

TOWN OF SOUTH WINDSOR
PLANNING & ZONING COMMISSION

Deborah W. Reid, Asc
RECEIVED FEB 29 2024
@ 8:34am

MINUTES

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FEBRUARY 13, 2024

MEMBERS PRESENT: Stephen Wagner, Robert Vetere, Kevin Foley, Michael LeBlanc, Stephanie Dexter

ALTERNATES PRESENT: Paul Bernstein, Despina Buganski, Michael Ouellette

STAFF PRESENT: Jeffrey Folger, Senior Environmental Planner; Jeffrey Doolittle, Town Engineer; Michael Lehmann, IT Support; Joshua Stern, Recording Secretary

REGULAR MEETING

CALL TO ORDER: Chair Wagner called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

Alternate Commissioner Ouellette was seated for Alan Cavagnaro; Alternate Commissioner Bernstein was seated to fill the vacancy on the Commission.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

NEW BUSINESS: Discussion/Decision/Action regarding the following:

1. Discussion with Dr. Kate Carter, Superintendent of Schools, regarding the status of school enrollment

Dr. Carter presented **Exhibit A**. She told the Commission that South Windsor's enrollment growth makes the Town an extreme outlier and clarified that she would not be speaking about any specific proposed housing projects, but rather addressing her overall concerns related to school enrollment.

Dr. Carter said many initially described the Town's enrollment growth as a good problem to have, but while the Town should be proud of its education quality, growing enrollment can still lead to challenges. As of October 2023, the district's total enrollment is 5,002 students. Following years of declining enrollment, the data shifted course in 2016; enrollment has increased by 888 students since 2015 and is projected to increase by an additional 620 by 2033. Carter noted that the combined actual and projected growth is larger than the total enrollments of 76 Connecticut school districts, and South Windsor's current K-5 population is larger than the total enrollments of 103 districts. She also noted the projected increases of the TEMS and SWHS populations. South Windsor is a significant outlier among Hartford-area towns in District Resource Group (DRG) B and is the only town in Connecticut whose enrollment increased by over 10% between 2012 and 2022.

Dr. Carter said in 2012, when the South Windsor Woods development was proposed, the developers projected that it would generate 21 school-aged children in the short term and 35 in the long term; as of today, it has generated 141. Because of a combination of factors that she referred to as the South Windsor effect, the usual tools for forecasting enrollment growth from a housing development cannot be relied upon in South Windsor. Estimates of the fiscal impacts of proposed developments can also be inaccurate due to these factors. For fiscal year 2023, the Town's net current expenditures per pupil was significantly lower than the State and DRG B averages and was the lowest in DRG B for the fourth consecutive year; across the State, 92% of school districts spent more per pupil than South Windsor.

Dr. Carter said in the recent POCD community survey, the schools were the most popular response to questions about why residents moved to South Windsor and why they enjoy living here, but growth and increasing enrollment was the top response to a question about the greatest challenges the Town will face over the next 10 years. She outlined three ways to address the enrollment growth: adding on to the existing schools, increasing the education budget, and building a fifth elementary school. She listed several recent facility upgrades that increased the capacities of the existing schools, such as adding classrooms and converting the former Wapping School to the High School Annex; she said the need for a larger budget is unavoidable, noting that the elementary schools have gained 24 classroom teachers since 2015. Carter said based on the existing data, an additional school is not necessary for the foreseeable future. However, the existing elementary schools are at

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maximum capacity, and a new school could be necessary if a substantial increase in housing leads to an influx of students not accounted for in the projections.

Commissioner Bernstein said that when Carter presented to the Commission three to four years ago, she stressed that the historical projections were off; he asked how she knows the current projections are more accurate. Carter said demographers examine trend data from throughout the region and the State and could not have foreseen South Windsor's current trends as the Town is a significant outlier. The demographers are now accounting for the trend data and projections for recently approved housing, though Carter said there could always be unforeseen factors that make the projections inaccurate. Bernstein asked how the current trends arose; Carter said some factors include the Town's reputation for commitment to education, the accessibility of its housing, and its growing South Asian community. She noted that three of the four new elementary schools were designed before the growth trend was known. Her concern is that increasing housing in town comes with the responsibility to expand infrastructure to accommodate new residents.

Commissioner Vetere asked who the Town should engage to supply enrollment estimates for proposed housing developments. Carter expressed confidence in the demographers but recommended that the Town arrange independent reviews of any enrollment projections that come in. Vetere noted that the Town's moratorium on affordable housing will expire in October and said concrete data will help the Town defend a denial of a project if necessary.

