

MINUTES OF THE CHESHIRE PLANNING AND ZONING COMMISSION, PLAN OF CONSERVATION AND DEVELOPMENT, HELD ON WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 13, 2017, AT 7:30 P.M. IN ROOM 207-209, TOWN HALL, 84 SOUTH MAIN STREET, CHESHIRE CT 06410

Present

Earl J. Kurtz, Chairman; Gil Linder, Secretary; John Kardaras, Jeff Natale, Louis Todisco. Alternates: Robert Anderson and Robert Brucato (via conference call)
Staff: William Voelker, Town Planner.

Absent: Sean Strollo, S. Woody Dawson, Vincent Lentini

Staff: William Voelker, Town Planner, Gerald Sitko, Economic Development Coordinator.

Guests: David Pelletier, Chairman, Economic Development Commission (EDC) and EDC Members William Stanley, Vice Chairman, and Don Dobbs.

I. CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Kurtz called the meeting to order at 7:31 p.m.

II. ROLL CALL

Mr. Voelker called the roll.

III. DETERMINATION OF QUORUM

Following roll call, a quorum was determined to be present.

IV. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE.

The group Pledged Allegiance to the Flag.

V. ACCEPTANCE OF MINUTES, MARCH 2, 2017, APRIL 12, 2017 (notes)
And JUNE 14, 2017 (notes)

MOTION by Mr. Natale; seconded by Mr. Kardaras

MOVED to accept and approve the minutes of March 2, 2017 subject to corrections, additions, deletions.

VOTE The motion passed 5-0-1; Anderson abstained.

VI. COMMUNICATIONS

A. DISCUSSION:

- a. Report from David Pelletier, Economic Development Chairman, on behalf of the EDC dated 10/5/17
- b. The Arnett Muldrow report RE: Market Assessment and Marketing Plan for the Town of Cheshire, Connecticut.

- c. Staff report dated November 15, 2017 RE: Implementation Issues For Muldrow Report.

Mr. Sitko gave background information on the efforts to promote economic development in Cheshire. The EDC and staff have been trying to do more knowing the town cannot rely on the State of Connecticut which is no longer partnering with municipalities. Following interviews of three consulting firms, the EDC chose Arnett Muldrow to conduct a study of the economic development for Cheshire. The Muldrow report was submitted in January 2017 and was presented to the Town Council by Mr. Pelletier and the EDC members.

Incentive Policy – this policy was improved by the Town Council and is better now than it was before.

Infrastructure – the referendum for infrastructure improvements (water) was defeated in November 2017 by the voters. Mr. Sitko said the town must still move forward on this project. There were discussions with the Regional Water Authority (RWA) about partnering on this project, with RWA sharing some of the project costs with the town. Another meeting is scheduled for January 2017.

Marketing – the town’s web site needs to be improved; the EDC will look at the web site to help with its efforts to market the Town of Cheshire.

Tax Incentive Financing – there have been discussions with consultants about TIF. More money is paid for infrastructure bonds; the grand list will rise; and a meeting is scheduled for December 19th. The EDC has started work on the town having a development or re-development agency, but this is now on hold.

West Main Street – this area of town is active and Mr. Sitko has been involved with the West Main Streetscape project and grants for Ball & Socket rehabilitation project.

Linear Trail – the town is looking for additional parking for the new section of the Linear Trail which only has 12 parking spaces at this time. The Council included funds in the capital budget for acquisition of property for more parking, and the town applied for a STEAP grant for this project. EDC is working a number of different fronts on economic development.

Arnett Muldrow Report – one of the recommendations is to do a better job of telling the story of Cheshire. The information to the Council was about what EDC is doing, has done and is planning to do, with talk about the town’s economy, continued economic activity, with more needed.

Mr. Pelletier commented on the fact that people in town are not seeing development along Route 10, as most projects have been off the Route 10 corridor. It is hoped there will be cranes seen in the air with construction of the new medical office building. The

tax incentive financing, TIF, is in the early stages; there have been talks with consultants; this may come back to the Council about going ahead with this project. The Planning and Zoning Commission (PZC) would be involved at some point, and TIF could be a great tool to attract development to Cheshire.

It was noted by Mr. Sitko that the quiet side of economic development is business retention. He cited UT Aerospace plans to leave town. The company employs 300 people; he intervened; and the company signed a five year lease extension to stay in town.

TIF – Mr. Pelletier explained that once the TIF district is designated, i.e. the north end, infrastructure improvements must be made within the district. The implemental increase in the taxes related to a property after it's developed would be used to pay for the infrastructure improvements. For example, the undeveloped property generated \$500,000 in taxes; with improvements it generates \$750,000 in taxes; the incremental increase in the taxes has a portion carved out and designated to pay for the infrastructure improvements...the bonds.

