schedule of site visits being performed by the Land Use Enforcement Officer.

The Land Use Administrator needs to encourage the public to make appointments so she can schedule her time effectively. Pre-application meetings with applicants should be encouraged on the larger projects in the office prior to submittal to the land use commissions. With large complicated Zoning and Wetlands applications, the Town should take advantage of their fee ordinance that allows the Town to hire a planner at the applicant's expense to assist the Land Use Administrator and Commissions in their application review. This can be a substantial time savings for the land use office and make the application reviews go more smoothly by providing reports, hopefully in advance of public hearings, for the Commission's review and for the applicants to respond to. A planner should be utilized by the Planning and Zoning Commissions on a more regular basis to assist the Commissions with Regulation updates.

### **Land Use Enforcement Officer**

The Land Use Enforcement Officer should report to the Land Use Administrator. Good communication and teamwork between the Land Use Enforcement Officer and Land Use Administrator is essential. I would envision the Land Use Enforcement Officer handling primarily the routine day to day zoning permits, zoning and wetlands complaints and the majority of the fieldwork. Additional clerical help is needed so as to allow for more time in the field doing inspections. The Land Use Enforcement Officer should be the main staff person to the Zoning Board of Appeals. He should not be needed in reviewing new Planning applications or applications going to the Zoning Commission for approval. These applications should be handled by the Land Use Administrator. He should be responsible for the administration and processing of zoning permits within the office. I would also recommend that the Land Use Administrator be the primary staff person to the Inland Wetlands Commission as well. It may not be necessary to have the Inland Wetlands Enforcement Officer attend Inland Wetlands meetings if the Land Use Administrator is present and is actively reviewing and reporting on new applications. Enforcement reports on work assigned would be provided to both the Inland Wetlands and Zoning Commissions by the Land Use Enforcement Officer. Additional reports and recommendations on specific applications and projects underway can be provided by the Land Use Enforcement Officer when directed by the Land Use Administrator.

Inland Wetlands regulated activities that are very minor in nature can be handled by Inland Wetlands Agent Determinations. This can lessen the workload of the Inland Wetlands Commission. If the Inland Wetlands Commission is agreeable, the Land Use Enforcement Officer can make these determinations with the approval and supervision of the Land Use Administrator.

The Historic District does not have an enforcement officer assigned. The ordinance allows the building official or zoning enforcement officer. The First Selectman may wish to add HDC enforcement to the duties of the Land Use Enforcement Officer.

The Land Use Enforcement Officer should spend less time doing certified letters, ordering stamps and supplies. The Land Use Administrator can assign a clerical person to assume some of the clerical duties he has been performing provided additional clerical help is provided to the department. Set hours for reviewing applications and being in the field will make for a more productive situation. Advance appointments can be made by the secretaries to better utilize everybody's time.

## **Land Use Secretaries**

All the secretaries need to have a clear understating of the entire land use process and a clear understanding of the chain of command. All the land use secretaries should report directly to the Land Use Administrator.

## **Historic District Commission & Health Secretary**

The Land Use Administrator needs to expand the duties of this position so that clerical help can be provided in all areas within the department. The position needs to be more of a gate keeper so that the Land Use Administrator is not constantly interrupted by the phone and walk-ins with no appointments.

## **Conservation Commission and Zoning Board of Appeals Secretary**

Additional training is needed for this newer employee. As she becomes more familiar with the land use office procedures additional clerical duties can be assigned by the Land Use Administrator to relieve the Land Use Enforcement Officer of some of the clerical duties now being performed. The Land Use Enforcement Officer as staff liaison to ZBA needs to make sure that applications are properly completed and scheduled for public hearing and see that Certificates of Variance and Certificates of Special Exception required by State Statutes are being properly prepared and filed on the land records. The ZBA seems to have an unusually large number of applications for which variances and special exceptions are being granted. A joint meeting between ZBA and Zoning Commissions may be in order to discuss the need for revisions to the Zoning Regulations to reduce the large number of ZBA applications being filed.

## **Commission Minutes Secretary**

Hours need to be found for a secretary to be responsible for preparing minutes for the Inland Wetlands Commission, Zoning Commission and Planning Commission. This individual needs to spend additional time working in the office to help with the follow up clerical duties needed after the meetings. I would think at least 10 office hours per week plus the night meetings would be required as a minimum. The office should be manned by a land use secretary at all times to greet the public and answer the phone during the hours that the Land Use Office is open. The Connecticut Association of Zoning Enforcement Officers has a Certified Zoning Enforcement Technician training program for land use secretaries that would be very beneficial and would save the Town money in the long run. See [www.cazeo.org](http://www.cazeo.org) for details.

## **Phones**

The phone system needs immediate attention. The single phone line is not sufficient for the land use department. In addition, staff training is necessary on how to optimize the current functions of the system, call transferring etc. A representative of the phone system should be called in to help improve its efficiency. The building department's phone rings in the land use office and does not have a voice mail when building staff is not present. The First Selectman should insist that the Building Official's line have voice mail so that the phone doesn't keep ringing in the land use office when they are not in.

