

Town of Stonington
Economic Development Commission
Special Meeting Minutes for September 27, 2012
Stonington Police Station Meeting Room 7:00pm

Attendance: Blunt White, Robynne Madison, Paul Burgess, Ed Hart, Wendy Bury, Ed Planeta, Les Bray, Dan Oliverio

Absent: Amy Arruda

Call to Order: 7:05pm

A Special Meeting was held for the purpose of gaining Public input regarding the possible zoning amendment change to those areas designated M-1 within the Town of Stonington.

Glen Chalder from Planimetrics facilitated the meeting. Approximately one dozen residents and business owners attended the meeting along with several members of the Planning and Zoning Board. First Selectman Ed Haberek and Selectwoman Glee McAnaly were also in attendance.

The M-1 designation has been in existence for more than 50 years, since 1961, and was originally instituted to identify areas of manufacturing. Fifty years later, the manufacturing industry has all but disappeared leaving the Town of Stonington with several vacant properties and properties that should they become vacant, will be severely restricted in use because the permissible types of businesses are not viable industries within this area. Types of businesses that have shown interest in moving into the M-1 zones, are currently listed as not permitted.

Mr. Chalder provided a brief overview of the Town's M-1 designated areas and then opened the floor for public comment to present ideas on possible uses within M-1 areas which he would then articulate into proposed zoning text amendments to the M-1 Classification.

The public was asked to consider three questions:

1. What can we do to broaden the use and activities allowed in the M-1 District?
2. Should we get rid of outdated or limiting restrictions?
3. How can we increase business opportunities in Stonington?

The following table captures the ideas and discussions that took place:

| Name | Association | Use/Comment |
|------------|------------------------------------|---|
| Al Furtado | Mystic Spine & Sport – Mechanic St | Health Cub proposal in progress, currently with P&Z, not an M-1 permissible business |
| Jim Varas | Cabinet Shop – S. Anguilla Rd | Use was 'unlimited' when shop was opened, now he is restricted in use and limited in growth opportunities. |
| Anonymous | | Propose a 'floating' zone allowing the community to decide what can/can't be allowed. |
| Anonymous | | Special Permit process could be expedited if those permissible uses were approved by the Town's Zoning Department rather than going to P&Z. |
| Name | Association | Use/Comment |
| Ed Haberek | First Selectman | M-1 is becoming a dinosaur, need to find new ways to rehab |

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| | | old mills sitting vacant. Many definitions in the Zoning regulations are also dated and impose restrictions where flexibility is not an option. Proposal of a 'term review' to include new uses as time change and industries fade and prosper. |
| Al Furtado | Mystic Spine & Sport | One restriction due to term definition is "Personal Services" vs. "Group Exercise Classes" one is allowed, the other isn't but could be considered the same. |
| Anonymous | n/a | Expand the "S" class to include "N" type businesses, and move "S"s into the "P" class to offer relief. |
| Glenn Chalder | Planimetrics | There are less difficulties to move into the "P" than move into the "S" classes |
| Anonymous | n/a | The time, money and navigation of the zoning approval process is a deal breaker often when realtors are on the verge of closing deals with potential new business owners. The Approval process needs to change, allowing for "staff" approval of those "P" businesses. |
| Anonymous | n/a | How many properties in M-1, should they change ownership or happen into a situation where a business is destroyed and needs to be rebuilt, would still qualify under the M-1 definition? |
| Ed Planeta | EDC | Almost 50% of the existing M-1 properties would no longer meeting the zoning regs. If destroyed or sold. |
| Ed Planeta | EDC | Not new issue - Zoning results in underuse of property – consider adaptive reuse of old mills. |
| Anonymous | Broadway Extension area | Boat repair/storage would be ideal given proximity to marina's, not permissible in M-1 |
| Anonymous | n/a | Consider splitting zones to M-1 and M-2. There are only 1 or 2 mills in the 11 M-1 districts. Nedd to look at Brownfield and IHRD "law" |
| Blunt White | EDC | Consider separating regulations into "existing" and "to be built", which would aid in the ease of the process and filling vacant properties. Pace of approval would depend on size of the proposed business. |
| Keith Brynes | Town of Stonington | Special Use Permit process is lengthy. This is the biggest issue |

Mr. Chalder then proposed looking at the topic a different way and solicited comment on what the residents didn't want to see in an M-1 district.

| Name | Association | Comment |
|--------------------|----------------------|--|
| Ed Hart | EDC | Before M-1 is amended, each use should be analyzed to understand the impact on traffic to the streets and neighbors surrounding the M1 zone. |
| Anonymous | Borough resident | Mills were the hub of the community. The people that worked in the mills lived around the mills. The community was self sustaining. Consider Smart Growth, how can we enhance the community by adding business. |
| Anonymous | Velvet Mill Property | Old abandoned mills need special use allowances or a category all their own due to the cost of cleanup, maintaining and restoring before additional businesses can come in. |
| Les Bray | EDC | Be careful that these concepts may come back to bite us. By relaxing the amendment too much you open the doors to such environments as strip malls and big box stores that in turn put our downtowns out of business. |
| Charlene Donnorumo | Resident | Can Planimetrics gather and share information on what other towns have done to amend their M-1 zones so that they continue to prosper. Also would propose a change to a definition rather than adding to the "P" category. |
| Anonymous | n/a | Consider such uses as Artist Studios w/living space; rack storage for boats. |

As the meeting came to a close, Glenn Chalder communicated his next steps which were to review the comments and ideas put forth above, formulate a potential solution, propose an overall recommendation based upon all comments and viable solutions and then to finally present his recommendation back to the EDC and the public within a 60 to 90 day time period.

Adjournment: 8:23pm

Respectfully Submitted by:
Robynne Madison, Secretary

Approved 10/11/12
Blair White,
EDC Chairman