

APPROVED / REVISED
MINUTES
INLAND WETLANDS BOARD

June 30, 2009

Present: Michael Autuori
Joseph Fossi
Nelson Gelfman
John Katz
James McChesney
Phil Mische
Rebecca Mucchetti, Chairman
Patrick Walsh, Vice Chair

Absent: Peter Chipouras

Also Present: Betty Brosius, Inland Wetlands Agent

The Planning and Zoning Commission meeting was held prior to this meeting.
At 10:15 p.m. Chairman Mucchetti called the meeting to order.

PENDING ITEMS

1. **#2009-056-SP-PR:** Plenary Ruling Application under Section 7.6 of the Inland Wetlands and Watercourses Regulations for the Town of Ridgefield for bridge installation crossing the Silvermine River for residential development on Lot #6 in the Shafer Subdivision, **Spectacle Lane and Wilton Road East**. Applicant/Owner: Pyramid Luxury Homes Joint Venture. Auth. Agent: JFM Engineering, Inc. *65-days to commence public hearing ends 9/3/2009. For receipt / schedule walk / schedule public hearing.*

Chairman Mucchetti asked for acknowledgement of receipt of the application and suggested July 12th for a site walk and September 1st for a public hearing.

Mr. Mische motioned, seconded by Mr. Fossi, to acknowledge receipt and to schedule the site walk and hearing on the dates suggested. The motion passed, 8-0.

BOARD WALKS

The following site walk was scheduled for **July 12, 2009**, as noted above:

- **#2009-056-SP-PR:** Plenary Ruling **Spectacle Lane and Wilton Road East**, Pyramid Luxury Homes Joint Venture

REQUESTS FOR BOND RELEASES/REDUCTION

There were no requests for bond release or reduction.

CORRESPONDENCE

Chairman Mucchetti pointed out the following correspondence:

- Letter from Agent Brosius to the engineer for **239 Mamasco Road** application
- Town Engineer's review memo, for **Second Lane and Third Lanes** application

MINUTES

There were no minutes for approval.

Hearing no further discussion, the Chairman adjourned the meeting at 10:18 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Betty Brosius
Inland Wetlands Agent

APPROVED / REVISED
MINUTES
PLANNING AND ZONING COMMISSION

June 30, 2009

Present: Michael Autuori
Joseph Fossi
Nelson Gelfman
John Katz
James McChesney
Phil Mische
Rebecca Mucchetti, Chairman
Patrick Walsh, Vice Chair

Absent: Peter Chipouras

Also Present: Betty Brosius, Director of Planning
At 7:30 p.m. Chairman Mucchetti called the meeting to order.

PENDING ITEMS

1. **#2009-016-POCD: PLAN OF CONSERVATION AND DEVELOPMENT**, Town of Ridgefield Workshop for town boards and commissions.

Heidi Samokar and **Glenn Chalder** of Planimetrics, the Commission's consultants, were present for the workshop.

Chairman Mucchetti noted the receipt and distribution of several reports from Boards and Commissions. Ms. Samokar stated that the consultants were there to listen and to take notes, and information would then be "distilled" and discussed with the Commission at another workshop on July 28th. The Chairman stated that the last meeting in July is mainly for "clean-up" of previous Commission business, but the Planner committed to making an effort to dispense with most of the Commission's business before that date, leaving adequate time for a meeting with the consultants.

Presenters for the Boards and Commissions included the following: Emma Lou Benedict representing the **Commission for the Disabled**; Dave Goldenberg and Joanne Search representing the **Ridgefield Affordable Housing Committee (RAHC)**; Susan Baker and Alan Pilch for the **Conservation Commission**; Barbara Dobbin for the **Parks and Recreation Commission (P&R)**; and Bob Knight for the **Economic Development Commission (EDC)**. Written comments from the **Water Pollution Control Authority (WPCA)** were distributed to the Commission. Roger Guilfoyle of the **Ridgefield Design Council** was in the audience, but had to leave before making a presentation.

Commission for the Disabled: **Emma Lou Benedict** presented the document for the Commission for the Disabled. In addition to a 4-page report stating suggested issues for the Plan of Conservation and Development, she included and described several documents in an Appendix to the report, citing federal websites and regulations, an on-line newsletter called “Access Currents,” design guidelines for architecture, buildings, sidewalks, and other documents focusing on accessibility for the disabled and elderly.

