

September 4, 2012

7:30 p.m. Land Use Meeting Room

Members Present: Ms. Roberts, Mr. Frank, Mr. Rimsky, Ms. Jahnke

Members Absent: Ms. Gager

Alternates Present: Mr. Carey, Ms. Bishop Wrabel, Mr. Osborne

Alternates Absent:

Staff Present: Ms. Hill, Ms. White

Also Present: Mr. Bedini, Mr. Talbot, Mr. Charles

Ms. Roberts called the Meeting to order at 7:30 p.m.

Seated: Roberts, Frank, Rimsky, Jahnke, Osborne, Alt.

Consideration of the Minutes

Regular Meeting of August 7, 2012:

The Commission considered the minutes from the Regular Meeting of the Planning Commission on August 7, 2012

Motion:

to accept the August 7, 2012 Regular Meeting Minutes of the Planning Commission as submitted, by Mr. Frank and seconded by Mr. Rimsky, passed by 5-0 vote.

Special Meeting of August 22, 2012:

The Commission considered the minutes from the Special Meeting of the Planning Commission on August 22, 2012.

Corrections:

Page 1, last paragraph, 3rd sentence should read: "Mr. Hileman, past chairman of the Housing Commission, said that the Commission had studied this matter and had determined that the 2000 census had miscounted the number of housing units.

Page 4, paragraph starting with Mr. Hileman, item 3) should read: "Nearly one quarter of the property in Town is owned by people who reside out of town. He said they come here to get away from dealing with tough issues and so could not be relied upon to get involved..."

Motion:

to accept the August 22, 2012 Special Meeting Minutes of the Planning Commission as amended, by Mr. Frank and seconded by Mr. Rimsky, passed by 5-0 vote.

Subsequent Business

Motion:

to add discussion of the status of the cell tower at the Town Garage site under Other Business on the agenda,

by Mr. Frank, seconded by Mr. Rimsky, passed by 5-0 vote.

New Applications

There were no new applications to consider.

Other Business

Status of Cell Tower Application at Town Garage:

Mr. Frank stated that he looked at previous Planning Commission minutes beginning with December 2010 when the First Selectman made a presentation to the Commission for the proposed cell tower application at the Town Garage property. He stated that it was then the consensus of the Commission that they would like to review the lease before they draft an 8-24 Report. Mr. Frank stated that in March of 2011 Selectman Solley had informed the Planning Commission that there had been little progress in the lease negotiations with Verizon. He stated that he and Mr. Carey had been appointed as a Subcommittee to review the application for the 8-24 Report.

7:40 pm Ms. Bishop-Wrabel arrives.

Ms. Hill stated that she thought that the current cell tower that the Town is negotiating is in a different location and is a different application than the tower Verizon had proposed. Mr. Carey stated that the current negotiations are with a tower contractor called Homeland Towers and they are proposing to site this lower than the tower Verizon had proposed. He said that Homeland Towers acts as an intermediary between the Town and the cell service providers. Mr. Carey stated that the proposed lease had been reviewed by Town Counsel, who had also recommended that it be examined by counsel specializing in these matters. Mr. Carey stated that he and Mr. Bedini attended a presentation by Homeland Towers in Morris, CT (which is also considering such a cell tower proposal). He stated that if the lease is approved, it was intended that the parties would first enter into a Memorandum of Understanding since Homeland Towers would not enter into a lease until one of the major cell service providers signs up with them.

There was a brief discussion about the next steps in the lease negotiations and whether the Planning Commission should have another site visit.

There was a brief discussion as to what would happen to the cell tower if cell phones became obsolete. Mr. Frank stated that the sole issue before the Planning Commission would be whether the proposed leasing of Town property would be consistent with the Plan of Conservation and Development.

Mr. Frank stated that Mr. Carey was not on the Board of Selectmen when he was appointed to this subcommittee and that his continuing in such capacity may not be appropriate under the circumstances. Mr. Carey agreed.

