

WINDHAM PLANNING & ZONING COMMISSION

MINUTES

April 24, 2014

The Windham Planning & Zoning Commission held its meeting on April 24, 2014 in the Meeting Room, Town Hall. Chair Paula Stahl called the meeting to order at 7:01 P.M. Members present: Jean Chaine, Michael Graff, Scott Lambeck, Dan Lein, Claire Lary and Paula Stahl. Ed Pelletier was absent. Also present were Town Planner James Finger, and Zoning Enforcement Officer Matthew Vertefeuille.

I) Approval of Minutes

Action on the minutes of March 27, 2014 and April 10, 2014 was deferred to the next meeting.

II) Public Hearing

a) Colonial BT LLC, 36 & 37 Foster Drive, Willimantic – Special Permit application to expand the number of dwelling units into unoccupied space at existing multi-family development.

Jeff Kamm, architect for the project, said the original townhouses, which were built in the 1960's, were built in Windham. He referred to a handout which explained the history of the apartment complex, as well as the proposed plan.

Colonial Townhouse Apartments is a complex of 200 apartments on the Windham town line; with an additional 208 apartments in the Town of Mansfield. The complex has changed very little since it was built. Originally, the buildings had tenant storage areas in the lower levels of the buildings; but in response to a request from the local Fire Marshall, management had discontinued use of those storage areas. He said we came up with the idea to take this space and convert it into apartments. Due to a waiting list for apartments within the complex, we are looking to add additional units in these areas. The complex mainly serves UConn and Eastern students, faculty and professionals who work in the area.

He said at this time we are looking to expand the Windham part of the complex by creating 29 apartments within the 15 existing structures on the property. Of the 29 units, 8 are to be studio apartments containing approximately 400 square feet, and 21 units are to be 2-bedroom units containing approximately 798 square feet to 983 square feet. We are basically adding three apartments to every building, but we are not expanding the footprint of the building; this is all happening within the existing buildings.

He said we have met with civil and technical engineers to go over the technical aspects of the project to ensure that the proposed plan meets the State Building and Fire Codes. We will also work with the town's building officials to make sure the final plans are in compliance with all the requirements.

Currently we have 300 parking spaces in the Town of Windham with no reported problems associated with the parking. He said the engineers are currently looking at a parking study of the property. We realize that the parking is not laid out the best, but based on current standards we can reconfigure the parking lot, and in some cases add 5-10 feet to a side of a parking lot. We have been working with Windham's requirements of 1.5 spaces which seems to be the standard for this type of multifamily housing in Windham.

Chair Stahl expressed concern with the parking. She said the 1.5 spaces for a 2-bedroom unit may not be sufficient. Mr. Kamm said currently management has no knowledge of any problem with the parking on the property in Windham.

Mr. Kamm said the existing apartment styles are 1-bedroom, and the townhouses are 2-bedroom units. Right now we are not experiencing any problems with parking, and we do not expect that to change when we add more 2-bedroom units. Chair Stahl said you are adding 50 bedrooms so you should be adding 50 parking spaces. Mr. Kamm said if the board is asking that, that is something we can do. Mr. Kamm said they would like to get this project to the point where the board is happy with the project, and see if we can work these matters out on an administrative basis because we are not building any new building.

Chair Stahl referred to a letter from the Town of Mansfield which listed some of their concerns related to parking, storm water and traffic. Mr. Kamm said we started the project in Windham first. We met with all the officials, walked them through the property and explained what we want to do with the buildings. A few weeks later, we did the same thing in Mansfield. We have met with the Building Inspector, the Town Planner, and the Fire Marshall and brought them up to speed, and the informal response that I have received so far is that they are looking at this as an administrative project.

Chair Stahl referred to Mansfield's concern with storm water. Mr. Kamm stated that Planner Finger has been in contact with the Town of Mansfield. He has recommended that the storm water systems be improved to reduce any pollution. He further recommended that the storm water facilities be designed to function independently within each community, also to minimize any impact on nearby wetlands (Natchaug River). Mansfield has indicated that they totally support the recommendation of Planner Finger. Mr. Kamm added that they also met with the Wetlands Officer who stated there would be no negative impact to Mansfield.