Ms. Benedict noted the theme of her presentation, “Building a True Community: Safe Access for Everyone.” She said that, “Although people with disabilities live within the community, they are often not part of the community. This is not caused by deliberate intent but is caused by lack of access to the infrastructure of the town and a general lack of awareness on the part of the community of the need of people with disabilities.”

She stated that her Commission’s primary concerns are (1) parking availability and accessibility in public places, (2) accessibility to businesses [sidewalks, grade-level entrances, no steps], and (3) parks and recreation facilities accessible to the handicapped. She also offered to provide review and advice to the Commission for specific projects, so that proper planning can be done before new facilities and businesses are constructed.

The report was extensive, thorough, and well-prepared, and the Commission thanked Ms. Benedict for her valuable input.

Ridgefield Affordable Housing Committee: **David Goldenberg**, Chairman of the RAHC, presented the viewpoints of his committee. Joanne Search, a member of the Committee, joined him at the table for the presentation, and Ann Marie Roller arrived during the presentation. The RAHC reiterated the generic goals of the 1999 POCD and compared those goals with the recommendations made by the RAHC in its study, “The Home Front,” prepared in 1996. Only a portion of the RAHC goals have been met to date (numbers of affordable units were listed in the report), and it was suggested that the POCD contain more specific (numeric) goals for creating affordable housing in the decade ahead.

Mr. Goldenberg referenced statistics compiled by HVCEO (Housatonic Valley Council of Elected Officials), and the obvious need for more affordable residential units in Ridgefield and the surrounding area, based on cost of living expenses in the Fairfield County region. The accessory apartment regulations, revised in the year 2000, have helped to provide some affordable units (although those units are not deed-restricted).

The RAHC is very interested in the Branchville area and the potential for the village to be zoned under the HomeCT Incentive Housing Zone regulations, focusing on its obvious potential as a Transit Oriented Development (TOD) area, with the rail line and Route 7 in its center. Mr. Goldenberg emphasized the need to look at §8-2i in the Connecticut General Statutes, authorizing commissions to adopt regulations for

“inclusionary zoning,” and to consider the creation of a Housing Trust Fund financed by development, to provide funding and loans for the creation of affordable housing.

The Commission commended the RAHC on its hard work and the suggestions in its report. It was agreed that this is the beginning of dialogue, and discussions should continue with the preparation of the POCD and beyond.

Conservation Commission: **Susan Baker and Alan Pilch** were present on behalf of the Conservation Commission. Susan Baker reviewed the lengthy report, which focused on Chapters 5 and 6 of the existing POCD (Natural Resources and Open Space). She highlighted the Commission’s concerns and recommendations.

The CC is in the midst of preparing a Natural Resources Inventory, which will catalogue species of plant and animal life in critical areas in the town. “The goal of the Natural Resource Inventory will be to allow for decision making that considers impacts to and protection of natural resources on a larger scale than a site-by-site approach.” The CC also made extensive comments in the areas of Habitats and Wildlife, Water Resources, Slopes/Ridges/Viewsheds, and Trees and Wood Tracts. A large section was devoted to the need to educate the public about conservation and protection of natural resources, and the CC proposed that they would be a good agency to “develop and launch an ongoing public education program to promote better land stewardship.”

In its conclusion to the Chapter 5 review, the CC said, “Development should focus on resource protection, connectivity of resources, and avoidance of the most sensitive areas in preference to development of resource-constrained land using minimization or mitigation.”

Chapter 6 of the current POCD, “Open Space,” was re-written by Ben Oko, Chairman, with the major changes being an update of the generic statements about open space. Charts and statistics will need to be updated as well. The Commissioners were encouraged to take the proposed update to Chapter 6 and to compare it with the current chapter, to understand the recommended changes, since they were not obvious in the draft.

The Conservation Commission was applauded for the detail and thoroughness of its report.

Parks and Recreation: **Barbara Dobbin** was present for the Parks and Recreation Commission. The Planner had previously distributed the “Ridgefield Parks and Recreation FY2010 Action Plan.” Ms. Dobbin spoke from a list of priorities including: Accessibility to facilities, fields and parks; Bike Trails; Aquatic Expansion at the P&R facility; parking for the P&R facility; “treescape” improvements in parks; lighting at the Old HS softball field; Sturges Park Master Plan work; permanent performance facility at Ballard Park; more athletic fields and facilities.

There was some discussion about the need for more aquatic facilities and whether existing pools should be enlarged, or new pools created. There was also discussion about new fields, a recognition that requests for more fields is a constant concern, and acknowledgment that construction involves much work and clear-cutting of forested landscapes.

