

Regular Planning Commission Meeting

MINUTES

7:30 PM Thursday, June 04, 2015

Brookfield Town Hall - Room 133

1) Convene Meeting

Chairman J. Van Hise convened the meeting at 7:32 p.m. and established a quorum of members: J. Van Hise, Chairman; Vice Chairman A. Kerley; Secretary D. Frankel; Regular members G. Hunton and L. Taylor; Alternates G. Blass and I. Agard. Also present: Community Development Director K. Daniel; Town Director of Public Works R. Tedesco; Recording Secretary J. Llewellyn.

2) Review Minutes of Previous Meeting

- [Draft Minutes Regular Meeting 05/21/2015](#): A motion to accept the Minutes of the Regular Meeting of 5/21/2015, with the stipulations raised by the Chairman*, was made by A. Kerley, seconded by D. Frankel, and carried unanimously.

*Chairman Van Hise questioned the reference in the minutes that two of the homes would be priced at 80% of the State median income, and two at 60% of the State median income. They will check this with the applicant at the public hearing.

*Correct the name of the Commissioner who seconded the motion to set the public hearing for **Mountain Road Hollow #201500415-36 North Mountain Road: New Affordable Subdivision** to G. Hunton.

*Chairman Van Hise asked for a copy of the letter sent to the Fire Marshal re: Mountain Road Hollow, #201500415 (addressing the fire tanks), and wanted to be sure a reply was received by the public hearing (July 2, 2015).

3) Old Business

- a) Mountain Road Hollow #201500415 - 36 North Mountain Road: New Affordable Subdivision (Public Hearing date 07/02/2015 - Public Hearing close date 08/05/2015)

No one present. This agenda item will be discussed at the Public Hearing on 7/2/15 and the site walk on June 25th.

PUBLIC HEARING: 7:45 P.M.

- Plan of Conservation and Development - Draft dated 04/29/2015
- POCD Maps Draft Dated 04/29/2015
 - [Topography Map](#)
 - [Watershed Map](#)
 - [Wetland Soils and Watercourses Map](#)
 - [FEMA Floodplain](#)
 - [Critical Habitat and Natural Diversity Database Map](#)
 - [Surface Water Quality Map](#)
 - [Ground Water Quality Map](#)
 - [Sewer Service Map](#)
 - [Brookfield Public Water Systems](#)
 - [Current Land Use Map](#)
 - [Current Zoning District Map](#)
 - [Subdividable Residential Land Map](#)
 - [Residential Density](#)
 - [Open Space Map](#)
 - [Historic Resources Map](#)
- Memo to Commission from Selectmen RE: POCD

Chairman Van Hise opened the Public Hearing at 7:45 p.m. and introduced the Commissioners as well as K. Daniel, Community Development Director. Commission Secretary D. Frankel read the legal notice for the record.

Chairman Van Hise outlined the purpose of this hearing, and the statutes requiring the revision of the Plan of Conservation and Development (POCD) and the revision process thus far. He further outlined the format the hearing would follow this evening.

Chairman Van Hise noted Correspondence from the Board of Selectmen which was read into the record. This memo focused on giving attention to the aging elementary schools and care for the environment and stewardship of the three water bodies within the Town. It also felt there should be “diminished” priority given to use of the Gurski property, and eliminate the development of a new historic district at the Four Corners around the Craft Center. The Chairman reiterated the Commission’s comments from the last meeting in reaction to the latter statement of this memo: . . .” *the Commission requests further clarification on what the Selectmen’s basis was for its objection to a Historic District at the Four Corners, as indicated by its comment that it would “not approve” a move to create another historic district. The Commission would like to understand why, since some of the townspeople had given input supporting this idea. The Commission would like to have the Selectmen’s rationale prior to completing the Plan of Conservation and Development.*” (Source: Planning Commission Minutes, May 21, 2015).

The presentation began with the Plan of Development’s Vision Statement, then the Executive Summary, and proceeded through all sections in order. Public comments were welcome and recorded as noted.

Following the presentation of the Vision Statement, Resident Chris Delia, addressing the Plan (and Commission’s) objective of “providing housing for young people,” but contented that in doing so with the multi-family dwellings this is “destroying this town” by bringing in low-income housing.

