

**Windham Planning & Zoning Commission
Windham, CT
Minutes**

December 19, 2013

The Windham Planning & Zoning Commission held its meeting on December 19, 2013 in the Meeting Room, Town Hall. Chair Paula Stahl called the meeting to order at 7:02 P.M. Members present were Edward Pelletier, Jean Chaine, Michael Graff, Claire Lary, Scott Lambeck and Paula Stahl. Also present were Town Planner James Finger, Town Engineer Joseph Gardner and ZEO Matthew Vertefeuille.

I) Approval of Minutes

- a) The minutes of October 10, 2013 were approved. The motion was made by Jean Chaine and seconded by Scott Lambeck. The motion carried unanimously.
- b) The minutes of November 14, 2013 were approved. The motion was made by Scott Lambeck and seconded by Ed Pelletier. Voting in favor of the motion were Scott Lambeck, Ed Pelletier, Michael Graff, Claire Lary and Paula Stahl. Jean Chaine abstained as he was not present at the meeting. The motion carried.
- c) The minutes of November 21, 2013 were approved. The motion was made by Scott Lambeck and seconded by Jean Chaine. The motion carried unanimously.

II) New Business

a) Town of Windham, 13-17 Walnut Street and 13 Bank Street (corner of Walnut & Meadow Street), Willimantic, CT. – Site Plan Review and Municipal Improvement (8-24) report.

Town Engineer Joseph Gardner said a parking study was done in 1999, and at that time the recommendation was to construct a parking garage at the corner of Walnut Street and Bank Street. In 2007, the firm of Walker Parking Consultants of Boston, MA was hired to design the parking structure which would be located in the existing parking lot located at the corner of Walnut Street and Meadow Street.

Brandon Schrenker, Project Engineer with Walker Parking Consultants said approximately four years ago the plan was updated. He said we met with Town staff, the Fire Dept. and the Police Dept. and security options such as lighting were discussed. Approximately one year ago the plan was presented to the Windham Town Council. It was also presented to the public, and most recently the plan was presented to the Zoning Board of Appeals who granted variances from; Section 31.7; Setback Regulations, Section 31.9; Maximum Building Footprint, Section 31.11.3; parking close to the street and Section 71.5.1(j); minimum 5 foot setback from the property line to build the parking facility closer to the sidewalk.

Mr. Schrenker said the design of the garage is a very basic and user friendly design. It is basically a cork screw up and a cork screw down design. The proposed parking facility will provide parking for approximately 270 passenger vehicles on three structure supported tiers and one on-grade tier. This represents a net add of approximately 174 spaces above the existing public surface lot and the existing police station lot.

The main entrance for the public will be off Walnut Street. Public parking will include 248 parking spaces. Parking in the NE corner of the structure, with an entrance off Meadow Street, would be used exclusively by Police and Fire employee vehicles and would include 42 parking spaces. There is higher head room in this area to accommodate for emergency vehicles. These spaces will be separated from the other parking spaces by a removable type barrier.

At the base of the structure, there will be dedicated parking, a bus stop, ancillary storage, miscellaneous mechanical space and potential retail use. The bus stop area will be located in the NW corner of the site, as well as some commercial space. Pedestrian traffic is also shown in the NW corner. An elevator and stair tower will be located in the SW corner as well.

The architecture will be a townhouse design with a brick façade. From the outside looking from Meadow Street or Walnut Street the garage will resemble townhouses with brick facades, but other parts of the garage will look like a traditional garage. There will be two glass stair towers which will provide added security. We have attempted to maintain a balance with aesthetics and cost, said Schrenker. He said we have dressed up Walnut Street and we have dressed up Meadow Street. The police station will make it look more like a traditional parking garage, but when you turn the corner at the east side of the police & fire department buildings, we have simplified the architecture into a column spandrel look.

A general discussion ensued.

Chair Stahl asked what the townhouse doors at street level would look like. Mr. Schrenker said they intend to use brick, but they would be willing to consider an alternative. She said if it is all bricked up it would look like a boarded up building as people are walking by. She said we have to think about the experiences for pedestrians. She said there may be something else you can do that would cost the same as brick.

Commissioner Jean Chaine said the useable spaces for the commercial district are 250 spaces. He referred to the ground level spaces which will be dedicated to town personnel's personal vehicles. He said all other members of the public will have to park on the upper levels. He questioned whether so many of the best spaces should be set aside for the personal vehicles of public safety employees who are going to be on the job eight hours. It is nonsense giving them the prime locations for their personal vehicles, he added. Put them in spaces that are not as prime as those ground floor spaces and make room for more handicap spaces, he added.

