

• January 10, 2006

MEMBERS PRESENT: Mr. Charles, Mr. Frank, Mr. Gager, Mr. Rimsky, Mrs. Roberts

ALTERNATES PRESENT: Mr. Fairbairn, Mr. Fowlkes

STAFF PRESENT: Mrs. Hill

ALSO PRESENT: Mrs. Peckerman, Ms. Doran, Mr. Cornett, Mr. Mustich, Mr. and Mrs. Paris, Mrs. Anderson, Mr. Van Zanten, Residents, Press

Regular Business

Mrs. Roberts called the meeting to order at 7:35 p.m. and seated Members Charles, Frank, Rimsky, and Roberts and Alternate Fowlkes for Ms. Gager. She then announced this was not a Special Meeting concerning the Depot study as had been reported in the Litchfield County Times, but said that matter would be taken up later in the meeting and comments from the public would be welcome at that time. She added the study would continually be discussed at upcoming meetings through the spring and perhaps through the summer.

Consideration of the Minutes

MOTION: To accept the 12/6/05 Regular Meeting minutes as written. By Mr. Frank, seconded by Mr. Rimsky, and passed 5-0.

MOTION: To include subsequent business not already posted on the agenda. By Mr. Charles, seconded by Mr. Frank, and passed 5-0.

New Application

Upper Church Hill, LLC/72 Upper Church Hill Road/3 Lot Subdivision

Mr. Van Zanten, agent, submitted maps and plans, 12 pp, revised to 1/10/06 and the "Stormwater Management Report," by Mr. Szymanski and Mr. Van Zanten, dated 1/9/06.

Ms. Gager entered at this point.

Mr. Van Zanten briefly reviewed the plans for the three lot subdivision. Lot #1 contained the existing house and barns, Lot #2 would be accessed from Upper Church Hill Road and Lot #3 from Popple Swamp Road. Each lot would have its own well and septic system and processed gravel driveway. He noted an erosion control plan, which mainly called for the use of staked hay bales, had been submitted. The driveway entrances would cross over roadside swales and so a 15 inch pipe to handle a 100 year storm was proposed for each. He pointed out the location of wetlands and of the proposed conservation easement area, which was comprised of approximately 20% wetlands.

Mrs. Roberts noted the applicant had submitted a letter dated 1/9/06 to address each of the issues raised by Mrs. Hill in her 12/30/05 review.

Mr. Van Zanten noted the conservation easement language was not yet ready, but said it would be given to the Town. When asked if the Conservation Commission had accepted it, he said that the applicant had received a review from the Commission and would have a written response prepared for the next meeting.

Mrs. Roberts noted that at the preliminary discussion the Commissioners had asked for a vegetative

buffer along the driveway to Lot #3 to screen it from the existing house on the adjoining property. Mr. Van Zanten said white pines were proposed at the entrance to shield headlights as they turned into the drive. Mrs. Roberts suggested the driveway be moved farther from the property line, but Mr. Van Zanten said the applicant was trying to keep it as far from the wetlands as possible. Mrs. Roberts remarked how flat and open the land was and asked for additional screening along the length of the driveway. Mr. Fairbairn noted the Conservation Commission had recommended the easement be extended into the southeast corner of the property, which is visually important due to the view from the road. Mr. Van Zanten said he would look into it. Mr. Fairbairn and Mrs. Roberts asked for plantings in addition to white pines, noting they grow quickly and would not shield headlights for long and were not typical vegetation found at the edge of farmland. Mrs. Peckerman added that white pines were too brittle for such a windy, open area.

A site inspection was scheduled for 9:00 a.m. on Saturday, January 21, 2006.

Other Business

Depot Study

Mrs. Roberts again stated the Depot study would continue to be on the agenda during the upcoming months as the Commission continues the slow process of gathering information. She noted the study had been circulated among the Town boards and comments were beginning to come in. She said when a disc was received, it would be available on the Town website and copies would be printed for the public to purchase. She read an introductory paragraph she had written to accompany the document when it is put on the website and she noted that although it contains a list of priorities, the Commission would continue to assess the needs of the Town and establish its own priorities after considering further input.

There was a brief discussion with Mr. Owen, Chairman of the Zoning Commission, regarding Zoning's role. Mr. Owen noted many of the ideas presented in the study would require revisions to the Zoning Regulations, but thought Zoning should follow rather than lead in the process. The Planning Commissioners, however, advised Mr. Owen they thought it was very important for the Zoning Commission to give Planning its insights early on. Mr. Rimsky recalled the joint Planning-Zoning meeting, which was held to define issues and concerns in the 2003 Plan of Conservation and Development, noting it had been a productive approach. Mrs. Roberts noted many other towns have combined planning-zoning commissions making it easier to address issues cooperatively. She said Planning plans and then Zoning codifies, so it is important that they work together and communicate openly. Mr. Owen offered to serve as a liaison between the two commissions. He also agreed the Zoning Commission would submit comments on the study once each Zoning Commissioner had received a copy.

