

Town of Stafford
Planning & Zoning Commission
September 29, 2022 – Special Meeting
Community Center – 3 Buckley Highway

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TOWN CLERK

Members Present: Dave Palmberg, Chair
Rich Shuck
Dr. David Mordasky
Chris Joseph, alternate
Leonard Clark, alternate

Others Present: David Perkins, Zoning Enforcement Officer
Public

Public Hearing

Presentation of the Draft Plan of Conservation and Development to solicit feedback from the public.

Dave Palmberg, Chair, opened the public hearing at 7:02 p.m., establishing a quorum with Dave Palmberg, Chair; Rich Shuck, Dr. David Mordasky and seating alternate members Chris Joseph for Cindy Rummel and Leonard Clark for Ron Houle.

Dr. David Mordasky read the legal notice. Dave Palmberg explained the process for the public hearing.

David Perkins reviewed the chronology and process for putting together the Plan of Conservation and Development (POCD). The State of Connecticut mandates that the POCD be updated every ten years, and the last time the PZC did so was on October 9, 2012. They have been working on the update for the past two years and received input from various parties including the Agricultural Advisory Commission, the Conservation Commission, the Historical Advisory Commission, town departments, as well as a community survey. He explained that the POCD is not only used to guide the PZC but also provides outsiders with a feel for the Town of Stafford.

David Perkins reviewed some of the demographics in town and how the population has grown and changed since 1830. He noted that the older population is increasing, while younger people are decreasing, so the town will need to consider its aging population in future planning. Dave Palmberg noted they were able to incorporate the recent census data into the plan, so it is very current.

Home and rental values show Stafford is an affordable community to live in relative to its peers. There is also fairly significant Open Space in town (about 25%), made up of state land, pasture,

and forest. David Perkins noted the map of bio-diversity areas and the need to connect greenways. He also noted Stafford is, by ordinance, a right-to-farm town.

David Perkins reviewed recommendations for infrastructure, pointing out the locations of firehouses, hydrants, and sewer lines. He noted the plan names the various town-owned buildings and provides recommendations on how they might be best used. The plan also outlines roadways and the conditions of roadways, including where they may need more money from the state for repairs. Various recommended tasks have been outlined in the plan for each section it covers.

He reviewed economic development in the past ten years and commercial-related issues. He pointed out the Monson Road/Diamond Ledge industrially-zoned area. The lack of utilities in this area and the fact that it falls in a flood zone makes it difficult for industrial development and the plan recommends it be rezoned to allow residential development.

He reviewed other various commercial areas around town and in the downtown that need attention. The plan suggests rezoning the Local Business zone near the racetrack to mixed use. Dave Palmberg said the idea is to capitalize on the racetrack by allowing hospitality type businesses such as restaurants, possibly a hotel, as well as accessory uses to racetracks. David Perkins reviewed a graph depicting the positives and negatives of economic development and the need to support complementary businesses. He explained the need to enhance and maintain the various villages in Stafford.

David Perkins discussed the retail gap in Stafford for food and drink establishments and that a study determined there is a \$10 million potential in this area.

David Perkins said the State encourages getting away from the term “town character,” but that in describing Stafford, it identifies as a green-acres type lifestyle with country living and self-reliance. It is a front porch type community that puts focus on parks and recreation. He reviewed some of the results of the community survey. The top favorite things about Stafford in the responses was its small town feel and its rural landscape and natural resources.

He reviewed some of the recommended zoning changes, including creating a Lake Zone in the Staffordville Lake area and a historical district in the downtown. There is a recommendation to build cluster housing and he showed some potential concepts on how they might look. David Perkins also noted that Stafford has a “Justice Zone” based on income that would allow the town to apply for federal grant money. He noted that the POCD is a very important tool in applying for grants.

He reviewed other items including Quality of Life tasks and emergency services.

Dave Palmberg noted that the PZC is required to submit their plan to the Capitol Region Council of Governments (CRCOG) and the plan came back to them with minimal comments. He noted there has been significant legislation from the State in recent years on affordable housing, and he reiterated Dave Perkins comments about the importance of the POCD with regard to obtaining grant monies for services, road repairs, conservation, and business interests.

Under the Quality of Life Tasks, Dave Palmberg noted the need to create new housing stock for Stafford's aging population such as cluster housing developments with smaller homes and yards, assisted living developments or other developments similar to Woodland Springs. He said he would ask David Perkins to add an additional section to the plan that would describe how the plan should be implemented. He suggested creating a Plan Implementation Committee (PIC), which would be advisory and made up of people from various commissions as well as the public to meet quarterly and follow through on making sure progress is being made on the various tasks recommended in the plan.