He referred to the location of the pedestrian overhang. He asked if there would be a bus pick-up at this location. Will the full length of that bus be blocking Meadow Street, he asked. Mr. Schrenker said they hadn't intended to have a bus pick-up at that location. Mr. Chaine said someone ought to think that through because that is a narrow street.

ZEO Matt Vertefeuille said regarding the bus pick-up, if we created a turn-off as long as the bus they would be in the middle of the street. He said that area of Meadow Street is used daily so traffic is often blocked.

Chair Stahl said the proposed location is really a tight site for a parking garage. She said her concern is because we have to accommodate the public safety there is only handicap parking space on the first floor. I think every person who is pulling into a parking garage has their fingers crossed that there is a spot for them on the grade level. There are no parking spaces for the general public other than handicap. People like to park at grade level, and they will not be able to.

Planner Finger said there is a problem in getting public parking on the first level, because there is only one entrance/exit to the Public Safety complex through the Meadow St access and they will need to keep that secure for the Public Safety personnel. Commission members questioned whether having only one entrance/exit for the public would be adequate during high traffic events.

ZEO Matt Vertefeuille said he was involved in selecting the design for the garage. He said we looked at 8 or 10 different designs; wider ones, narrower ones, all different shapes and by far this was the most cost effective, and the best as far as net parking spots.

Chair Stahl said because the site is so small and narrow she has always had a problem with placing the garage there. The other garage site option, the lot across from the Town Hall would have been far easier to work and would have provided more parking on the ground level.

Commissioner Jean Chaine asked what the plans are to deal with snow on the roof. Mr. Schrenker said the snow would have to be trucked off site as they cannot dump snow over the sides. Commissioner Jean Chaine added that if you want to get the water off the roof and the best way is to get the snow off.

Chair Stahl asked about drainage. Mr. Schrenker pointed out the drains shown on the plan.

Commissioner Jean Chaine asked, with one entrance and one exit, is that adequate when you have special events? Mr. Schrenker yes, it would be a single lane entrance and a single lane exit.

Chair Stahl asked about funding for the project. Town Engineer Joe Gardner said we have secured several grants, but there is a stipulation that if we don't build the garage we will have to give the money back. He said construction is years away especially because the Town cannot apply for funding until the final architectural drawings are complete. Mr. Schrenker said the design work has been funded with a grant administered by the State Dept. of Transportation. The town will most likely need to match that grant, he added. Mr. Gardner pointed out that the plans have come a long way since 1999 when we started discussing the need for the parking garage.

Commissioner Scott Lambeck asked how the Town would accommodate events in town such as Third Thursdays. Mr. Gardner said we will have to make special arrangements to accommodate

traffic. Chair Stahl asked who would manage the garage. Mr. Gardner said we haven't gotten that far ahead yet.

After some further discussion, Scott Lambeck made a motion to approve the site plan as presented and Michael Graff seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

Scott Lambeck made the following **RESOLUTION** and Jean Chaine seconded the motion.

Be it hereby **RESOLVED** pursuant to the Connecticut General Statutes, Section 8-24, that the Windham Planning & Zoning Commission recommends that the Town of Windham proceed to construct a parking garage at 13-17 Walnut Street in Willimantic. Members voting in favor of the Resolution were Scott Lambeck, Jean Chaine, Ed Pelletier, Michael Graff, Claire Lary and Paula Stahl. There were 0 votes in opposition. The Resolution carried.

II) Report from Zoning Enforcement Officer

a) ZEO Matt Vertefeuille referred to a the plan submitted by Craig Gates for property in North Windham, CT. The plan was approved by the Planning & Zoning Commission, but the owner decided it was too costly to build, and so they've decided to do something else with the property. They plan to scale down the business and locate it in the existing structure. He then showed the revised plans, which showed much less disturbance to the site, and less parking that originally proposed. They will also change the location of the ground sign - moving it closer to the driveway, and will eliminate one of the driveways. Commissioner Chaine commented that if they had presented this plan originally, they wouldn't have had to come before the Commission - it would have simply been a staff review; and that we're trying to accomplish with streamlining the permit process.

III) Routine Business

a) Correspondence

There was no correspondence.

b) Miscellaneous

Notification from the Town of Sprague regarding proposed zoning changes on interior lots, driveways, and non-conforming lots.

As there was no other business, the meeting was adjourned at 8:12 P.M. Motion by Ed Pelletier and seconded by Jean Chaine. The motion carried unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,

Lillian Murray, Clerk