The three top concerns of Ms. Dobbin (not necessarily the same as the entire P&R committee) are: (1) Aquatics facility expansion, (2) parking at the P&R facility, and (3) managing existing and providing for expansion of athletic fields and facilities.

Ms. Dobbin was thanked for her valuable contribution to the workshop session, and consultants will be in touch if additional information is needed.

Economic Development Commission: **Bob Knight** was in attendance to make the presentation for the Economic Development Commission. He thanked Al Garzi, Mark Waterhouse (EDC consultant), the EDC members, Board of Selectmen, First Selectman, PZC Chairman and Planner for providing input and/or guidance for the report. He stated that their recommendations are realistically 20-year projections, rather than 10.

Mr. Knight reviewed the 13-page report prepared for the POCD update review, noting first the statistics on the business portion of the Grand List, and the need to maintain an adequate proportion of business and residential values. The 25% goal in the 1999 Plan may be unrealistic; current statistics show 13.04% of the Grand List is non-residential. A 13-18% business portion of the Grand List is recommended for the update to the POCD, “so as to assure a continuing reasonable tax rate for all Ridgefield residents. This is consistent with, or slightly higher than, our historical average.”

There was lengthy discussion in the review of recommendations for “Providing Adequate Locations for Future Business Development.” The EDC report recognizes that new areas for business development are not generally feasible, but that existing business zones may be reviewed to determine if changes in the zoning would be desirable. There may be opportunities for modifications of the zones in the Route 7 corridor, or in the area between the 116/35 intersection and Copps Hill Road. The report recognizes the restraints (in Route 7 in particular) of topography and the Norwalk River.

There was a recommendation that the Town inventory its own property, to determine if there are parcels that are “surplus” to the needs of the town, and whether those lands might be sold to provide revenues for more desirable property, or opportunities for business development by others.

It was recommended that the gateways (boundaries) to Ridgefield be improved and upgraded, to make the entrances to the town more attractive and desirable.

The report recognized the complexity of the issues in the Village, and spoke of the arguments and issues on both sides of the “fence.” Clearly there is no one answer to the issues, and there are many lined up on both sides. They say, “Achieving broad agreement on exactly what should be done cannot and should not be decided by a small group of people.” The EDC offered to host, in collaboration with other appropriate boards and commission, a community summit on “The Future of Downtown Ridgefield.” They also offered to host a forum on “The Myths and Realities of Special Services Districts,” recognizing that this recommendation in the Ridgefield Center Study for a BID deserves more thought and consideration.

Branchville is a major focus of the EDC’s concern. The EDC feels that Transit Oriented Development (TOD) is an appropriate consideration for the village, and that lack of sewer service for existing or proposed development is one of the major issues. Recommendations include focus on the upgrading of existing properties and identification of areas for “infill”. Zoning may be changed to something more area-specific, such as a new “Route 7 Corridor District... to allow a higher density and broadest possible mix of uses. Mixed use development combining business uses with upper floor residential should be encouraged, particularly for dwelling units meeting the state’s affordable housing criteria.” Parking improvements at the Branchville station should continue to be a priority, and the town should vigorously protect the preservation of the Branchville stop on the train line.

The report also encouraged the retention and expansion of existing business facilities, and the preservation of business zones for commercial purposes, “unless it can be clearly demonstrated that the net tax benefit (that is, tax revenues less public service costs including education) does not decline significantly from the prior use.”

The EDC will continue to assist with external and internal marketing of significant Ridgefield business properties; the Town budget should continue to support the work of the EDC. An “Economic Development Team” should be organized, consisting of representatives of the EDC, the Chamber of Commerce, Downtown Ridgefield, town staff and board and commission members involved in land use and other matters affecting economic development process. This team should work to discuss the permit and approval processes that are perceived by some as being “less friendly than it could be.” The EDC recommends the creation of a “Permit & Approval Manual,” “to provide a simplified overview of the steps and timeframes that should be anticipated in obtaining necessary approvals for development in Ridgefield.”

It was emphasized that the EDC report is a draft, and that additional comments and discussions may be needed as the POCD update process moves along. The Commission thanked Mr. Knight and the efforts of the EDC in providing valuable input to the Commission.

