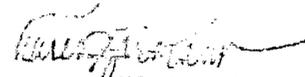


Town of Stafford
Planning & Zoning Commission
Regular Meeting
May 9, 2017
7:00 p.m. – Auditorium
Warren Memorial Town Hall

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TOWN CLERK

Members Present: Nancy Ravetto, Chair
Gene Julian
Kathy Bachiochi
Ron Houle

Also Present: Doug Fassett, Alternate
Leonard Clark, Alternate
Dave Perkins, Zoning Enforcement Officer
Donald Poland, PhD, AICP
Dennis Milanovich, Building Official/Town Engineer
UConn Students/Civil Engineering Department
Public

Public Hearing

A public hearing will be held to review proposed changes to the current Zoning Regulations which were reorganized and revised as of April 13, 2017.

Nancy Ravetto, Chair, opened the public hearing at 7:00 p.m. Kathy Bachiochi read the call. Nancy Ravetto reviewed the procedure for the public hearing. She introduced Dr. Don Poland, who has provided assistance to the Commission throughout the process.

Don Poland said he has helped the Commission with making revisions to the Zoning Regulations over the years. This included creating a Highway Industrial Zone as well as the Village Overlay District. He has since worked on a comprehensive reorganization of the Zoning Regulations, making corrections, removing duplications, and incorporating the new regulations into the revision. Sign regulations have also been updated to be in compliance with a recent federal court case and decision regarding content neutrality.

Gene Julian noted that in the back of the new regulations, there is a page that speaks to the dates of revisions. These are listed on the last page. He said this was an enormous, comprehensive task, and the result is a living document that reflects the changes in Stafford over the years.

The hearing was opened to public comment.

Stacey Joseph of 5 Collette Road West said she reviewed the proposed changes, noting it was difficult to determine what might have been changed. She said the First Selectman had recently passed some kind of rule or regulation that does not require including the details of which regulations are changing in the newspaper ads, but rather just a summary form.

Stacey Joseph said it appeared the retail sales definition was borrowed from the farm regulations which were not approved. Don Poland said that was a technical error on his part and he will remove that from the Zoning Regulations.

Regarding Item 3.6, Obstructions in Yards, Stacey Joseph recommended putting farm stands back into the Zoning Regulations. Nancy Ravetto said the Commission decided not to do this until the new Agricultural Commission can weigh in.

Stacey Joseph asked that the language for temporary signs that requires they advertise a special event be removed. She said she felt it was micro-managing. Don Poland explained that this was an attempt to address generic temporary signs that would need to be content neutral to be in compliance with the new law. He said that although it may be difficult to do so in some cases, permits for temporary signs have to include a beginning and an end date. Otherwise, they are not temporary. Additionally, if the Commission does not change its sign regulations, it could open them up to a First Amendment lawsuit. Stacey Joseph also said the regulation limiting temporary signs to no more than two weeks before an event will hurt businesses and is an arbitrary amount of time. Don Poland said the current regulations are actually more restrictive.

Stacey Joseph said she did not feel residents should have to take out a permit for a sign. She said residents should not have to ask permission to put up a sign on their own property. She also asked the Commission to reconsider the requirement that signs be at least 10 feet back from the road. This, she said, was an arbitrary amount and may make the signs difficult to see.

Chris Joseph of 5 Collette Road West said he felt as long as people take the signs down each day, it should be okay to continue to put them up indefinitely. Stacey Joseph added that signs are the most economical way to sell one's product.

Stacey Joseph said she did not like that farm stands were removed from the Zoning Regulations. She said it was not the best regulation to begin with, but they should not remove it until they have something better to put in its place. Nancy Ravetto said they had to take it out because they had no definition for farm stands. She noted residents expressed in the public hearing for farm regulations that they didn't want anything done until an Agricultural Commission could be formed and could weigh in. She reiterated that the PZC will work with that Commission.

Gene Julian explained that one of the PZC's main jobs in any update is to remove anything not defined in the Regulations, and farm stands were one of several. Without a definition, it puts an undue burden on the ZEO for enforcement. Stacey Joseph said she felt the public hearing was rushed. She added that she did not like that the attorney for the farm regulations public hearing discounted the Farm Bureau as a special interest group.

Matthew Kline asked to clarify if farm stands are no longer allowed until they are defined and regulations are written for them. Nancy Ravetto said that is the case. Gene Julian said the PZC does not usually initiate regulations. He said they don't normally go out and look for problems in town. However, the farm regulations were started in the beginning in an effort to assist a resident who requested their help with a regulation change. Nancy Ravetto also noted that the PZC must address complaints if they receive them, which can sometimes put them in a difficult position.