Commissioner Foley said the Commission has recently been changing zones to accommodate the State's affordable housing laws. He does not support this approach and asked State Representative Tom Delnicki if the Town's outlier status would give it standing to request an exemption to the State law. Delnicki said he has raised this issue with the Office of Policy and Management and plans to reach out to the Housing Commissioner, noting that the same growth trends can also affect the roads and wastewater treatment system. Carter expressed willingness to give the same presentation at the State Capitol if invited.

Commissioner Dexter asked what percentage of the projected new students would be from new housing versus turnover of existing housing. Carter said the surge in elementary school enrollment is partially due to empty nesters selling their homes to younger families. The demographers have more specific data on the percentage of students new to the district versus those who move within the district. Dexter said a number of homes in her neighborhood have expanded and wondered if there is a connection between building permits and enrollment.

Commissioner LeBlanc noted SWHS's projected growth of over 400 students in the next eight years and asked if the High School Annex can accommodate this increase. Carter said TEMS's projected growth is more immediate, and TEMS can accommodate this growth due to recent staffing increases and added classrooms, though teachers may need to share classrooms more often. She added that federal funding can be used to expand the cafeteria serving area. With regard to SWHS, she said the addition of the Annex has made a significant difference, but she does not know if portables will be necessary; when the projected growth takes place, few teachers would have their own classrooms. She noted that building new infrastructure takes time and requires State involvement. The program for students aged 18-22 with disabilities is currently housed at the Annex, but she said it would be ideal for it to move away from the high school, which could free up additional space. LeBlanc asked about the former Orchard Hill School space. Carter said this space is being considered by the Parks and Recreation Department, but the education system's current needs do not justify the costs that would come with staffing it as a school facility.

Commissioner Ouellette said that of the DRG B school districts listed on slide 14 of the presentation, 17 include a high school, and South Windsor's graduation rate was higher than 12 of those; he asked why these outcomes are higher despite the lower expenditures per student. Carter will look further into these data. She is not aware

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of any Connecticut districts that spend less than South Windsor while achieving a higher graduation rate. Ouellette expressed interest in the root cause and said the district should focus on what it is doing well. Carter said it is crucial for the budget to keep pace with enrollment in order to maintain the current outcomes. She also stressed the importance of keeping South Windsor a desirable location for teachers. Ouellette requested that Carter distribute any future presentations to the Commission in advance.

Commissioner Buganski asked about the average class size in the elementary schools. Carter said the average size is currently between 20 and 24 students, with upper limits of 24 for K-3 and 26 for grades 4 and 5. She noted that class size plays a role in attracting teachers and said she feels the current class sizes are manageable. In response to another question from Buganski, Carter said the projections take approved housing developments into consideration.

Chair Wagner said expert predictions can be inaccurate. He asked if the student populations of housing developments other than South Windsor Woods are more in line with their developers' projections. Carter said the demographers could look further into these data. Wagner asked if families in South Windsor tend to have more children than in other towns. Carter is not aware of such a dynamic but said demographers could examine the number of children per household and housing type. Wagner asked about the cost of the facilities additions listed on slide 20; Carter did not have the cost data with her but noted that the improvements also required significant staffing resources. Wagner asked about employee morale given that the system is under stress. Carter does not feel the situation has impacted morale, though more issues could arise if class sizes continue to increase or resources become scarcer.

Wagner said that given that the four new elementary schools are already at capacity, he feels the Town would be in a good position to defend a denial of an affordable housing proposal after the moratorium expires. He asked if Carter could weigh in on a review of a developer's enrollment projection; Carter said the Town would be better served by engaging an expert in that field who could take the South Windsor effect into account. Wagner said graduation rates are an easy statistic to come by, but it is also important to consider whether schools' music and athletics programs are impacted by enrollment growth. Carter said the high school gymnasium is viewed as inadequate compared to those of other high schools, and the PE programs at TEMS are impacted by the number of students. Due to space standards, Pleasant Valley is the only one of the elementary schools with a gym of the size desired by many in town.

PUBLIC HEARING 8:00 PM

1. **Appl 24-03P, Burnham Realty, LLC** – request for a Special Exception to Table 4.1.1.A and site plan approval for a 5,400 sf building in phase 1 and 1,080 sf addition in phase 2, for equipment sales and rental, on property located at 396 Burnham Street, I zone

Chair Wagner opened the public hearing at 8:20 p.m.

Commissioner Dexter read the legal notice.