Mr. Sitko said the EDC has no preconceived areas yet, and has not started yet. A consultant has not been selected. The site could be anywhere in the industrial area, West Main Street, but no decisions have been made. There are no particular sizes for such property.

In New Britain CT, Mr. Pelletier advised they put in a TIF area, which covers a large part of the downtown. There are limitations on how the overall tax base can be used.

According to Mr. Sitko, the TIF has not been used much in Connecticut due to stringent regulations. The regulations have been loosened up to the benefit of municipalities, and TIF is a tool worth looking at for Cheshire. The decision on the area would be made by the town; there would be public hearings; the Council is involved; and it would be a joint effort.

Floating Zone – PZC Chairman Kurtz talked about the “floating zone” idea, and asked for clarity on this issue.

A floating zone has been used elsewhere, and Mr. Pelletier said it is a different idea which ECD wanted to explore, and he hopes it works in Cheshire. It could be something different incorporated in the north end to the I-C zone and spur development in this area. The EDC is open to ideas from the PZC.

Mr. Kurtz referred to Mr. Voelker's staff report and the S.D.D., and why the S.D.D. cannot be used.

In his report, Mr. Voelker said his point is that what is done with regard to zoning regulations must be tied to the POCD. There should be a relationship between what the zoning regulations say and what POCD says...the statute requires this. The report recommendations open up the Highland Avenue industrial quarter from Creamery Road to Southington CT. The retail is an option, and is a change from what the PZC and former Commission recommended against. The floating zone must have a relationship to the POCD. Public input is necessary when changes are discussed, including the POCD.

Mr. Todisco talked about the planned development district and floating zones, and said the Interchange zone came in with its own set of regulations for the property. He cited the Lakeview project as an example of a project, but it was never developed. It is the same with Ball & Socket development. These are devices, rules that allow a reasonable way to vary the zoning rules in various districts, and doing something otherwise is not permitted. The POCD is a good way for the town to be ordered, and to change this for different things is fine, but the overall development must be considered. If you look at the overall POCD, you look at the town, the industrial area in the northern quarter, and decide it would benefit the town to have flexibility and put in something else other than industrial.

In the Muldrow report, Mr. Voelker said it recommends a community vision process, and active process which can be beneficial in assisting the EDC, PZC and Council of getting to that. With regard to the Lakeview project, it used adaptive use regulations. Ball & Socket was also the adaptive use regulations. S.D.D. was established in 1975 in the POCD and specific boundaries of the S.D.D. were set aside. The medical office building is within the S.D. D. Cheshire Coffee is in the S.D.D. The genesis of the S.D.D. is from the POCD.

Mr. Kurtz said the Commission can discuss using some other tools to develop the Highland corridor.

Mr. Pelletier asked about the present S.D.D. regulations, and if there is a designated area and what it covers.

This is where we are and Mr. Voelker said it is a few blocks south of Town Hall, and is the central quarter designated as an overlay district within which individual projects are possible. West Main Street is a gateway, and he sees this functioning as an S.D.D. overlay district. It could be mixed use projects. We know how the overlay functions and within that, projects can be done. The information is in the staff report. The Interchange S.D.D. was set up when W.S. Development project came in. The POCD at that time precluded retail projects over certain sizes, and the developer came in with an amendment to enable their project under certain conditions and locations. It was tied to the interchange development.

There were new regulations to that project that never got built and Mr. Todisco said if someone came in with another project, the regulations are there.

The Commission was told by Mr. Pelletier that businesses owners/management are invited to EDC meetings. The EDC continually hears that there are no services in the north end...no restaurants, no stores...and if something could be done to open up development in that area, it would be beneficial. He cited the parcel just south of the DunkinDonuts or the parcel at the corner across from DunkinDonuts.

Mr. Kurtz said, in the past, with industrial use projects, they pay for Route 10 frontage, and developments are not happening on Route 10, but in other areas.

In the report, Mr. Sitko pointed out Cheshire having several million square feet of warehouse and industrial space off Route 10.

Mr. Brucato said this leads to marketing Cheshire, doing outreach, and asked if the town can go out and look for projects or companies looking for partnerships to come into Cheshire.

These are both done now, and Mr. Sitko said there are sites along Route 10, but if businesses are not interested, not much can be done. It is a matter of matching the company to the right site.

Mr. Pelletier reported that Hartford Health Care wanted to build a large medical building in the I-C zone. They talked with the owners of the gas company and Michael Bozzuto. No one wanted to split up the land, and the building was constructed in Southington on Queen Street.