Commissioner Jean Chaine referred to the parking density. He said the applicant has stated that they could re-stripe the parking in order to accommodate the tenant's cars. He asked how that fits in with the parking standards for residential. Does dead space equate to a parking space, he asked. Chair Stahl said the parking is based on dwelling units, and ranges between 1 and 2 ½ spaces. The Zoning Enforcement Officer will determine the appropriate number within that range, she said. ZEO Matt Vertefeuille said his recommendation is one parking space for each bedroom. Chair Stahl said the applicant would be required to meet whatever the ZEO requires for parking. Mr. Kamm said many of the tenants are students. They don't have cars; they use the bus service that is available. Mr. Kamm said historically the parking has been based on 1.5 units and we seem to be doing okay with that. He said he hoped that this could be handled administratively. ZEO Vertefeuille agreed to work with the applicant on the parking.

Chair Stahl asked if there were any public comments pertaining to this proposal. 1) Don Aubrey spoke in favor the proposal. He said there has always been a large emphasis on the UConn population, both graduate students and regular students, as well as professionals who work at the university and in other locations. It has always been a highly sought after place to live. It has always had a waiting list because people have wanted to live there.

As there were no further comments the public hearing was closed.

After a general discussion among members, Jean Chaine made a motion to approve the application for a Special Permit for the expansion of buildings owned by Colonial BT, LLC located at 36 & 37 Foster Drive for a total of 29 additional units to be established in the lower level of the buildings, and also to refer the issue of storm water and parking configuration to Town staff for administrative approval. Scott Lambeck seconded the motion and the motion carried unanimously.

III) Other Business

Dan Lein made a motion to add the Evans Subdivision as item (c) on the agenda and Claire Lary seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

Commissioner Claire Lary recused herself at 7:30 P.M.

a) Municipal Improvements – CGS-8-24 Review

1) Extension of lease to Windham Textile & History Museum.

Chair Stahl explained that the Connecticut State Statutes, Section 8-24, requires that the Planning Commission look at any sale and purchase of property for the town to make sure that projects meet the Town Plan of Conservation & Development.

Michael Graff read the following Resolution into the record:

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 continue to lease to the Windham Textile and History Museum the Town owned property located at 157 Union Street (aka 411 Main Street) in Willimantic.

This is consistent with the Town Plan of Conservation & Development as it will promote awareness of the Town's history, and will provide recreational opportunities in the downtown area. Jean Chaine seconded the resolution. Those present voted unanimously in favor of the resolution.

Commissioner Claire Lary resumed her seat on the commission at 7:35 P.M.

2) Section 8-24 Review Micro-grid grant for Windham Middle School.

Jean Chaine asked if the micro-grid is going to be a 24-7 operation or only when there is an emergency. ZEO Matt Vertefeuille said it is basically a 24-7 operation. Planner James Finger said we can take advantage of gathering the credits of this facility to use against the load demand of other buildings. ZEO Vertefeuille said you are producing

more power than the demand. Jean Chaine said is it producing power 24-7. ZEO Vertefeuille said no. Mr. Chaine asked, if the grid goes down can you isolate this to operate the emergency shelter. ZEO Vertefeuille said yes. Mr. Chaine asked if the project is completely funded, or does the Town have to participate in it. Planner Finger said the town has to front load the project for the full amount (1.8 million dollars). He said we are eligible for up to seven hundred and nine thousand dollars from the Connecticut Dept. of Energy & Environmental Protection. The remaining balance is eligible for up to 80% of reimbursement for the school facilities qualifying expenses, but not everything is going to qualify, said Finger. We are looking to carry maybe two hundred to three hundred thousand dollars over a 20 year period depending how long we bond for.

Dan Lein proposed the following resolution:

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 apply for a Micro-grid grant to provide a “safe haven” for the Sweeney & Windham Middle School.