The Consultants: Heidi Samokar and Glenn Chalder explained that they would be working to “distill” the information and comments, and they would prepare some bulleted lists for discussion with the Commission on July 28th. In addition, they will

seek input from the Police Commission, the Fire Department and other town agents who are still working on their contributions to the process. The consultants should be able to “weed out” comments that may not be relevant to the POCD update, and will compile a document with their suggestions, for the next workshop.

The next work session meeting, for the Commission and its consultants, is scheduled for July 28th.

NEW ITEMS

2. **#2009-055-SP:** Special Permit application under Section 9.2 as required by Section 3.6.C.1 of the Ridgefield Zoning Regulations to convert an existing deck into an enclosed sunroom on the residence located at **7 Whitewood Hollow Court** in the RAA zone. Owners: Gerald and Sharon Garavel. Auth. Agent: Benjamin v. Doto, III, P.E. *65 days to commence public hearing ends 9/3/2009. For receipt, schedule walk and public hearing.*

Chairman Mucchetti asked for acknowledgement of receipt of the application and suggested July 12th for a site walk and July 21st for a public hearing.

Mr. Mische motioned, seconded by Dr. Autuori, to acknowledge receipt and to schedule the site walk and hearing on the dates suggested. The motion passed, 8-0.

3. **#2009-056-SP-PR:** Special Permit Application under Section 9.2 required by Section 6.1.E of the Ridgefield Zoning Regulations for bridge installation over the Silvermine River in a 100-year flood zone, for residential development on Lot #6, Shafer Subdivision, **Spectacle Lane and Wilton Road East**, in the RAA zone. Applicant/Owner: Pyramid Luxury Homes Joint Venture. Auth. Agent: JFM Engineering, Inc. *65-days to commence public hearing ends 9/3/2009. For receipt / schedule walk / schedule public hearing.*

Chairman Mucchetti asked for acknowledgement of receipt of the application and suggested July 12th for a site walk and September 1st for a public hearing.

Mr. Katz motioned, seconded by Mr. Fossi, to acknowledge receipt and to schedule the site walk and hearing on the dates suggested. The motion passed, 8-0.

4. **#2009-057-REV(S):** Request under Section 9.2.A.7.e of the Ridgefield Zoning Regulations for revision to previously filed 3-lot subdivision at **48 Peaceable Hill Road**, changing lot lines to create two lots fronting on Peaceable Hill Road, and one rear lot to be served by the existing accessway, part of original subdivision of 34.505 acres in the RAA zone. Applicant/Owner: Suni P. & William Harford. Auth. Agent: JFM Engineering, Inc. *65-day action period ends 9/3/2009. For receipt /schedule walk if necessary / action.*

Chairman Mucchetti asked the Planner to explain the request and suggested a site walk for July 12th.

The Planner explained that drawings were in the packet, and suggested that the Commission study the request and be ready for discussion at the meeting on July 7th. If a site walk is needed, it could still be added to the July 12th schedule.

She further explained that the request is for a boundary change within the approved subdivision. The original approval was for two rear lots served by an accessway, and two lots fronting on Peaceable Hill Road. The request is to reverse that; the rear lots would be combined as one, and the front lot would be split as two. The accessway crossing wetlands and open space has been completed, and the Commission/Board inspected it last year.

The Commission agreed by consensus to accept the application, to review the plans during the week, and to schedule it for discussion on July 7th.

COMMISSION WALKS

The Commission scheduled the following for site walks on **July 12, 2009**, as noted above:

- **#2009-055-SP:** Special Permit **7 Whitewood Hollow Court**, Garavel
- **#2009-056-SP-PR:** Special Permit **Spectacle Lane and Wilton Road East**, Pyramid Luxury Homes Joint Venture

REQUESTS FOR BOND RELEASE / REDUCTION

There were no requests for bond release or reduction.

CORRESPONDENCE

Chairman Mucchetti pointed out the following correspondence:

- A collection of minutes from the AAC / VDC for various applications
- Memo from the Planner re **Big Shop Lane** and the proposal for cosmetic improvements.

Chairman Mucchetti noted that the Planner was requesting authority to handle an application for cosmetic improvements at the Big Shop Lane property. The proposed work is outlined in the memo, and the plans have already been reviewed by the Architectural Advisory Committee.

Mr. Katz motioned, seconded by Mr. Mische, to authorize administrative oversight of the changes. The motion passed, 8-0.

MINUTES

There were no minutes for approval.

Hearing no further discussion, the Chairman adjourned the meeting at 10:14 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Betty Brosius
Director of Planning