Mr. Kurtz asked whether the zoning regulations are a problem for developers.

In response, Mr. Sitko said he has heard this over the years...it has to do with Route 10 and the town's ability to locate businesses on Route 10 due to regulations.

Mr. Brucato asked about State grants for bio-tech or a sports complex, and if this has been looked at by the town. He cited bringing in a couple of bio-tech schools, satellite businesses, small shopping center, a restaurant, gym facility...and seeing this on Route 10. It is industry with small retail.

The Commission was informed by Mr. Pelletier that the Alexion building in Cheshire is 170,000 sq.ft. and the property is owned by Winn-Stanley Enterprises in Boston. Winn-Stanley was key in the development of the New Haven Science Park and bringing Alexion into Cheshire. At this time there is no interest in the Alexion building; the company put lots of money into that property; it is a high-tech state of the art lab and science building; and is being offered at \$5 sq. ft. triple net, first year free. But, there is nobody interested in this property. It was pointed out by Mr. Pelletier that bio-tech

companies want to be located around metropolitan areas to attract talent. With Alexion, there was no problem with Cheshire, but felt it was important to be around a metropolitan area and moved to New Haven and Yale. Most bio-tech companies want to be around each other.

This is why Mr. Brucato mentioned bringing in satellite schools into a safer area rather than metropolitan areas, and then pulling in bio-tech firms.

There are large scale warehouses in the North Haven area, and Mr. Sitko noted that Amazon purchased Whole Foods. The modern warehouses are not the same as 10 years ago; it is matching up the land with the right user.

The lack of infrastructure is a hindrance to development in the I-C zone, and Mr. Pelletier said it is water, sewer, and until there is an end user in there, it makes no sense to talk about sewer lines going into the north end. The water lines in the north end could help a business make the decision to come to Cheshire. The discussions with RWA show an interest in partnering with the town on sharing costs, about \$400,000.

Since November, Mr. Pelletier has heard many reasons why the referendum did not pass. One statement was the town not promoting the referendum, but the town cannot promote such an issue. EDC wrote a letter of support for the referendum.

Mr. Sitko said the explanatory text was unclear.

Mr. Stanley stated one person told him it was a \$1.3M proposal for a water line for a project that was not there. The real proposal was put \$1.3M on the shelf and if there is a project, run the water line.

Stating that was the intent, Mr. Sitko said if someone talks about a site on that location, and there is no water, it must go to referendum, and it would be a year and a half to get approval of the funds. With the approval of the \$1.3M, the money would be in place for engineering, permitting, etc. in partnership with RWA, saving 5 or 6 months.

The group talked about the referendum item of \$1.3M, people not understanding the question, better education on the issue, the other referendum issues on the ballot with careful explanation.

Regarding shovel ready projects, Mr. Kurtz asked about people coming to Cheshire asking about them, i.e. the Highland Avenue area.

Mr. Sitko said the more time taken off development projects, the better for the town. With things in place, it makes it easier.

With the whole corridor in place, Mr. Kurtz said there could be approval or denial of what goes in there.

This is a challenge, and Mr. Sitko said it is the call of the PZC.

Mr. Voelker said the problem with zoning regulations is they must apply equally. The Highland Avenue industrial corridor is lots of mileage. The West Main Street area has a core area of focus.

There was a brief discussion about the S.D.D. area for the large mall, a company not coming into town without infrastructure, the town not chasing people away, people asking to amend regulations, companies going to other towns where infrastructure is in place.

The Muldrow report shows now to move forward, and Mr. Voelker said there is interest. Retail is not permitted in the industrial area.

Mr. Stanley said things have changed; the State is in a deep hole; taxes will increase; and over 20 years the Route 10 corridor has not changed. There is lots of land with nothing happening and the question is why, when this is a prime area for business, and is the town doing something wrong.

With regard to taxes, Mr. Linder asked about the difference between Cheshire and Southington for the average size house...if Southington taxes were lower.

Mr. Voelker pointed out that Southington has 50,000 people, but for the same size house, the taxes in Cheshire would be higher.

Mr. Natale does not want Route 10 to become Queen Street. He said Southington is smart with West Street development which will look better than it does now.

Regarding a floating zone, Mr. Anderson asked about it being an S.D.D. now, can it be changed to a floating zone to derive a change or solution. He asked if this would encourage people to come to town.

Mr. Kurtz said the zoning regulations would have to be changed, with the POCD changed first.

There could be some change, but Mr. Voelker said it should be tied to the POCD.

