



STATE OF CONNECTICUT – COUNTY OF TOLLAND
INCORPORATED 1786

TOWN OF ELLINGTON

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PLANNING AND ZONING COMMISSION SPECIAL MEETING MINUTES

MONDAY, JULY 29, 2024, 7:00 PM

IN-PERSON ATTENDANCE: TOWN HALL ANNEX, 57 MAIN STREET, ELLINGTON, CT

REMOTE ATTENDANCE: ZOOM VIDEO CONFERENCING

(ATTENDEES BELOW WERE IN PERSON UNLESS OTHERWISE NOTED)

MEMBERS PRESENT: CHAIRMAN ARLO HOFFMAN, VICE CHAIRMAN SEAN KELLY, REGULAR MEMBERS WILLIAM HOGAN, F. MICHEAL FRANCIS, AND MICHAEL SWANSON

MEMBERS ABSENT: SECRETARY ROBERT SANDBERG, JR., REGULAR MEMBER JON MOSER, AND ALTERNATES RACHEL DEARBORN AND JEREMIAH WILLIAMS

STAFF PRESENT: LISA HOULIHAN, TOWN PLANNER AND BARBRA GALOVICH, RECORDING CLERK

I. CALL TO ORDER: Chairman Arlo Hoffman called the meeting to order at 7:00 pm.

II. PUBLIC COMMENTS (On non-agenda items):

Miriam Underwood, Board of Education (BOE) Chair of Finance and Operations Committee, 15 Eva Circle, Steven Viens, member of the BOE Finance and Operations Committee, 45 Middle Butcher Road and Alisha Carpino (via Zoom), Ellington Schools, Director of Finance and Operations, 47 Main Street, Ellington, came before the Planning & Zoning Commission to discuss replacement of a free-standing sign in front of the high school on Maple Street.

Miriam Underwood explained the free-standing sign in front of Ellington High School was demolished due to a motor vehicle accident. The BOE is looking to replace the sign and wants to know if the Commission would allow the new sign to be LED. Steven Viens stated they would like to rebuild the sign with brick framing. The electronic message board would be controlled by the school's main office, should they be allowed to have the LED component.

Lisa Houlihan, Town Planner, stated Scott Nichlos, Superintendent of Schools, and a member of the BOE reached out for guidance and asked if the sign could be digital. Lisa explained the zoning regulations don't allow for digital signage. Vice-Chairman Kelly explained one of the gas stations in town installed digital signs on the top of pumps and have received a Cease and Desist Order from the Zoning Enforcement Officer.

Commissioner Hogan noted the Commission recently revised the sign regulations to avoid having LED lighting and businesses outlining windows with LED string lights to draw attention. Commissioner Hogan stated such lighting disturbs the surrounding environment.

Chairman Hoffman said the Commission is trying to preserve the look of the town. Miriam Underwood noted school staff members had to manually change the letters on the sign that got hit by the vehicle, which is a safety concern. Steven Viens noted that other towns have digital freestanding message board signs for their schools.

Commissioner Hogan noted the safety issue with an individual walking from gas pumps to the convenience store is not different than an attendant going out once a day to change the pricing on the pumps. Commissioners agreed if they amend the zoning regulations to allow the school to have digital signage, they would potentially create an issue with business owners wanting the same. The zoning regulations do not allow any signage to revolve, rotate, flash, or be portable on wheels. Commissioner Hogan noted there are many more efficient ways for the school to communicate with the public rather than individuals driving by the location to obtain information.

III. NEW BUSINESS:

1. **Informal discussion regarding Section 6.6 Access Management of the Ellington Zoning Regulations and a request from Hallisey, Pearson & Cassidy to allow two access points for Assessor Parcel Number 046-003-0002, a 20.98-acre vacant parcel on the west side of Route 83 in the Planned Commercial (PC) zone.**

Attorney Robin Pearson, Alter & Pearson, LLC, 701 Hebron Avenue, Glastonbury, CT, James Cassidy, PE, Hallisey, Person & Cassidy Engineering Associates, Inc., 630 Main Street, Cromwell, CT, Matt Baldino, PE, Solli Engineering, 501 Main Street, Suite 2A, Monroe, CT and Gary Eucalitto, Garrett Homes, LLC, 55 Proprietors Lane, Torrington, CT were present for the informal discussion.