Dave Mordasky of 21 Buckley Highway said the Agricultural Commission was just recently established and he is the Chair. They will be holding their first meeting tomorrow evening and the

role of the Agricultural Commission is in an advisory capacity. He said their job is to listen to the concerns of farmers. He asked how the Agricultural Commission should go about bringing their concerns to the PZC. Nancy Ravetto said he should contact the Zoning Enforcement Officer to get on an agenda or ask for a Special Meeting. She noted that if a Special Meeting is called, they need to allow 48 hours for legally posting the meeting. She said the Agricultural Commission can also advise the PZC about what they are discussing. There should be some give and take.

Dave Mordasky asked how the Agricultural Commission could go about having a regulation changed if something is approved that they disagreed with. She said they can come before the PZC to discuss it. Amendments to the Zoning Regulations are made regularly.

Gene Julian added that every board and commission in town would gladly welcome groups and individuals to attend their meetings. Too often they are discussing town matters before an empty room. They want people to be involved in the process.

Matthew Kline asked what people can do in the short term regarding farm stands as the season approaches. Don Poland said that for any existing farm stand, people can continue having one--so long as the size, shape and use do not change. In layman's terms, these stands are grandfathered.

Chris Joseph asked if a farm stand is grandfathered, could people then put up signs for them. Don Poland said the same grandfathering rule would apply for existing, permitted signs. He said it would not apply to temporary signs. Any temporary signs would need to go through the permitting process.

Chris Joseph said he felt it was important for farms to be able to write and change signs at will. Don Poland said you can get a permit for a temporary sign for a set size for a sale of products. If the sign is the same size and shape but the wording changes from, for example, a sale of "corn" to a sale of "squash," it is not a new sign. He said he felt they drafted a regulation that allows temporary signs and a process for them. He said they don't want a proliferation of unpermitted temporary signs, as that is generally a concern for most towns from an aesthetics point of view.

Stacey Joseph asked when the Commission would be voting on the Zoning Regulations. Nancy Ravetto said a discussion and possible action is included on this evening's Agenda, but she can't say for sure whether they will take a vote. Don Poland said that by law, the Commission can approve, modify, or deny the regulations.

Stacey Joseph said it is possible some people who have not had farm stands in the past will want to open one this year, and she asked what would happen in that case. Nancy Ravetto said the ZEO would likely investigate them if he gets a complaint. Stacey Joseph asked who decides to enforce the regulations. Nancy Ravetto said it is the responsibility of the ZEO to enforce them. Stacey Joseph and Don Poland also had a brief discussion about why grandfathering exists under the law. He explained that pre-existing, non-conforming uses protect property owners.

Kim Milikowski of 21 Stafford Street said in her old job she worked with many towns where businesses put up Grand Opening signs. She questioned the need for a start and end date. Don Poland said this is necessary to protect against a temporary sign staying up in perpetuity. He clarified that this information need not be on the sign. It would simply be part of the permitting process.

There were no further questions or comments from the public or from the Commission. Gene Julian made a motion to close the public hearing, seconded by Kathy Bachiochi. All were in favor.

Agenda

1. Call to order and establish a quorum
2. Review of minutes of April 25, 2017 Regular Meeting.
3. Presentation of Main Street redesign concepts by UCONN Civil Engineering Department
4. Public Hearing, discussion and possible action.
5. New and other business.
6. Adjournment

1. Call to order and establish a quorum.

Nancy Ravetto, Chair, called the meeting to order at 8:00 p.m. She established a quorum with Nancy Ravetto, Chair; Gene Julian, Kathy Bachiochi, and Ron Houle.

2. Review of minutes of April 25, 2017 Regular Meeting.

Ron Houle made a motion to approve the minutes of the April 25, 2017 Regular Meeting, seconded by Kathy Bachiochi. All were in favor.

3. Presentation of Main Street redesign concepts by UCONN Civil Engineering Department

Dennis Milanovich introduced four recent graduates from the University of Connecticut's Civil Engineering Department---Mike Crimmons, Kevin Ellis, Adam Webber, and Corey Burroughs. Each has accepted positions with area engineering firms. Dennis Milanovich said he approached the Civil Engineering Department about a year and a half ago to ask if students might be willing to come up with individual design concepts for the Main Street area from the intersection of Main and Furnace Avenue to the intersection of Park and Main Street. They came up with four concepts which were presented this evening.

