

APPROVED / REVISED
SPECIAL MEETING MINUTES
PLANNING AND ZONING COMMISSION

September 26, 2006

Present: Joseph Fossi
Nelson Gelfman
John Katz, Vice Chair
James McChesney
Rebecca Mucchetti, Chairman
Walter Slavin
Patrick Walsh
Lillian Willis

Absent: Michael Autuori

Also Present: Betty Brosius, Director of Planning
Richard Baldelli, Zoning Enforcement Officer

At 7:32 p.m., Chairman Mucchetti called the meeting to order.

PENDING ITEMS

Special Meeting: Public Information Meeting on Proposed Revisions to the Zoning Regulations, c/o planning consultant Glenn Chalder of Planimetrics, LLC.

Chairman Mucchetti opened the meeting and introduced Glenn Chalder of Planimetrics. She emphasized that this is an informational meeting and not a public hearing, and that the Commission is interested in receiving comment and questions on the proposed revisions to the regulations.

Mr. Chalder reiterated the need to obtain public input prior to proposing a set of revised regulations for adoption and public hearing. He briefly explained that the Commission would continue to conduct workshop sessions and to revise the proposed regulations further, with a public hearing likely to happen after the first of the year (2007).

Mr. Chalder's presentation began with (PowerPoint) slides explaining the Commission's reasons for proposing the regulation amendments, and the need for a comprehensive update. The new regulations are intended to produce a document that is more user-friendly, to provide clearer guidance, and to address identified issues that have been brought up by staff, the Commission and others. He then outlined and explained the reorganization of the regulations with comment on the items that are contained in each of the new sections. He explained that certain zones would be re-named as a result of the regulation changes, and that the Commission is contemplating additional zone changes beyond what would be required with the adoption of the new regulations.

The meeting was then opened up for comment and question from the public. A brief summary of the discussion follows:

Michael Hoffman: Mr. Hoffman identified himself as a resident, and he is an attorney. He asked if there was a summary of the proposed/substantive changes (like a “red-line” copy). Mr. Chalder explained that there is an Origin/Destination chart to link current regulation sections with sections in the proposed regs, but there is no overall summary. A summary of the qualitative changes should be prepared when the new regulations are proposed for public hearing and adoption.

Helen Dimos: Ms. Dimos is a member of the AAC and she asked several questions: She wanted an example of the PDD (Planned Development District), and Mr. Chalder cited mixed-use developments in West Hartford. He explained that the PDD is a kind of “floating zone” that allows the Commission greater design flexibility and discretion. Ms. Dimos also asked for clarification of how the AAC comments are incorporated into the P&Z review. She said a checklist of requirements for applicants would also be helpful, to provide some consistency in the type of drawings and information presented for review by the AAC.

Steve Trinkaus, P.E.: Mr. Trinkaus commended the Commission and the consultant for producing a document that appeared to be clear and much easier to use than the current regulations. He offered several comments about the illustrations, FAR amendments, definitions, and determination of grades and building heights. He submitted his comments in writing to the Commission. He also asks for consideration of Low Impact Development (LID) concepts, which are different from the PRD concept.

Dr. Ben Oko: As Chairman of the Conservation Commission, Dr. Oko’s comments were related to conservation and open space. He suggested changes to the PRD regulations. He also suggested that the Conservation Commission be consulted about land that is proposed for open space, so they could comment on its suitability. For Conservation Clusters, he does not feel the 8-foot setback is sufficient to prevent encroachment into the open space land, as evidenced by problems at the Town’s only Conservation Cluster subdivision in Ridgebury.

Geoff Harrington: Mr. Harrington suggested that the Commission consider a regulation that would require the subtraction of steep slopes and wetlands from a lot, prior to determining the density for development.

Sue Manning: Mrs. Manning represents the Ridgefield Chamber of Commerce and commended the Commission for simplifying the regulations, making it easier for businesses to apply for permits. She appreciates the dialogue and meetings with the Commission where it has been demonstrated that Planning and Zoning has a concern for economic development and the problems faced by downtown businesses. She looks forward to continued dialogue.

Nick Verbitsky: Mr. Verbitsky is concerned about the Aquifer Protection Zone and how it might affect residential use of property. Mr. Chalder explained the new State regulations and Ridgefield's regulations for aquifers, and changes expected for the future.