Dr. David Mordasky said there is a need for a PIC as when they started looking back at the plan that was developed ten years ago, it was found that little follow-up was done on some of the tasks they really wanted to accomplish. He also commended staff and the commission for the work they all did on the plan, noting many towns pay a hefty fee to have outside professionals write their plans. It was a great achievement that they were able to complete it in-house.

The public hearing was opened to public comment.

Carol Frassinelli of West Street noted that the plan recommended moving the Senior Center to the Staffordville School. She said she and many other seniors were opposed to this. Chris Joseph asked her to expand on her concerns. Carol Frassinelli said the location of Staffordville School and for seniors to get out there was the major concern. She said the Senior Center is in the borough and for many seniors, who don't drive as much as they once did, would not feel comfortable making that longer trip out to the school. She noted also the town bus isn't always reliable. Dave Palmberg said a main reason for the recommendation was that it is a relatively new school and that it was more accessible regarding being ADA compliant. He said there is a lot of opportunity there for recreation programs for people of all ages.

Ann Rosi of 7 Orcuttville Road, a participant at the Senior Center for the past 25 years, reiterated Carol Frassinelli's concerns. She noted the recreation program at Staffordville School and that there are often kids on the beach. She had liability concerns with seniors driving up there and said she preferred the Senior Center's current location because it is more centrally located. She said she brought up the issue at the Senior Center's Board of Trustee's meeting and suggested there might be a lot of pushback from seniors.

Joyce Murray of Edgewood Street said when the summer recreation program is going on at Staffordville School, no one can get in there. David Perkins explained that the whole POCD is a series of policy statements—right now just ideas. They don't get into the details yet. He noted, for example, that the Witt School might hopefully get back online and create potential opportunities for people in town.

Elaine Lueckel of RFD Road said Staffordville School would need a lot of renovating if it were to be converted to a Senior Center. She noted it had a gym, but not a lot more. Dave Palmberg said part of the considerations when they make recommendations are the age of buildings and the utilities that serve them.

Art Guerra of 33 West Stafford Road said he is a lifelong resident on Staffordville Lake and would like the Commission to take a second look at providing access to the lake for residents who don't live on it. He would like there to be a balanced approach. He said the lake is underutilized for canoeing and kayaking and they might be able to achieve some balance by creating a launch (possibly for a small fee) so there would be some oversight. Allowing this would expand on fitness interests and recreational opportunities.

David Perkins noted they looked at the various issues in town with generally broad strokes. Dave Palmberg said they had discussed the possibility of a launch for non-motorized boats and possibly a wash station to address concerns about invasive species. While Dave Palmberg noted that many lake residents were opposed to opening up the lake to residents who don't live on the lake, Art Guerra said this is a trend and that they could look to how their neighbors on Snipsic Lake (in Tolland) have handled it successfully. Dave Palmberg said this is a hot topic on both sides of the issue and it might be good to take a second look at the lake regulations.

Dr. David Mordasky said he is a member of the Staffordville Lake Association and acknowledged it is a topic they are wrestling with. The milfoil situation is a definite concern, but he said he saw allowing canoes and kayaks as a possibility. Art Guerra agreed that any allowances should only be for non-motorized, paddle only watercraft. Dave Palmberg said they want to encourage more healthy activities for town residents.

John Giumarra of 58 Wales Road and a member of the Staffordville Lake Association read a statement from Association President Aaron Hoffman. In his letter, Aaron Hoffman thanked the Commission and expressed pride in the Association's partnership with the town in working toward protecting the lake quality and keeping the reservoir healthy and sustainable. His letter also stressed the importance of minimizing the impact of stormwater runoff which can be detrimental to lake quality. John Giumarra said he was open to considering allowing non-motorized watercraft on the lake.

Dave Palmberg noted the Lake Zone recommendation is not just for Staffordville Lake but also other water bodies in town. They want to provide more accessible areas to non-lake residents.

Becky Kraussmann of 6 Hillcrest noted she is the Vice President of the Stafford Historical Society. However, she was speaking as a private citizen. She said she felt the PZC and staff did a good job on the POCD. It was quite a task and she appreciated their efforts. She said in addition to the POCD, the town should have a Master Plan, one that offers more than band-aids. She said a Master Plan would determine if they wanted to be more of an Enfield or a Northampton or something else. She added that she would still like to see a separate heading on Stafford's history alone as history can really promote a town.