On the matter of the Executive Summary, the Chairman cited this paragraph as the most important:

“The intended readers and users of the POCD include land use commission members (Planning, Zoning, Inland Wetlands and the Zoning Board of Appeals), government officials (Board of Selectmen, Board of Finance and Board of Education), and other agencies and groups involved in responsible and sustainable development, such as the Conservation Commission, Economic Development Commission, Historic District Commission, Park & Recreation Commission, and the Water Pollution Control Authority. In addition to state planning and development agencies, other external organizations and groups will likely find the POCD useful, and include the Western Connecticut Council of Governments, the Brookfield Chamber of Commerce, realtors, developers and prospective residents and businesses.”

Resident Howard Lasser, representing Brookfield Craft Center, first stated that he is “embarrassed” that this is the first time he’s read the POCD from cover-to-cover. He said he is here tonight to ask all parties to “keep an open mind, and explore all alternatives” on the matter of the text that reads that the Town “*will explore the potential of an additional historic district in the Four Corners/Town Center area.*”

Transitioning to the Introduction to the Plan’s Objectives, Chairman Van Hise reiterated the 2002 Objectives, which he said remain the same for this Plan:

“The basic principles that formed the foundation of the 2002 Plan of Conservation and Development are Enhance Community Character through preservation of important resources including natural resources, open space, historic resources, and community character. Grow Smarter through improving the quality of development and managing the quantity of development Meet Community Needs through improvement of community facilities and resolution of transportation and utility issues.”

He added that the Commission tried to preserve what we thought was important from the 2002 POCD.

Chairman Van Hise first addressed the Demographics, stating that the key thing people should realize is that the Town is getting “older” and middle-aged people is the group that is shrinking. The Town, therefore, has a need for more affordable housing to both attract a younger demographic, and also to meet the needs of older residents who may want to downsize.

Resident Sean Hathorn agreed that there is a need to attract younger families and professionals but called for developers and real estate professionals to be more than a “potential” audience (Ref. p. 10, paragraph 4), adding that they “have to buy in and have a stake in this town.”

On **Conditions and Trends**, the Plan seeks to address the needs of older people want may to stay in Town and want to live somewhere more affordable, with less maintenance. It was also noted that the school age population is also shrinking. A. Kerley noted that a lot of the early renters in the new multi-family developments are teachers, firemen and other professionals.

He reminded the audience that there is a State mandate for the Town to have 10% of dwellings as affordable housing, adding that people tend to get “unduly concerned” over the term “affordable” and need to understand the true requirements of the Affordable Housing Statute (CGS 8-30G). D. Frankel added that with the declining school population, the Town might have to consider consolidating a school or two. It was also noted that Center School is the oldest wooden school building in the state.

Resident H. Kurfehs addressed the issue of Affordable Housing, first clarifying that “affordable housing is not Section 8.” He cited a recent conversation he had with someone from Danbury Hospital who lamented that there is a dearth of living facilities for upcoming professionals. He added a positive economic statistic that the employment situation, while dire in the State as a whole, is actually “better (here) than the rest of the state.”

Also, addressing real estate trends, he stressed that it's important that young people come to town because we do have a problem demographically, as aforementioned. If we do a good job with the Town Center District, we can increase our share of market of this demographic age group, he contended.

Resident Sean Hathorn concurred that there is a misconception of what “affordable housing” is, adding that, “unless you're here tonight and hear the explanation,” you would still be misinformed. He encouraged the Commission: “If there is any way to spread the information, let's do it.”

Resident Jackie Salome noted that in a lot of the discussion sessions leading up to this Plan of Conservation and Development, there were distinctions made between Incentive and Affordable Housing, adding that a “way to clear up the confusion”, is to put this distinction in the Plan of Conservation and Development. (Chairman Van Hise noted: “It's in there.”)

Before proceeding further, Katherine Daniel pointed out corrections which needed to be made to Section Three, on pages 20 (Paragraphs Two and Four), and 21 (first full paragraph is “completely wrong” and this needs to include paraphrased information from p. 22: text read into the record).

The matter of developable land (9% left); public land/open space (@ 1/4 of our land: 24+% is open space). “We're doing a pretty good job with open space in keeping the Town's character,” Chairman Van Hise noted, adding that the Town's growth will be concentrated in the Village Business District (Four Corners area).