Eric Kristoffersen: Mr. Kristoffersen is a surveyor, and he had comments on the definitions and calculation methods for building height. He also questioned the definitions for "lot line" and suggested that corner properties should have two front yard property lines. For Open Space Ratio calculations, he says parking islands should be excluded. He suggests that regulations be created to require enclosures for horse and other livestock to be set back at least twice the required setback for the zone. He asks why there is no requirement for wetland/dryland ratio for the PRD, R20, R10, SDR20 and R7.5 zones. He suggests that sheds be allowed at ½ the required setback from property lines, for the zone. He had several comments about PRD subdivisions and setbacks, including setbacks from open space.

In regard to the ARHD, he stated that the zone seemed to be "tailor made" for the Eureka property on Bennetts Farm Road. He said the same for the proposed PDD zone, and called it a "wildcard" concept.

Doug Burkett: Mr. Burkett said he was encouraged about the discussion concerning FAR calculations for residential properties, and agrees with the idea to exclude attached garages and covered porches from the calculation. He questioned the definitions for Basement, Story and Attic, and said the regulations are not clear as to how (or when) these spaces are counted for FAR calculations.

Bob Cascella: Mr. Cascella, as Chairman of Ridgefield's Economic Development Committee, had questions about the proposed changes to the MCDD and DPD zones. It was explained that the MCDD would be incorporated into the CDD (without changing the permitted uses, and it would be site specific). The DPD would be replaced with another existing zone, probably B2.

Mary Ellen Miller: Mrs. Miller is a homeowner who questioned the proposed changes to the FAR calculations and expressed concern that the regulations not become more restrictive for smaller lots. She noted inconsistencies in the proposed definitions for FAR, and is concerned about the concept of counting all structures in the calculation (accessory structures are currently excluded). She also asked for a definition of the proposed Village District boundaries (the Village District is the equivalent of the CBD zone).

Steve Zemo: Mr. Zemo asked about the proposal to re-zone ½ of the B3 zone on the east side of Danbury Road to B1. His property (100 Danbury Road) would be split by the proposed zone line.

Helen Dimos: Ms. Dimos asked about the definition for basement and why the existing land contours were not required to be preserved. She also asked about provisions for the disabled, developmentally disabled, and affordable. She thinks there should be regulations

to protect ridgelines and steep slopes. She supports the concept of restricting first floor use in the CBD zone to retail, and thinks offices should be prohibited.

Sue Manning: Mrs. Manning added that the Chamber of Commerce would also like to limit first floor use in CBD to retail.

Jack Baldaserini: Mr. Baldaserini asked if more commercial properties would be required to obtain special permits under the new regulations.

Scott Sharlow: Mr. Sharlow questioned the Aquifer Protection Regulations and asked why automobile service stations were being allowed with special permits. Mr. Chalder and ZEO Richard Baldelli noted that there are existing gasoline stations that would be under P&Z review with a special permit, and under Zoning Board of Appeals review if they were non-conforming. Mr. Sharlow asks that the Commission consider adding regulations for buildable area and steep slope protection. He disagrees with the PDD concept and says Ridgefield doesn't need it. He says the regulations are not specific enough, and including them would be opening a "can of worms."

Steve Trinkaus: Mr. Trinkaus talked about the aquifer districts in Southbury and says in that town the regulations are mainly for well-head protection. Ridgefield's regulations are strict and refer to stratified drift aquifers, which do not need to be regulated to the same degree as water supply aquifers. Mr. Trinkaus supported the PDD concept and says it offers the Commission more flexibility and results in better design.

Susan Baker: Ms. Baker asked about the CDD zone and the requirement for Open Space Ratio. Mr. Chalder explained that the new regulations specify maximum coverage for buildings, parking and drives, which means that the remainder of the lot must be open space. Ms. Baker also suggests that the regulations should include protection of ridgelines and steep slopes.

Jim Sandy: Mr. Sandy is a former planner for the Town of Greenwich, and says that they have an approach for development of small lots that permits a one-time expansion of up to 50% of the of the coverage for legally non-conforming structures. He suggests that this type of regulation might work in Ridgefield, and will provide a copy of the regulation.

Eric Kristoffersen: Mr. Kristoffersen questions the permitted coverage and setbacks in the Conservation Cluster subdivision and says the current regulations could produce a row of massive homes standing 45 feet tall and 16 feet apart. He thinks the regulations need to be more strict.

Mr. Chalder briefly reiterated the proposed timeline for producing a draft set of regulations for public hearing, and thanked the attendees of the meeting for their valuable comment and suggestions.

The informational meeting was adjourned at 9:30 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Betty Brosius
Director of Planning