## **Web**

Washington is clearly ahead of many Towns but the more technology that can be used the better it will be for citizens, commission members and staff. While a lot of information is available online it's a constant challenge to keep it current. I would suggest revamping the basic zoning application and putting it online. In its current form, legal size, it doesn't fit well in files. Additional check off's such as a question on conservation easement restrictions could eliminate a separate "mandatory" form being used. The noticing requirement for land use applications has changed. Planning, Zoning & IW Regulations should be revised accordingly. See <http://www.cga.ct.gov/2006/ACT/PA/2006PA-00080-R00HB-05290-PA.htm>.

## **Copy machine**

A copy machine with scanning abilities needs to be located in the land use office so that copies can be

made without the need to go down the hall. The ability to scan documents and e-mail them would be a timesavings and would be helpful for commissioners. A large machine should be available somewhere in Town Hall in order to make copies of large plans for the public and Commission. Lot of time piecing together photocopies of plans in sections is being wasted. Often times these larger machines are located in the Town Clerk's office.

A mailbox area and place for Commission members to pick up handouts for meetings should be built in the alcove area. A plan review table in this area could also be better utilized by Commissioner's and the public for reviewing plans. The system for getting stamps and mailings seems very cumbersome. The Town should look at establishing a mailroom and getting a postage meter.

### **Filing**

A large room exists for filing however additional file cabinets are required and manpower to properly oversee the filing. The Town should make sure that the Land Use staff understands the Connecticut's retention schedule for municipalities ( see <http://www.cslib.org/publicrecords/retland.pdf>) and regularly takes advantage of disposing of documents they are no longer required to keep. This will keep the file system to keep from becoming unyielding. Application tracking systems are becoming more predominate and affordable and could prove very beneficial for the land use office.

### **Bond Tracking & Fees**

The current set-up for tracking maintenance bonds and fees for outside consultants does not seem to be very efficient. In addition checks submitted for application fees should be removed from applications after receipt and sent upstairs to the fiscal office on a more regular basis. The land use secretaries should be logging in and processing these checks.

### **Staff Training**

It is imperative that the land use staff attends training to keep them current with changing laws and knowledge of recent court cases affecting land use. In this manner they save the Town money and are able to provide the Commissions with better advice. The Land Use Coordinator should be a member of the Connecticut Chapter of the American Planning Association attending training offerings and conferences. See [www.ccapa.org](http://www.ccapa.org). The Land Use Administrator would benefit from attending a management course offered somewhere locally. Often times courses are 1 or 2 days in length and can be very helpful. If Washington belongs to CCM they may have such course offerings. The Land Use Enforcement Officer needs to attend seminars offered by the Connecticut Association of Zoning Enforcement Officers on a regular basis. Both the Land Use Administrator and Land Use Enforcement Officer need to keep current on wetlands training and law. This requires attendance at DEP and the Connecticut Association of Conservation and Inland Wetlands Commission training events and conferences. F.O.I. training for all staff members is important and should be done on a regular basis.

### **Staff Evaluations**

Along with job descriptions should come job evaluations. Benchmarks in staff performance, including time management need to be a necessary part of the evaluation.

### **Joint Commission Meetings**

I would recommend that at least once per year the Selectmen and land use commissions have a joint meeting to discuss land use in Washington in a "State of the Town" type land use forum. Communication between the various boards and Commissions and Selectmen would prove very beneficial. Interest in this Land Use Study by those commissioners I spoke and continuing dialogue is necessary with all those concerned.

Sincerely yours,

Martin J. Connor, AICP  
Planning Consultant

Mr. Connor began by telling those present that they and the Town should be very proud of its Land Use office, the dedication and hard work exhibited by staff and volunteer commissioners. He then went through the report section by section elaborating on some points.

Following this, the Selectmen explained that they had reviewed the report and were very pleased with what they had read and discussed with Mr. Connor. If recommendations are to be followed, it will mean meeting with individuals in the Land Use Office, discussing any recommended changes and considering budget implications.

Commissioners present spoke positively of the report and the recommendations made. Joint meetings of the Commission Chair and the Board of Selectmen were thought to be of importance and will be held at least once a year. The first priority of the Board of Selectmen will be to work with the individuals whose job duties may be changing, discussing restructuring of duties, etc. Some of the suggestions made may not be able to be considered or made until the next fiscal year due to budget considerations. The point was also made that the Town would like to keep Mr. Connor involved in the planning stages of his recommendations.

**Adjournment:**

\* Motion: To adjourn the meeting at 8:05 p.m. By Mark Lyon, seconded by Nick Solley and unanimously approved.

Respectfully submitted,  
Mary Anne Greene  
Selectmen's Secretary