



TOWN OF MONROE

PLANNING and ZONING COMMISSION POCD COMMITTEE

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Meeting Minutes

PLANNING and ZONING COMMISSION – POCD COMMITTEE

MONROE, CONNECTICUT

October 29, 2020

REMOTE ELECTRONIC PUBLIC MEETING VIA GO TO MEETING

Via computer, tablet or smartphone at this link: <https://global.gotomeeting.com/join/957942141>
Via phone at: United States: +1 (224) 501-3412 – Access Code: 957-942-141

Meeting: Planning and Zoning Commission POCD Committee
Virtual Public Workshop
7 Fan Hill Road, Monroe, Connecticut

Meeting was Video and Audio Recorded

1. CALL TO ORDER & PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The Chair called the meeting to order at 6:00 pm.

2. ROLL CALL

Present: Michael O'Reilly
Leon Ambrosey
Bruno Maini
Ryan Condon
Robert Westlund
Rick Schultz, Town Planner
William Agresta, Planning and Zoning Administrator
Francisco Gomes, FHI, Planning Consultant

Absent: Ronald Schneider
Domenic Paniccia
Jonathan Formichella
Ryan Driscoll
Barbara Thomas
Tammy Julian
Ray Giovanni

3. POCD UPDATE PUBLIC WORKSHOP AGENDA DISCUSSION ITEMS

- Introduction to the Plan of Conservation and Development

Chair O'Reilly welcomed all and passed moderation of the workshop to Francisco.

- Presentation of Early Findings

Francisco with the aid of a power point presentation reviewed and summarized some of the data collected to date, including responses to the online survey, which remains open and would remain open for another month or so.

- Discussion Topics - Francisco introduced the topics of focus and led the discussion with the workshop participants.

(See attached Meeting Notes for discussion summary)

- Transportation and Infrastructure Discussion
- Housing Discussion
- Economic Development Discussion
- Open Space and Environment Discussion

- Open Floor Discussion

There were no further comments or questions raised.

- Meeting Recap and Next Steps

Francisco summarized the workshop discussions. The next steps involve Francisco meeting with the Committee to define a Plan vision statement and goals, as well as to formulate Plan recommendations.

- Adjournment - The meeting adjourned at 9:00 pm.

To: Planning and Zoning Commission POCD Committee

Cc: Rick Schultz, Will Agresta, Town of Monroe

From: Francisco Gomes, Fitzgerald & Halliday Inc.

Date: 11/5/20

Re: Plan of Conservation and Development Workshop Summary conducted on 10/29/20

Plan of Conservation and Development Workshop Summary

The Town's Planning and Zoning Commission POCD Committee hosted a virtual public workshop, facilitated by Fitzgerald and Halliday, in support of the Town's Plan of Conservation and Development (POCD) update. Twenty-four participants took part in the three-hour virtual workshop (hosted via Go-To-Meeting) and provided comments and discussion on a variety of topics relevant to the POCD.

Michael O'Reilly, Chair of the Planning and Zoning Commission POCD Committee, opened the meeting and explained the virtual meeting process and State orders, reading Executive Order No. 71. He turned the meeting over to Francisco Gomes, Project Manager from FHI, who reviewed the workshop agenda, provided an introduction to the POCD and presented early findings. Francisco presented demographic trends in the Town and discussed findings from an online survey for the POCD that was conducted and is currently open.

Following the POCD overview and early findings presentation, topical discussions were conducted and were organized around the following topics:

- Transportation and Infrastructure
- Housing
- Economic Development
- Open Space and Environment

Key for summary discussion on the following pages: (FG) refers to Francisco Gomes, (RS) refers to Rick Schultz, (WA) refers to Will Agresta, (Participant) refers to member of the public or member of the Planning and Zoning Commission POCD Committee.

Transportation and Infrastructure Discussion

What are the issues and needs related to transportation and infrastructure?

- FG: Is there interest in providing on-road bike facilities (the Town currently has no facilities)?
 - Participant: Does the Town pay for these facilities and do they need a plan first?
 - FG: Town's often implement incrementally, then moves towards developing a comprehensive plan. The POCD could identify the need for facilities and would recommend improvements or that a plan be conducted for those facilities.
- Participant: Is this plan finalized and how will it be used for planning? It seems that the running, biking, walking trails are important but access to them are not easy. So easy access should be considered.
 - FG: We are right in the middle of this process; we don't have a draft plan yet. The purpose of this discussion is to determine what the priorities are for the Town. Adding bike and pedestrian infrastructure is something that could be a priority in the plan. If the Town initiated a Bike/Ped Plan, it would be a public process to find out what areas would like to be connected.
- FG: What are the pedestrian needs in Town?
 - Participant: Need to build a connected sidewalk network along RT 25 so that people can park once and walk to different shops, etc.
- Participant: If sidewalks are to be built along RT 25, does that fall under the Town or the State, since RT 25 is maintained by the State?
 - FG: The State does not maintain sidewalks, so the Town would have to maintain them. If the sidewalk is in front of someone's property, they would be responsible for snow clearing. The Town is ultimately responsible for the improvements and maintenance. Zoning requires the consideration of sidewalks with new development. The zoning requirement has been successful on RT 111 and Rt 25, as new sidewalks have built.
- Participant: Has COVID-19 resulted in an increase in population or school enrollment in Town?
 - FG: There could be a population boost from people leaving New York. The best way to determine is to review school annual enrollment figures (issued in October every year).

Housing Discussion

What are the housing needs in Monroe and what ideas do you have?