James Cassidy explained the parcel they are looking to discuss is currently used for agriculture. They are looking to subdivide and develop 3 acres of the 20.98-acre parcel. James Cassidy noted the lot has 1,500' of frontage, has a drainage ditch running through it, and some wetland soils on the western side. James Cassidy reviewed the draft site plan showing the proposed two driveways with 750 linear feet between the two. Matt Baldino reviewed the schematic plan and noted the Department of Transportation (DOT) would need to review the new access and a traffic study would be conducted. James Cassidy stated that retailers are looking for a single point of access.

Chairman Hoffman said the parcel is challenging to develop. He would support one main access and one righthand only access from the north. The drainage ditch was created when the plaza across the street was developed. The Route 83 access management plan was designed to connect parcels and provide internal access without vehicles having to enter onto Route 83.

Matt Baldino explained the DOT requires eight hours of steady traffic to warrant a new traffic light. Vice Chairman Kelly said traffic does become congested in that area during peak times.

Commissioner Hogan asked if the property owner has seen the concept development plan, James Cassidy responded the owner has reviewed several concept plans. Chairman Hoffman noted the Inland Wetlands Agency (IWA) would need to review the possible creation of a bridge over the drainage swale.

Gary Eucalitto noted the portion of land to the north of the drainage swale would be developed first, then the southerly portion. He noted the potential retail business to build on the parcel will not have a drive thru.

Commissioner Francis suggested three means of access along the 1,500' of frontage, including a right turn only to the north and south and an access across from the plaza with right turn entry/exit with left turn signal.

Attorney Pearson reviewed the requirements the commission is looking for and said they would like to discuss the potential bridge and wetlands impact with the IWA. Lisa Houlihan stated the next IWA meeting is Monday, August 12, 2024.

VI. ADMINISTRATIVE BUSINESS:

1. Approval of the June 24, 2024, Regular Meeting Minutes.

MOVED (SWANSON) SECONDED (KELLY) (FRANCIS - ABSTAINED) AND PASSED TO APPROVE JUNE 24, 2024, REGULAR MEETING MINUTES AS WRITTEN.

2. Correspondence/Discussion:

- a. **Discuss Airbnb's and the Ellington Zoning Regulations.**

Lisa Houlihan said the closest regulations the town has to Airbnb's is Section 7.2–Bed and Breakfast operations, which requires a Special Permit and owner occupancy. Lisa Houlihan said when the department receives questions about short-term rentals, they inform the requesters they are not allowed. Lisa Houlihan said over the last 10 years there have been nine complaints about short-term rentals and six of them were near Crystal Lake. Complaints generally come from neighbors complaining about parties and occupants not being considerate of their surroundings. John Colonese, Assistant Planner Zoning Wetlands Officer, has issued three Cease and Desist Orders for illegal short-term rentals; one was appealed, but the owner ended up selling the house. There are currently five Airbnb's listed on the internet in Ellington. Chairman Hoffman mentioned he was approached about allowing Airbnb's in town, one of which is renting a motor home that is located on an individual's property. Lisa Houlihan said the current regulations do not allow campers to be occupied, only stored, on the premises.

Commissioner Hogan noted Airbnb's are an economic engine and create a nice place to stay and not in a creepy hotel. The commission round tabled the topic and Lisa Houlihan noted there are statutes that allow a registration process and a certain amount of collected monies would be taxable. Lisa Houlihan said more research needs to be completed. They discussed short-term versus long-term rentals.

Lisa Houlihan will provide the commission with a copy of the enabling statute and other information about short-term rentals for discussion next month. She suggested if the commission wants to pursue an amendment to the zoning regulations to allow short-term rentals the commission should hold a public information meeting before moving forward with a formal regulation amendment.

- b. **Pursuant to Connecticut General Statute Section 8-30j, review and amend Chapter 5 Housing and Residential Development and the Housing Needs Assessment from the 2019 Plan of Conservation and Development.**

The commission conducted a round table discussion. Commissioner Swanson is on the Ellington Housing Authority (EHA) and would like to meet with the administration to move forward with constructing more senior housing on the former Schlude property.

Commissioner Swanson feels there is a disconnect between town administration and the EHA. The EHA receives money from the State, the Town owns the property, and all other money is donated.

VIII. ADJOURNMENT:

MOVED (HOGAN) SECONDED (FRANCIS) AND PASSED UNANIMOUSLY TO ADJOURN THE PLANNING AND ZONING COMMISSION MEETING AT 8:25 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Barbra Galovich, Recording Clerk