Becky Kraussmann noted that Stafford is on the Lafayette Trail and it is a nationally important event that General Lafayette had actually stopped in Stafford. Because of Stafford's mills, they are also part of the Industrial Trail. She said they are working on creating a self-guided walking trail with signage. Interest in history is growing. Becky Kraussman also noted the old Milikowski Farm and said the old 18th century house on the property needs to be preserved, moved, or architecturally salvaged. It is a big piece of land in a good location and she said she did not want

the home to continue to deteriorate. David Perkins suggested she stay on top of any demolition orders for the property. He noted also that while they did not do a separate history section in the POCD, the history of the town is noted throughout the plan as they discuss what should be done about some of their old, vacant buildings.

Bob Senatro of 153 RFD Road inquired if there had been any progress on bringing the railroad back for passenger service. David Perkins said it was found that the gauge of the rails are for freight trains, not passenger service so the idea about bringing back passenger service pretty much missed them. Dave Palmberg noted that the state's attention shifted to a north/south rail service between Enfield and Windsor Locks and an east/west route from Palmer to Boston. The original intent was to link the various colleges.

Donna Wright of 95 West Stafford Road noted she is President of the Stafford Garden Club, a group of about 25 volunteers. She said what they do in decorating various areas in town with plants for the summer and Christmas might seem almost unnecessary but it means a lot to the people in town. They are grateful for the private donations they receive as they could not survive as a club without them. She stressed the importance of maintaining the beauty and cleanliness of their town, the need to keep their streets free of litter, and the overall need to do more to maintain and enhance its natural beauty. She said these things matter for the integrity of the town and she volunteered her services to be a member of the PIC when it is created. Dave Palmberg said if the POCD is approved, the Board of Selectmen would be the body to consider the establishment of the Plan Implementation Committee.

Beth Magura of 95 West Stafford Road said at the History Advisory Commission meetings, they have periodic discussions about a vision for the town. She noted several of the unique historic buildings in the downtown area such as Town Hall, the train station, the Historical Society building and the Episcopal Church. She said they need to appreciate and engender this uniqueness as part of their public relations efforts. Dave Palmberg noted they have discussed the need to install wayfinding signs for various points of interest including historical ones. Dr. David Mordasky agreed the town has much to offer. David Perkins said this also speaks to their right-to-farm ordinance and agricultural roots.

Rich Shuck said the POCD actually *is* their Master Plan. Anyone who wants to build or do something in town needs to follow the POCD and that is part of why it is so important. It is also a living document that will change with the times and technology. He said he appreciated the good turnout for this discussion. Dave Palmberg added that while the POCD update is required every ten years, there is no reason they cannot update it in two years or five years, whenever they feel it is needed.

First Selectman Sal Titus said he wanted people to know that Stafford will be receiving about \$23,000 from the state for their 5 cent surcharges on bottles. They will get the payment in two checks and the next one for about \$11,000 to \$12,000 will be coming in October. It is fairly open ended on what they can use it for, but the plan is to put it toward addressing littering issues and adding recycling bins around town. He welcomed people to make suggestions for its use.

Donna Wright brought up that there was nothing about noise pollution created by jake brakes in the POCD. She wondered if they could do something with signage that prohibits it. Dave Palmberg said she would likely need to talk to the State Department of Transportation about this issue. There was also a discussion about situations with light pollution. Dave Palmberg noted the PZC requires full cut-off lighting on commercial buildings.

Ingrid Drexler of 195 Buckley Highway asked if the POCD included any recommendations for a dog park in town. David Perkins said the plan named the old Transfer Station as a potential location for a dog park. He said there was a committee that was working on the potential for one and she could check with the Selectmen's Office about where plans stood.

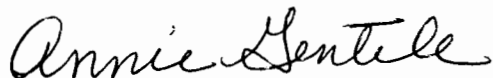
Beth Magura mentioned earlier comments from David Perkins about Monson Road and the fact that it is in a watershed and does not have public utilities. She asked why they would consider changing the zoning to residential if it is a flood prone area. Dave Palmberg said the area required for residential homes is a lot less than what would be needed for industrial buildings. Industrial buildings also require larger septic systems and more parking.

Dave Palmberg recommended they continue the public hearing to their next regular meeting on October 6. He asked David Perkins in the meantime to incorporate the implementation portion into the plan.

Dr. David Mordasky made a motion, seconded by Leonard Clark to continue the public hearing to October 6, 2022. All were in favor. Motion carried.

Dr. David Mordasky made a motion seconded by Leonard Clark to adjourn the meeting. All were in favor. Motion carried. The September 29, 2022 Special Meeting of the Stafford Planning & Zoning Commission was adjourned at 8:35 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,



Annie Gentile
Recording Secretary