With the Muldrow report, Mr. Todisco asked about consideration of doing something more general...maybe pushing for development, and not worry about traffic. He said community planning endeavor is the first step with the town paying for it.

This could take the better part of a year and Mr. Sitko noted the status of the State budget situation, and a regulation change could take a while.

There is a planning process and Mr. Todisco said once the consultant is hired it is a few months, and things could be fast tracked.

The Commission was told by Mr. Sitko that the Muldrow report took about 8 months.

In the Muldrow report it calls for a community vision process, and Mr. Voelker said this has been discussed. It includes public participation, and gives PZC things it wants to make zoning changes.

Mr. Kardaras commented on knowing where we want to go and what to do to get there.

There has been talk about retail and Mr. Pelletier said it is not necessarily the answer. Retail is evolving and changing now. At a recent business session, he said there were discussions about retail centers now being developed are not big box stores. They are smaller life style centers, town centers, to include doctor offices, central area for people to get services, grocery store. The retail world is changing and is not around box stores any longer.

In Prospect near the Aria building, Mr. Sitko noted there are three retail oriented projects, about 10,000 sq.ft. which are not occupied by one user. In the development business, a message can be sent out about an incentive policy to decision makers in the development community. The ultimate decision lies with the PZC.

Mr. Natale reported that Hamden CT sends out a monthly newsletter, via e-mail, with listing of properties for sale (industrial, commercial), things going on in town, and it gets a lot of play.

Mr. Sitko said this is done on the town's web site.

It was noted by Mr. Kardaras that no one has come before the Commission with a big ask with the Commission saying no.

A question was asked by Mr. Kurtz about why Cheshire cannot have a retail center/service in the north end...as they are all going to Southington.

The Commission was informed by Mr. Sitko that Cheshire is the 4th largest concentration of employees in the 19 town region, and is a net employer. And, businesses and employees state there is a need for more things in the north end.

The Knotter Drive industrial park area was developed years ago, and Mr. Linder talked about the tremendous lawns in front of the buildings, which was wanted in the past years. Today, this would not be done.

At a recent EDC meeting, Mr. Pelletier advised that Mr. Stanley (from Winn-Stanley) talked about new balance, their campus outside of Boston, with amenities that would rival any college. The firm is moving into downtown Boston because of the work force, has un-rentable empty office buildings in office parks similar to what is in Cheshire. Businesses want to be in the city.

With regard to the Knotter Drive industrial park area, Mr. Linder asked what can be done with the footprint of these buildings, i.e. rezone, carve up the lawns/fields and utilize them.

Mr. Brucato mentioned the percentage of square footage on the lot size, and if the zoning regulations could have a percentage or retail/commercial allowed in the industrial area...putting in a little restaurant, gas station in the industrial area.

Stating this is not permitted now, Mr. Voelker said there is no retail or restaurant allowed in the industrial area now. There is an exclusionary in the regulations with restaurants being separated by 2,000 sq.ft. This was written to keep fast food restaurants off Highland Avenue. The PZC could put service areas into the industrial park.

There was a brief discussion about this being a possibility, making the area more attractive, if a restaurant would survive in the area, Route 10 being a better area, taking up industrial land with a restaurant, visibility of a gas station or restaurant, taking away land should a business want to expand, the expansion of some properties limited by wetlands, and Bristol-Meyers property possibly being carved out.

Mr. Pelletier talked about the big attraction for businesses to Wallingford being the municipal electrical provider, with lower rates. He commented on the electric reliability issues in the 1990's in Cheshire with continued power outages throughout the entire town. A committee was formed to address these issues, to get the attention of CL&P for a better electric loop system and tree trimming.

Mr. Pelletier commented on the issue raised about bringing water from Southington into the I-C zone. RWA owns the franchise for Cheshire; they are in the business of selling water; and would not want the town to purchase water from Southington.

Chairman Kurtz said there are difficult choices to be made and lots of work to get done. He thanked Mr. Sitko, Mr. Pelletier, EDC members for attending the meeting and the information they shared with PZC.

MOTION by Mr. Todisco; seconded by Mr. Natale.

MOVED to approve the POCD meeting dates for 2018 as follows:

January 10, February 15 (cancelled), March 14, April 11, May 9, June 13, July 11, August (no meeting), September, October, November (cancelled), December 12, and January 9,2019.

VOTE The motion passed unanimously by those present.

VI. ADJOURNMENT

MOTION by Mr. Todisco; seconded by Mr. Kardaras

MOVED to adjourn the meeting at 8:50 p.m.

VOTE The motion passed unanimously by those present.

Attest:

Marilyn W. Milton, Clerk