Motion:

to appoint Ms. Gager as the second member of the Subcommittee that would be reviewing the cell tower application for purposes of the 8-24 Report,
by Mr. Frank, seconded by Ms. Roberts, passed by 5-0 vote.

Plan of Conservation and Development:

Discussion of Draft Report on Demographics:

Ms. Jahnke stated that she was surprised that the report indicated that people who are aging want to stay in their own homes. She stated that she took an informal poll and all of the people she talked to are planning on downsizing.

Ms. Roberts stated that she feels this report shows the need for alternative housing and that would require some changes in the zoning regulations.

Ms. Bishop-Wrabel stated that she feels that there should be provisions in Town for independent living and that smaller structures on smaller lots should be available.

Ms. Hill stated that the Zoning Regulations do allow for detached accessory apartment. She stated that small houses on small lots may be allowed under Affordable Housing legislation, but there is nothing in the Zoning Regulations permitting this.

Mr. Rimsky stated that the Commission needs to be proactive and present a positive response to these demographic issues. He stated that he feels the Commission should present ideas that have worked in other communities and that the consultants should advise the Commission as to how to propose these solutions.

Ms. Hill stated that the Commission should read the demographic report and email their comments to her or the consultants.

Mr. Frank stated that he would like to know how the consultants intend for the Commission to use this and future reports/memos. He questioned whether it is intended to foster discussion but will ultimately form part of the POCD update or if it is to encourage discussion in Town now and if so, how should the Commission be doing that.

Ms. Hill stated that it is her opinion that the report was created to get the discussion going. She urged the Commissioners to put their ideas, questions and comments in an email and send them to Milone & MacBroom or to her.

Mr. Rimsky stated that he was not clear on how the Commission is supposed to use these statistics and how the Consultants plan to move this agenda forward.

Ms. Hill stated that the meeting on Thursday, September 13, 2012 at 7 pm was set up by the Planning Commission to speak with the business community to start the discussion and to discuss ideas, concerns and issues that the business owners in Town might have.

Mr. Frank stated that he felt the implications of these demographic statistics are not clear. He said that he looked in the 2003 POCD and noted that after the statistics were given the planning implications were summarized in a table below. Mr. Frank stated that he was not sure how the census block groups are determined and he wonders if it is relevant to talk about population in various specific parts of a town as small as Washington unless there is some significant reason that the population in a particular area has changed markedly. The Commission briefly discussed how things should be summarized and their importance indicated in the POCD.

Ms. Roberts stated that the whole State of Connecticut is facing an aging population trend and it seems that the Town of Washington may be facing it a bit faster than the rest of the State.

The Commission briefly discussed the revision process and dates. Ms. Roberts stated that both the Planning Commission and the Consultants are in the information gathering stage at the moment.

The Commission had a lengthy discussion regarding the respective roles of the Planning Commission and the during this process of revising the POCD. Mr. Osborne stated that he feels the Planning Commission needs to appoint someone in charge to keep the communication between the Commission and the consultants going. He stated that he feels the Planning Commission needs to meet with residents of the villages to get their input and make sure that the consultants guide the Commission in addressing the pertinent issues in the revised POCD. It was the consensus of the Commission that Ms. Hill would be the “go between” person for the Planning Commission and the consultants. Ms. Roberts reminded the Commissioners that this consulting firm was chosen to do this revision without re-doing a large amount of the existing POCD and to do it at a cost that the Town would find acceptable.

The Commission discussed when they would schedule meetings, which ones they would like Milone & MacBroom to attend and how they would inform the public of these meetings.

9/13/12 Meeting with Business Community:

Mr. Talbot stated that he is a member of the Washington Business Association and has a business in Town. He stated that he learned about the Special Meeting of the Planning Commission with the business owners in Town by reading the Public Notice on the Town website. Mr. Talbot stated that there is a Business Association event on September 12th and he would try to make people aware of the Special Planning Meeting on September 13th. He stated that it is his understanding that the Planning Commission anticipates hearing input from the business people of the Town and he suggested that the Commission have a speaker at the meeting to come and talk about what the notion of a small village center is about, how the village centers could work together and get them thinking holistically in a way that will allow the POCD to grow in some way. One example would be to ask the business community what new enterprises in Town might be useful to them in their various businesses Mr. Talbot stated that he feels having talking points at the meeting would be helpful and more productive than simply encouraging random comments. He also suggested that mentioning the dates of the upcoming meetings in the minutes as another means of publicizing these events.

