

MINUTES OF THE CHESHIRE PLANNING AND ZONING COMMISSION PLAN OF DEVELOPMENT REGULAR MEETING HELD ON MONDAY, MARCH 3, 2014 AT 7:30 P.M. IN ROOM 207-209, TOWN HALL, 84 SOUTH MAIN ST. CHESHIRE CT 06410

Present

Commission Members: Earl J. Kurtz III, Vincent Lentini, Gil Linder, Lelah Campo  
Alternate: Diane Visconti.  
William Voelker, Town Planner.

I. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 7:32 p.m.

II. ROLL CALL

The roll was called.

III. DETERMINATION OF QUORUM

Following roll call it was determined that a quorum of the Commission was not present.

IV. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The group Pledged Allegiance to the Flag.

V. APPROVAL OF MINUTES – S.M. 5/22/13; 6/5/13 Notes (no quorum)

No action taken.

VI. DISCUSSION

A. REVIEW OF PLAN UPDATE, SCHEDULE AND PROCESS.

Mr. Voelker stated that the focus of the meeting is to review and inform the Commissioners about the Plan of Conservation and Development, what the Plan is, and set the schedule and matters to be discussed and accomplished for the Plan update.

Mr. Voelker distributed a copy of the Council of Governments, Central Naugatuck Valley, Economic Profile, 2013; a copy of the Cheshire Plan as amended in 2008; and census information, residential build-out analysis from COG. The COG Profile shows that Cheshire is the only community in our region that imports labor in the sectors of agriculture, warehouse distribution, retail jobs and some manufacturing, while other communities export labor. Commissioners have a binder of the Cheshire Plan.

The Commissioners were informed by Mr. Voelker that the Connecticut General Assembly requires municipalities to perform a review of their Plan once every 10 years. The State Statute Section 8-23 talks about all the things to be considered when doing a Plan of Conservation and Development, and the process required.

Regarding timing, the last time the Cheshire Plan was updated was in 2002 with a complete revision. An amendment was made to the Plan in 2007 and 2008 around the establishment of the Interchange Special Development District regulations, and they are part of the Plan. State Statute 8-23 requires the "State Conservation and Development

Polices Plan” be considered when the Town does its Plan. Modifications were made to the State Plan, and the State extended the time to July 2015 for the municipalities to complete their Plan. Other than consideration of the State modifications, the municipal Plan must be updated every 10 years. This 10 year update is a mandatory requirement from the State Legislature.

Mr. Voelker recommended the Commissioners review Section 8-23 to become familiar with its requirements regarding housing, affordable housing, housing diversity, transportation etc. The Plan is, basically, a general recommendation and framework for the land use regulations and implementation that comes forward from the capital budget recommendations. Section 8-24 is referenced in the annual recommendation made from the capital budget. Any time a municipality spends money to acquire or improve property, there must be a recommendation from the Planning and Zoning Commission in accordance with Section 8-24.

Copies of Sections 8-23 and 8-24 are in the packets.

Mr. Voelker noted that the PZC must have a representative for the regional planning agency which will be an agenda item for the next Commission meeting.

The Plan is broken out into sections/chapters – Community Goals, Physical Features, Open Space, Community Facilities, Schools, Recreation, Agriculture, Circulation and Traffic, Population, Existing Land Use, Commercial, Residential, Industrial. Each chapter will be reviewed, discussed and updated. Cheshire has acquired a considerable amount of open space since 2002, and this topic will be included in development of the recommendations.

An important component of the Plan update is community involvement. Mr. Voelker said the Plan must be the “Commission’s Plan”, and he will be guiding the Commission throughout the process. The community engagement is important and there has been talk about a community survey.

Ways to do this were suggested:

- public television
- videos with staff and Commissioners informing the public about what is being done
- public invitation to workshops on specific topics
- survey questions on the Town’s web site
- community response to the survey on the web site
- written mail-out survey to a random sampling of households

Mr. Voelker stated the suggested public outreach is a better way to go than hiring a consultant to do the survey, and would be more immediate using the tools available.

Mr. Linder proposed a mail survey, and had a copy of the Avon CT survey. He has checked into the costs of a mail-out survey, hiring people to do sample surveys, and for

10,000 households there would be a random sampling of 400 families. This would be a good representative group for Cheshire.

Ms. Campo asked about doing a phone survey which is not too costly, but would reduce the number of topics/questions.

For the mail-out survey, Mr. Linder said it could be done in-house without hiring a firm. Printing would be the highest cost plus the mailings. He got a quote from one firm for about 45 cents per household to include printing, folding, and mailing.

Mr. Kurtz commented on people not wanting to answer a phone survey, but having the survey on the web site and local newspaper enables everyone to participate. Using a mail-out selective survey will not reach everyone who wants to participate.

The Commissioners were told by Mr. Voelker that the law requires public hearings on the update to the Plan. He does not consider the hearings to be adequate for public input, as the public must be engaged in the process. With a survey there is only one source of public input, while using public television and the web site, the response will be much greater. The survey questions could also be published in the *Cheshire Herald*, and people would be encouraged to answer them on the web site. Mr. Voelker commented on the need to tap into the energy of the community for input on the Plan update, and said he believes there will be a good response.

For the 2008 Plan update, Mr. Voelker reported that there were public hearings on the different chapters of the Plan, and Martin Cobern was the Chairman of the committee.