The plans include traffic calming measures, and features that address aesthetics and walkability. The students reviewed the existing conditions, including long crosswalks that come out behind cars, narrow sidewalks, and unsafe speeds in the round-about.

The first alternative included some streetscape improvements. It creates a T-intersection at the Park/Church/Main Street intersection. The plan also calls for the addition of a speed bump, reducing lane widths to eleven feet and widening sidewalks to 6-1/2 to 9 feet and even wider sidewalks at the theater and neighboring restaurant where people may tend to congregate in larger numbers. The plan also calls for pedestrian bump-outs.

All four of the plans would include relocating above ground utilities to underground as well as adding on-street lighting for aesthetics.

In the first alternative the only major change from the east end of Main Street would be to add a landscape median at the intersection of Main and River Streets. A "Welcome to Downtown Stafford Springs" type of sign could fit well in this location.

The second alternative adds street trees such as dogwoods or Japanese lilacs. In this plan the round-about would be redesigned to increase deflections at all three entrances. Sidewalks would be increased to eight feet wide.

The third alternative includes pedestrian bump-outs and creates a one-way, west-bound Main Street in the downtown area. By eliminating an entire lane on Main Street, sidewalks could be made wider and the park could be expanded. The town could acquire the land where the gas station is located, possibly for mixed-use development. The turn would no longer be valid at the intersection of Spring and Main Streets, and there would be more green space at the former round-about.

The fourth alternative incorporates the idea of shared space, where the line is blurred between pedestrian and vehicular traffic. Examples were provided of shared space traffic in various places around the globe. There are no lane lines and drivers are naturally forced to slow down. Walk areas are fourteen feet wide and often include pavers.

The students said they felt it was necessary to do a traffic study and they collected data in various areas. They walked through the data collected, including levels of service, and summarized cost options for each alternative which ranged from about \$4 million for Alternative 1 to \$7.7 million for Alternative 4. They also graded the four alternatives based on various criteria such as walkability and traffic calming. In this case, the more expensive alternatives received the higher grades.

Future steps will include identifying funding sources and bringing residents together to discuss and explore options. It was noted that the Capitol Region Council of Governments may have some resources available to the town.

The presentation was opened to public questions and comments.

Roger Ingraham said there are a lot of large Federal Express trucks that come through the round-about and the Main Street area each day and he hoped that these alternatives took that into account. The students said they did address truck traffic in their designs.

A question was raised about where people could park cars if it was eliminated on Main Street. This has always been a challenge for the downtown area. The students noted there is parking off Route 32 and other areas just off Main Street could be incorporated into parking. The alternatives were each designed so people could traverse Main Street safely and comfortably.

Another resident discussed the need for handicapped people to be able to get around the downtown area safely and balancing that with some of the large buses, double wide trucks and fire trucks that pass through.

Dennis Milanovich said the biggest hurdle to increasing walkability in the downtown area is getting people to reduce their speeds. However, the students have produced a very good beginning that will help residents start a dialogue on these issues and how to address them in town.

Another resident said a trolley car option would work well with the one-way Main Street alternative, and would be an excellent way to address the lack of parking issue.

Gene Julian noted that Main Street (Route 190) is a state road, and he asked how this might play in. One of the students noted that, generally, if a town goes to the state with their problem and a solution in hand, they are willing to listen and work with the town. Dennis Milanovich said the state has begun this conversation and the students have proven to be a wonderful resource for the town to tap into. Dennis said the students' presentation will be put up on the town website. Going forward he said he would expect to get additional feedback from the town, from the Department of Transportation, and eventually he would expect the town to enlist professional help.

4. Public Hearing, discussion and possible action.

Nancy Ravetto opened the discussion. Gene Julian said the Commission had spent a long time working on the update and it is now time to pass them. He noted the Zoning Regulations are a living document and they can always make amendments as needed. There was no further discussion.

Kathy Bachiochi made a motion to accept the proposed changes to the current Zoning Regulations as presented in accordance with the Plan of Conservation and Development, with the exception of striking the definition of retail sales. The changes would be effective May 31, 2017. Gene Julian seconded the motion. All were in favor.

5. New and Other Business

Dave Perkins noted that the Commission would be sending a letter to temporary Zoning Enforcement Officer Tom Gormley thanking him for his help during the transition period. Nancy Ravetto read the letter for the record.

6. Adjournment.

Ron Houle made a motion to adjourn, seconded by Gene Julian. All were in favor. The May 9, 2017 Regular Meeting of the Planning & Zoning Commission was adjourned at 8:55 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,



Annie Gentile
Recording Secretary