Mr. Osborne stated that he agreed with Mr. Talbot and suggested that maybe the Commission should have an outline of topics ready for the business owners who attend the meeting.

Mr. Charles stated that when the Town did the Depot Study they knew that this was not what the Town wants to do or should be doing but was an example of the sort of thing that could be done. He encouraged people to read the Depot Study.

Mr. Rimsky stated that he did speak with some business owners in Town and gave them questionnaires, to which most had the same answers. He stated that parking problems, lack of a walkable town and no sense of coordination between the Town and the businesses were frequent responses.

Ms. Bishop-Wrabel asked how the Town could reach out to the of service businesses in Town.

Mr. Rimsky stated that the Town used to have a municipal town directory of businesses and services available and it was sent out to everyone in Town.

Mr. Frank requested that Ms. Hill ask the Consultants if this demographic report was their product with respect to housing or do they intend to do something more because he feels that this report is just an introduction to the issue.

The Commission discussed methods of communicating with the public and stimulating feedback from them. Mr. Bedini suggested adding a Planning Commission link to the Town website, publicizing the link and updating it weekly or biweekly. He stated that the Region 12 School system had a very good experience with their consultant who was hired to do the strategic plan for the schools. Mr. Bedini stated that the consultant had many years of experience and told the B.O.E what to do, how to do it and then guided them through the process every step of the way. He stated that he thought it was important for the Commission's consultants to explain the documents they put out and talk about the pros and cons of the recommendations that are made.

Mr. Carey stated that the meeting in June was well attended but they failed to attract the second homeowners. He questioned how the Town could get them involved and suggested that they look at the situation realistically and schedule these special meetings during the week.

Mr. Rimsky said that he thinks the Planning Commission needs to plan ahead and be strategic when promoting these special meetings. He stated that he feels the Town needs to upgrade its communication system.

Meeting with Zoning Commission:

Ms. Hill distributed copies of the Zoning Regulations that pertain to the business districts and housing as well as maps of the New Preston, Marbledale and Washington Depot Business districts. She recommended that the Commissioners review these regulations and drive around the business districts to familiarize themselves before their meeting with Zoning on October 2 at 7:30 PM.

Ms. Roberts stated how important it is to keep communicating with the other Town Commissions.

The Commission briefly discussed the business district maps.

State of CT. POCD Locational Guide Map

Mr. Carey stated that he and Mr. Bedini would be attending the Public Hearing for the State of CT POCD in Goshen on September 18. Hill stated that she has been told that there are areas in the Northwest District towns that have been left off the map. She stated that if a town is on this map, in the future, after the revised State POCD gets adopted, that town could apply for grants and funds to help with their village district.

Privilege of the Floor

Mr. Charles stated that there are 2124 residences, 3578 residents and potentially 4600 building lots in the Town of Washington. He stated that if the Town does nothing and does not have a POCD the Town will have a lot more houses, but they will all be weekend homes. We will have plenty of taxes but we will not address our schools, housing, etc. The Town has a grand list that

would be the envy of small cities. He stated that the Town of Washington is a small town with a lot of potential.

Mr. Charles stated that the information regarding housing is meaningless unless the Town knows the location and extent of the Flood Plain is and what the septic soils are in the Depot. He stated that without this data the Town could enact all of these proposals for the future and may find out that they do not have the potential to do anything.

Adjournment

Motion:

to adjourn by Mr. Rimsky, seconded by Mr. Osborne, passed by 5-0 vote.

Ms. Roberts adjourned the meeting at 9:48 pm.

FILED SUBJECT TO APPROVAL

Respectfully submitted,

Shelley White, Land Use Clerk