Mr. Voelker talked about doing survey questions around sections of the Plan, i.e. "Residential" -- holding a public information meeting, having a blurb on public television. Some of the discussion topics around "residential growth" could be availability of utilities, high density housing where public sewer is not available, housing diversity. For "open space" topics could be how it is evaluated and management plans.

Stating that the Cheshire Plan document is excellent, Mr. Linder said it is well thought out, and he commented on the 2014-15 updated Plan not being that much different than the current Plan.

In response, Mr. Voelker sees taking any and all ideas, refining and building upon them. To look at the plans of other towns, he suggested going on line to a town's web site.

Mr. Linder recommended looking at the Avon CT Plan, since Avon is a town similar to Cheshire, along with Glastonbury and Simsbury.

In that regard, Mr. Voelker noted that Avon has Route 44 as its downtown area, and it is a commercial strip. The Town of Simsbury has an older downtown center area.

As things relate to Cheshire, Mr. Voelker brought up the “Open Space” chapter with the Commission looking at how much land has been acquired, update of the land inventory, understanding the factors involved in land acquisition, does the town need more open space land, how much and why. If the public is properly engaged, there will be more ideas to carry forward.

PZC Chairman Kurtz questioned the need to hold public hearings on each section of the Plan. He prefers there be one public hearing with people bringing forward ideas on various sections of the Plan.

Mr. Voelker said there could be as many or as few public hearings as the Commission wants, with grouping of sections/chapters (agriculture/open space/environmental issues as one topic; economic base to include commercial/industrial issues as a topic).

In reviewing the current Plan, Ms. Campo cited the fact that there were some issues which did not come to fruition. She questioned whether it makes sense to do a report card session, going through/checking off items that have been accomplished, still need to be done, should or should not be done – i.e. a dog park, walking trails.

Mr. Voelker commented on the need to read the Plan. He explained that every time someone comes into the Planning Department for a zone map change or zone text amendment, staff looks at the Plan as part of the process. Under Section 8-23 there is legislative body(Town Council) involvement and Commission approval required.

There was a brief discussion about survey questions, the need for more questions, the timeline for completion and submission of the Plan update by July 2015 to the State. Mr. Voelker commented on moving the process forward.

Mr. Linder suggested the Plan be broken up into chapters/sections, and a Commissioner responsible for reading and recommending updates for a chapter of the Plan.

Ms. Campo stated she would like to be responsible for analyzing how far the Town has come with the Plan, with staff input on certain areas.

Mr. Linder stated he would continue to work on the components of the town wide survey, and review of other community plans.

It was suggested by Ms. Campo that with “groupings” there be people invited to sessions who are knowledgeable on the topic(s) so there is learning as well as teaching.

Mr. Voelker noted that in the Plan there is input from the Economic Development Commission and Historic District Commission. To keep things moving along, he said the Commission could meet twice a month to work on the update to the Plan and review what has been done or needs to be done.

Mr. Linder commented on Southbury CT having a very good and well written Plan of Development, including photographs.

Ms. Campo said she is interested in the Residential Chapter/Affordable Housing component of the Plan, and wants to learn more about this topic.

It was stated by Mr. Kurtz that affordable housing is an important component, but Cheshire will never meet the required percentage of affordable housing.

Stating that is true, Mr. Voelker said Cheshire will never get to the 10% affordable housing requirement, but it is also a matter of how the town thinks comprehensively about the issue. He noted that the 10% number was made, but no town will get to that percentage. In the State Plan, Section 8-13 is the affordable housing section written by Attorney Tondro, and this section is not in the Plan to solve a crisis to enable inner city people to move to the smaller towns. It is in the Plan as a measure to protect the economic base of the State to provide affordable housing for people who live and work in communities where it is expensive to live. The 10% number was picked out of a hat. The Affordable Housing Appeals Act provides the development community (home builders) with an alternative form of housing that may be available to them when the market does not provide market rate housing. This act will never be changed or appealed. In Cheshire there are few affordable housing units, and for developers this housing does not make much money.

In Section 8-23 "Affordable Housing" is a prime topic, and Mr. Voelker and Ms. Campo will work on this as a topic for the next Plan meeting. For the next meeting, Mr. Linder will bring forward Plans from other municipalities for review and discussion. There will also be a review of the Cheshire Plan accomplishments since the 2008 update.

The tentative date for the next meeting is Wednesday, March 19<sup>th</sup>, 7:30 p.m. The date and time will be confirmed and Commissioners advised.

With regard to holding public hearings on the Plan, the Commissioners discussed having more than one hearing. Mr. Voelker commented on the public hearings being dependent on how much the public is engaged throughout the review and update process. He noted that Cheshire people watch public television and go onto the Town's web site. There will also be a newspaper article in the *Herald* about the Plan update, and welcoming public input to the committee.

Ms. Visconti suggested sending an e-mail to all members of Cheshire boards, commissions, and committees about the Plan update, as these are people interested in the Town.

Ms. Campo suggested phone calls from the Plan of Development Committee to residents, posing some questions, and inviting people to the public hearings. This is another way to personally engage people, and at little cost.

According to Mr. Linder there is a possible risk with engagement of too many people involved in the process.

VII. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at 8:30 p.m.

Attest:

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Marilyn W. Milton, Clerk  
(transcribed from tape)