- Participant: It seems like there is a desire to build apartment buildings.
 - FG: That speaks to the market and relates to demographic trends that suggest many 20-somethings still live at home due to limited housing options. There is a strong market in the rental housing area. The cost of building has increased, and it's more difficult to make a profit building single family homes. The market is favoring multi-family.
- FG: How do people felt about multifamily housing in Monroe, is it a good thing? Historically they have not comprised much of the housing in Monroe.
 - Participant: Has anyone heard of the Desegregate CT movement? Their ideas are good, one of their biggest reforms they are trying to make is for increased housing diversity. There is a lack of housing

diversity in Monroe. I am in firm support of residential units, especially those units above stores and in commercial areas. It is easier to support local businesses when they are right outside where you are living.

- Participant: Apartments over retail are good for businesses - the apartments help cross-subsidize the business rents and makes projects that might not make sense as a pure commercial project. Residential development in commercial zones is a win-win.
- Participant: People feel they cannot afford the taxes, so that is why they are planning on leaving Monroe.
- Participant: Planning for affordable housing makes a lot of sense.
- FG: The new State mandate requires towns to create an affordable housing plan. Some of the groundwork for this will be established in the POCD, but the POCD will not be the affordable housing plan.
- RS: The Town is vulnerable to affordable housing applications via CGS §8-30G. State mandates aren't going to go away, they will probably increase. Towns can protect themselves by having zoning regulations and POCD policies that support the development of affordable housing in appropriate locations.
 - WA: Developers sometimes use §8-30G to get something else they want. Important that the Plan look at the existing Housing Opportunity District, as affordable housing is a component of this District.
- Participant: More people are looking for homes in the area since COVID. There has been an increase in bidding wars for condos. There is a wait list to get into many of the condos.

Economic Development Discussion

What are the Economic Development needs in Monroe and what ideas do you have?

- FG: How does the Town go about attracting commercial entities to help support the tax base?
 - RS: Economic Development Commission Development Coordinator was recently hired to act as a liaison between staff, First Selectman, and businesses.
- RS: There are architectural design requirements that sometimes are not met for developments. Zoning upholds high standards, but it is a balancing act. The high-quality aesthetic of the Noble Gas Station development is drawing attention from other businesses.

What would people like to see happen with the Stevenson Lumber Site?

- Participant: There are great potential uses, but it is close to the Halfway River. The Town should encourage projects that are environmentally sensitive. Would like to see commercial development there instead of industrial.
 - WA: The property is zoned for commercial, not industrial. The soil capacity for septic at the site is limited, therefore whatever goes in that large space will be affected by the septic soil capacity. The Town Sanitarian has recently done testing on the quality of the septic capacity of the site and can shed more light on the potential capacity.
 - Participant: Soils are poor at the site which limits septic potential. Mapping out the septic potential may help to figure out what exactly could be developed there.
- Participant: A dog park may be appropriate at the site, it could benefit future development.
- FG: Are there other constraints to development of the property?

- WA: The site is so large, 40+ acres, historically it has been challenging to a possible developer due to its size and limited septic capacity.

- Participant: The last POCD recommended that the site be a village district.

Does anyone have any thoughts on the Independence Drive area, what type of development is appropriate? Should the POCD take any initiative to point to any changes or different zoning in this area to enable different uses?

- Participant: The site is zoned industrial; the zoning of this area should be reviewed to see if there is opportunity to accommodate uses not currently allowed.
- WA: There is demand for warehousing.
- FG: The POCD should address this area and provide some guidance.

Open Space and Environment Discussion

What are the open space and environmental needs in Monroe?

- Participant: Town maps show that there are a lot of lovely areas of land that are Town owned or public open space. I would love to see more marked trails in these forested open spaces, perhaps with parking at trailheads, etc.
- Participant: It would be nice if trails would connect different areas of Town, as an alternative pedestrian transportation option since we have virtually no sidewalks. Connections to Lake Zoar desired.
- Participant: Zoning regulations need to be more consistent with the POCD:
- Participant: Need to track progress towards renewable energy, the Plan needs to be more than a wish list.
 - FG: The Plan's goals need to be realistic about what the community can achieve, while being aspirational.
- FG: Are zoning regulations favorable to solar? Has the Board of Education taken a look at the feasibility of solar on its buildings? The POCD provides an opportunity to encourage progress on this front.
- FG: As part of this Plan, an Implementation Plan will be created that tracks progress of the goals and is easy to use and track. FHI will provide an Implementation Plan that makes it easier to track the recommendations that get realized. It will identify who is responsible and in what sequence things should occur.
- WA: It is difficult to maintain and attract members to the Conservation Commission, hard to get people to volunteer so it makes efforts on things like trail creation/expansion more challenging.
- Participant: Monroe has more dog licensing than the neighboring towns, but there are no dog parks, while the other neighboring Town's do have a dog park. The Town would benefit from a dog park.
- Participant: Tree planting should be focused on. There is a carbon capture potential.
- Participant: Community gardens would be nice. Monroe does not currently have any.

What should be done with the Chalk Hill School site?

- WA: Past analysis indicates it would be costly to reuse/improve the building, it's been mothballed for a few years and each year reduces the viability of its reuse. One option discussed in the past was to demolish the building and build sports fields, but that too is costly and the site is sloped, currently no census or commitment to any plan.
- Participant: I am in full support of more open space, especially at Chalk Hill, as long as the proposed cell tower does not go in right behind it.
- Participant: Would it be possible to relocate another school to this site to free up another parcel for development?
 - WA: This has been discussed, but there are issues with moving school locations in part due to geography and proximity of school to attendees.
- Participant: What about a recreation center like a YMCA?
- Participant: The school is located between two other fully operational schools, so it seems like an unlikely site for private development. It would be great as an after-school center or recreational center for students.
- Participant: Would be nice to get more sports fields for the kids, fields are always in need.