This is consistent with the Town Plan of Conservation and Development as it will provide greater control of energy consumption at municipal facilities and emergency power. Michael Graff seconded the motion. Those present voted unanimously in favor.

c) David Evans, 606 Back Road, North Windham

Wes Wenworth, LLC representing Mr. Evans said at the last meeting discussion included establishing the property lines, the layout of the lots and the common driveway. He referred to the front portion of the property on the map. He said they have laid out six houses; five of them located on the front portion of the property and one large rear lot. He said after reviewing the property lines, they came to the conclusion that it made sense to have the center of the common driveway on the property line. The common driveway could also be used as frontage. He said some land on the northern portion will be added and conveyed to the Rambush property and the Folan property. He said rather than calling the roadway a common driveway we have decided to call it a private lane.

At the last meeting, there was also discussion about revising the Subdivision Regulations as a gravel road would not currently be permitted. Mr. Wentworth said he reviewed the Regulations and Section 5.13 states that you may utilize an existing or proposed private drive as a private street for vehicular access and to meet the minimum frontage requirement. Chair Stahl said that was added in for the hospital. She asked what standards for the gravel road were they asking for. Mr. Wentworth said we are looking at a 14 foot wide gravel driveway which might be paved later on. He pointed out a turn-around area for fire apparatus and other vehicles. He added that Town Engineer Joseph Gardner said he was comfortable with the proposed access as a private gravel road.

After a lengthy discussion, Mr. Wentworth agreed to meet with Town Planner James Finger and ZEO Matt Vertefeuille to work out the language for a possible revision to the regulations. He will also meet with the Fire Marshall to make sure the plan, as

proposed, meets the requirements. Mr. Wentworth said he will return to the commission next month so that the application can be scheduled for public hearing.

D) Draft Manufacturing & Industrial District map and regulation revision – Stakeholders input.

Chair Stahl reviewed the proposed revisions to Section 41 – Manufacturing District M-1. She said the goal is to align the regulations with the current development pattern and to promote a larger area for manufacturing and to increase the types of uses that are permitted with staff approval. The purpose and intent of the M-1 Zone is to permit manufacturing in harmony with the surrounding commercial and residential development.

Audience Comments: 1) Joseph Boucher, M.S., L.S. with Towne Engineering, referred to proposed revisions to the M-1 Zone. As stated at the last meeting, he referred to three properties owned by Windham Materials. He said property at 976 Windham Road, in South Windham is zoned M-1. There are house lots located on the west side of the highway that are zoned R-3. Chair Stahl said the Commission members agreed that R-3 Zone could be extended. Mr. Boucher also referred to property located on Commerce Drive owned by Jo-Ann and Keith Nasin which has a large wetlands located on the property. The Chair said the Commission will discuss that at their next working meeting.

2) Mark & Phil Turkington said they reviewed the proposed revisions and felt the permitted uses are fine, but they had a concern with eliminating such uses as office space, warehousing, research laboratory. They said they have operated these permitted uses over 30+ years and want to be allowed to continue these operations. They should be continued as a permitted use, they said. Chair Stahl explained that when the Planning Commission and the Zoning Commission became the Planning & Zoning Commission our charge was to review the regulations to make them more conforming with the Town Plan of Development. Mr. Turkington said you are making these changes for reasons we do not understand. Chair Stahl said their comments as well as Mr. Boucher's comments will be taken up at the next meeting.

D) Report from Zoning Officer

1) ZEO Matt Vertefeuille said 699 Main Street (Hurley Building) is being considered for housing and retail uses. He said the housing would include market value housing and some veteran housing, all of which are permitted uses. He said the new owners may proceed with the same site plan that was approved by the former developer. Site plans are not applicant specific, said Vertefeuille. He added that the former developer has transferred all tax credits to the new developer.

2) Renovations on the YMCA building are going according to schedule.

As there was no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 9:10 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Lillian Murray, Clerk