Mr. Cornett found the study disturbing because he thought it promoted development in the Depot, did not contain traffic studies to justify the corrective traffic and parking measures it suggested, and would result in changes that the townspeople did not want. He also stated building dwelling units in the Depot would add to the traffic and that affordable housing should be located in some other area of Town, not the Depot. He thought a traffic light should be installed on Rt. 47 to make it safer for pedestrians to cross. Mrs. Roberts responded that economic concerns were an important aspect of the study, noting that additional dwelling units and a walkable village center would be good for the existing businesses struggling there. She added one of the ideas raised in the study was the possibility of restoring some of the economic viability found in the Depot prior to the 1955 flood. Mr. Rimsky explained that planning for development differs from promoting it. He said if the Town does not draft a plan to ensure that future development is done according to its wishes, that development could change the character of the Town center. He said the goal was to be proactive by drafting a plan that would enable the Town to preserve what it now values and to develop in a way that consolidates the community and protects the existing

character. Mr. Cornett argued that the village center is already vital and does not need additional houses or businesses.

Mrs. Andersen did not think the Planning Commission had opened up the study process soon enough to the public. She recommended the Commission follow the same procedure now being used by the School Board to reach out to the public. She stated public meetings to listen to the people should be scheduled, the process was taking too long, and that important work such as revisions to the Zoning Regulations was being held up because the study was not progressing fast enough. Mrs. Roberts said again that the study would be a lengthy process, that the process had been slowed by the misinformation circulated in the fall election, and that financial constraints also slowed it down. She explained the charrette had been conducted to get the whole Town involved in the study. Mr. Charles agreed the Commission had continually reached out to the public for input. Mr. Rimsky noted comments from the Town boards would be evaluated, the study would be put on the website as soon as possible, copies were available in Town Hall for review, but that as soon as more copies could be printed they would be made available for the public to purchase, and that the entire process had been described in the Commission's minutes, which were on line for public review.

Mr. Paris thought it was good that Planning and Zoning were separate commissions because it provided the Town with protection. He said the charrette had not been successful because the consultants were adversarial and it had not been adequately publicized. He thought the Depot businesses were viable and the Town would survive with what currently exists. He stated that many in Town are worried about the future of the Washington Supply and Texaco properties, but they need not be because nothing is going to happen on either. He said the current division in Town is due to a lack of communication and recommended a meeting in the upstairs hall for all townspeople to attend. He also noted that the traffic problem might be solved by a simple traffic cop or stop sign instead of unnecessary large scale projects.

Mrs. Paris noted that while the Planning Commission is looking ten or more years ahead, Zoning is not making the revisions to its Regulations needed to protect the Town. Mr. Owen stated the Zoning Regulations were strict, but Mrs. Paris worried about loopholes and thought tightening them would be an inexpensive way to address many of the concerns raised in the study. Mrs. Andersen also thought the Zoning Regulations should be tightened to address the immediate problems the Depot is facing. Mr. Owen stated it was difficult for the Zoning Commission to deal in the abstract and it would work on revisions to its Regulations only after the problems to be solved were clearly defined.

Mrs. Roberts noted the Planning Commission has learned much during the process and that its volunteers had put forth their best effort and were comfortable with the progress to date. She said the next task would be to define priorities the Town could agree upon and reminded those present the Planning Commission must endeavor to see the whole picture and could not dwell on only one viewpoint. She thanked everyone for coming and invited them to attend the next meeting.

2006 Budget: Mrs. Roberts noted the 2006 budget included \$35,000 for Phase II of the Depot study. The Commission authorized Mrs. Roberts and Mrs. Hill to work on a budget based on the 2005 figures.

Depot Study: Several concerns were raised about the above Depot study discussion.

- Although the members of the public present claimed the study had not been well advertised and there was inadequate communication, the commissioners noted the following steps had been taken to notify and involve the public: press releases, newspaper articles (example: front page article in Voices), banner on Town Hall, tent outside Town Hall, posters, minutes and agendas on the website, Advisory Committee selected from broad cross section of town, and newsletter delivered to every household. It was noted the process had been and would continue to be an open one.

- It was noted there had been incorrect information printed in the Litchfield County Times and that the two members of the press in attendance were new and did not know the history of the study. Mrs. Hill was asked to contact them to let them know the Commission would be happy to answer any questions.
- The need for continued communication was stressed. It was noted that misinformation from the fall campaign was still circulating.
- Mr. Fowlkes asked whether under the current Zoning Regulations a CVS, large warehouse, or other similar business with parking on all sides, open 24-7 would be possible on the Supply property. Mrs. Hill said it would be possible. In that case, he said, it was, indeed, a possibility that should be addressed. Although the current owner has no plans to demolish what's on site and construct something new, a future owner could do so. He noted development from New Milford is coming closer to Washington and that businesses such as Home Depot build with future development pressures in mind. Mr. Fairbairn noted that seven years ago there were 17,000 people living within 5 miles of the Washington Green. Mr. Charles noted the owner of the Texaco property is working on plans to tear down that structure and build a bank. It was generally thought the more banks located in Town, the greater the development pressures would be.

The commissioners discussed how to proceed with the study. They agreed they would first review all the comments solicited from the Town boards and would continue to listen to comments from the public at upcoming meetings. As soon as the disc is received the study will go on the website. The commissioners agreed that they should establish their priorities prior to any large public meeting so that meeting would have a sense of direction and the agenda would be manageable. It was the consensus public discussion should be encouraged in order to build a consensus.

MOTION: To adjourn the meeting. By Mr. Frank.

Mrs. Roberts adjourned the meeting at 9:30 p.m.

FILED SUBJECT TO APPROVAL

Respectfully submitted,

Janet M. Hill

Land Use Coordinator