Resident H. Lasser addressed this comment on the location of growth. He contended that the impression people will have of Brookfield is what they see on Federal Road and from Route 7 when they come by, and asked the Commission to please keep that in mind.

To achieve this vision, the following topics were reviewed: Community Character (Issues, Goals and Action):

- Defining and promoting Brookfield's character, especially as it relates to the Four Corners area, and is important to attracting the middle and upper-middle class echelons of newcomers, both corporate and residential.
- Supporting Brookfield's cultural institutions: Chairman Van Hise noted that all cultural institutions require community support to be viable enterprises. Volunteers are valuable resources and many of Brookfield's volunteers support multiple community endeavors, both governmental and not for profit. Supporting and promoting our cultural institutions requires new energy from newcomers, young people and those who might reconsider volunteering for a local organization whether civic or cultural.” He further added that there is an action plan on p. 32.
- There are also action items addressing the architectural character of the Town.
- Natural Resources and Environmental Topics were also cited in this section, including such topics as Open Space Conservation and preservation with a point of assuring that the Town of Brookfield and the two private land trusts, Brookfield Open Space Legacy (BOSLI) and Weantinoge Land Trust, work together.
- This section also addressed the matter of determining whether a dog park or a dog play space, is needed in Brookfield and if so, selecting an appropriate location for it.
- Still River Greenway: Public Works Director R. Tedesco noted that on the matter of signage, the Parks and Recreation Department should take the lead role with the Public Works Department in a support role.

As the discussion turned to the previously mentioned consideration of a second Historic District (and objection expressed in the memo from the Board of Selectmen), First Selectman W. Tinsley addressed the matter by explaining that he does not want to accept the “regulatory handcuffs” which come with another Historic District in Town. He believes this will result in an “almost impossible situation” for any commercial venture to make it with historic regulations imposed. He added that he wants to see

the Brookfield Craft Center survive and if this, or other properties in its vicinity had regulatory restrictions further imposed upon then, it would be “virtually impossible” for any positive economic return on their investment. He also noted that the Plan of Development could become a “hurdle” if the Town is asked if it is adhering to its own Plan, essentially “handcuffing” the Town in applying for other grants.

Chairman Van Hise then read a letter into the record from State Representative S. Harding who supports the idea of designating the Craft Center and the surrounding area as a Historic District, adding that it would be open to grants and other funds with this designation.

Resident Laura Menke, who has considerable experience in the field of Historic Preservation, clarified that there will be no “strings” or requirements imposed on historic districts from the State level. Instead this comes when there are local restrictions. Ms. Manke further noted that the places mentioned are already listed on the State Register, which allows some state funding. She believes that it seems “logical” to deem these buildings, including the world-renowned Craft Center, which is part of the Town’s character, as historical. She also stated that the Town has agreed to a preservation partnership to maintain its historical resources, but felt it is not doing its job. A short while later in the meeting, she noted that the Town needs to contact the DOT to put any signage on State Roads (such as Routes 25 or 202) directing people to specific Town locations.

Resident Bob Brown cleared up one “misconception” about historic districts by stating that historic “districts” can be individual properties. For example, the Craft Center can be a Historic District on its own: it does not have to encompass the whole village district.

Resident Howard Lasser (of the Craft Center), noted that this site draws 1,000 people a year from outside the Danbury area, providing “significant economic impact” to Brookfield and the four corners area. “Anything we can do to help it along is a good thing,” Mr. Lasser added. He urged the Commission to study the impact on property values in a Historic District, to not make a decision in the absence of information, and to “follow the process.”

Resident H. Kurfehs said he has “run into problems” (professionally, as a realtor), with Historic Districts, and would feel “more comfortable” if any designation were to be given, it be confined to just those historic buildings.

Text changes to the POCD were made on the following:

-First paragraph “Protecting Historic Resources”: clarification of oversight agency;

-Under Gurski Homestead: Paragraph 3: correct date (not 2021), and clarify what the grant was for;

-Brookfield Historic Preservation Plan (p. 52): Information missing;

-p. 53: Clarification of dates: only the Miller’s house was built in the 1700’s. (Correct information will be sent to the Land Use Office).

As the Commission discussed Strategies and Goals, Resident Sean Hathorn cited the plan for residential development (20-30 units) on Station Road. He opposes this, instead preferring commercial development, adding that residential development “doesn’t make sense.”

Commissioner A. Kerley countered that all studies show that a downtown without residences will not attract businesses. First Selectman Tinsley also cautioned that the Town needs to be mindful, going forward with development of this area, to not be vulnerable to “8-30g projects” by becoming overly-restrictive.

On the matter of HOUSING, Resident Betsy McElvane clarified that Section 8 housing is not limited to Seniors, but also open to some disabled persons. She further added that they not need be Brookfield residents.

Also on the matter of Housing, Resident H. Skelley stated that he has lived here since 1992 and while the “charm” of the Town has been mentioned, he doesn’t see it in action, adding that this “charm” has diminished over the years. There has been what he described as “unabated” development” from furniture stores to big box stores to strip malls along Federal Road. He

believes that many people chose to live in Brookfield because there were few or no apartments, but now this is no longer the case, and the housing proposals outlined in this document seem to “push us farther away.” He stated a concern over the future price of single-family dwellings, given the proposed and existing amounts of apartments. He believes multi-family dwellings are “changing the nature of the Town even more than before.” He called the POCD a “document (that) reads like it’s developed for people *not* in the Town, but more in support of developers and real estate interests.” He contended that people in apartments don’t have the investment in Brookfield that the homeowners have. Mr. Skelley cited apartments in Danbury where there are families who live in dwellings that are not meant for that many people, which, among other things, becomes a fire hazard. He then asked why all the development in the Town’s commercial sector has not reduced residential taxes.

Commissioner L. Taylor responded that home ownership is not what it had been in the past. Apartments “fill a need” for those who may not be able to fulfill the dream of home ownership.

Resident H. Kurfehs challenged some of Mr. Skelley’s statements. Having lived here since 1977, Mr. Kurfehs said that the commercial area has greatly improved,” and added that the “green” (on the map) residential areas are “going to stay green.” If you can attract young people into the area with apartments, he contended, they may become future single-family homeowners.

The Commission then addressed the FACILITIES section of the Plan, which includes the Senior Center, Food Pantry, and the Library; Government facilities; and Recreation facilities, “continuing with projects that have already begun” on the latter. First Selectman Tinsley said that the Town has some “nice recreation facilities,” but cautioned that they’re being “discovered by the world, and are becoming heavily used by non-residents. Now, the Town needs to think how to regulate their use, adding that a discussion is already underway with the Town Attorney and the Parks and Recreation Department.

On the matter of the topic of TRANSPORTATION, the following topics were addressed: the Route 7 By-pass and the impact on the lack of traffic on Four Corners businesses; Route 202 improvements; Sidewalks and becoming a “bike friendly” community.

Resident Betsy McElvane, the Chairman of the Commission on Aging noted that per a 2009 survey, the issue of needing a car to get anywhere was raised as a big concern for Brookfield. A “FISH” driving program comprised of volunteers to drive seniors to medical appointments was started, but more is needed to address the need of Seniors to “get around as many want to stay in their own homes.

Chairman Van Hise noted that the Village District apartments (existing and proposed) are designed to be near public transportation.

The final section of the Plan, Utilities, addressed such issues as the Sewer System: Chairman Van Hise said that the WPCA has a plan to “carry our needs well into the future, including expansion;” and Public Water.

MANAGEMENT of the Plan: The Plan will be reviewed annually by the Commission as well as by those Commissions and Boards which contributed to it:

“The plan should be reviewed annually by the Planning Commission. This will involve an annual update from all boards, commissions and staff who have contributed to the plan. The results of this update will be presented to the Board of Selectmen annually on a date to be determined upon prior to adoption of this plan.”

A final comment was made by the First Selectman, who thanked all Commissioners for undertaking this “big, big task.” He also thanked the public for its input, for taking the time to respond to surveys, and for attending tonight’s hearing.

A motion was made by D. Frankel to close the Public Hearing at 9:54 p.m. G. Hunton seconded the motion which carried unanimously.

4) New Business

There was none at this meeting.

5) Minutes of Other Boards & Commissions

Zoning Commission: 5/28/2015: Complaints on noise from the Winery. Further discussion at the next meeting: please add to

the next agenda.

6) Correspondence

There was none at this meeting.

7) Adjourn

A motion to adjourn the meeting at 9:55 p.m. was made by G. Hunton, seconded by A. Kerley and carried unanimously.