Chair Wagner noted that the applicant for this item will not be presenting at this meeting due to pending updates to the site plans based on comments from the Inland Wetlands Agency.

Commissioner Foley made a motion to extend the public hearing to the February 27, 2024 regular meeting. Seconded by Commissioner Vetere. Motion passed unanimously.

2. PZC sponsored amendment to modify several sections of Section 6.4.10 *Minimum Number of EVSE Parking Spaces* to clarify the number and timing of required EV installed and EV ready spaces; and modify Section 11.8 APPENDIX H *Electric Vehicle Supply Equipment (EVSE)* to update EV Charger

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requirements related to: equipment, screening, site signage and EV Charger installation illustrations
(continued from 1-23-24)

Chair Wagner noted the revised draft of the regulations, as well as a memo from Director of Planning Michele Lipe regarding the EVSE requirements in the Connecticut Clean Air Act. In particular, he noted that Section 5C of the Connecticut Clean Air Act states that on or after January 1, 2023, a municipality shall require EVSE for 10% of parking spaces at any new development with 30 or more spaces. The amendment draft has been updated, but the Town is out of step with the State law. For certain types of businesses, the draft proposes minimum EVSE requirements based on employee parking as people making short visits would not necessarily use that time to charge their vehicles.

Senior Environmental Planner Jeffrey Folger said Director of Planning Michele Lipe had stressed that the Town should adhere to the State minimum requirement. Wagner wondered whether EV-ready and EV-capable spaces would count toward the 10% threshold.

Commissioner Buganski asked about the impacts of the proposed regulations to the Fire Department. Wagner said he has heard electric cars that catch fire are almost impossible to extinguish, though newer batteries make fires less likely. He thinks a blaze at a charging station would be handled like any other electric fire.

The Chair asked for public comments for or against the application. None were heard.

Commissioner Ouellette said under the proposed regulations, a development like Whole Foods, with 300 parking spaces, would require 30 EV spaces. He said installation of a Level 2 charger and the necessary infrastructure costs an average of \$43,000 per unit, and the cheapest DC fast chargers and infrastructure cost around \$100,000 per unit; these costs would be passed on to residents and customers. He said the State requirement amounts to an unfunded mandate, and he does not think most EV owners in town would charge their cars at public stations; he noted that many prominent auto makers have reduced production of EVs due to lack of demand. Ouellette feels the Town should stand up to the State's mandate, noting that several other towns are standing against it; he is also concerned about South Windsor becoming a charging destination for people traveling on I-84. He expressed support for scrapping any EVSE mandate, though residential and retail developments could still choose to implement EVSE to attract people.

Commissioner LeBlanc agreed that the 10% requirement is excessive, though he feels some charging stations should be available. He said building codes are being developed to address issues involving EVSE fires.

Commissioner Dexter noted that per the proposed Table 6.4.10C, EVSE requirements for retail developments would be based on the amount of employee parking, not customer parking. She still feels the 10% requirement is excessive and expressed concern about the expense to small businesses.

Commissioner Foley concurred with Ouellette's desire to push back against the State's mandate. He asked if any of the Town's municipal vehicles are EVs. Wagner and Doolittle said plug-in hybrids are used at the Town Hall and the sewer plant.

Commissioner Vetere concurred with the previous comments. He said it makes sense for EVs to be available for 10% of employees at retail outlets, but he does not think customers would require charging stations when running brief errands.

Commissioner Bernstein listed several news headlines from the last month indicating that the EV market is losing momentum, with some predicting that EV adoption will peak at 30%. He is unsure whether EVs, hybrids, or plug-in hybrids will become most popular and agreed that a 10% requirement is overly ambitious, imposing

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unnecessary costs to business owners. He expressed uncertainty about how to navigate this position with regard to the State requirement, but he does not feel 10% is ideal for South Windsor.

Wagner said he has the same reaction to an immediate 10% requirement and that the Town should communicate to the State that it will implement the requirement when it is necessary. He said EVSE is desirable to developers of multi-family housing as it can attract residents. He posed the question of whether to eliminate the current EVSE requirements, as Ouellette had suggested, or keep the current regulations and re-examine them in a year. Ouellette expressed doubt that affordable housing residents would buy EVs. Bernstein suggested maintaining the current regulations until the trends in the EV market are clearer; other Commissioners agreed.

Wagner suggested replacing item G of Section 6.4.10 with the language from the third item under "Notes" in Table 6.4.10A ("For this purpose . . ."). He suggested moving the last item under "Notes" ("See Tables 6.4.10B and 6.4.10C for usage specific details") directly under row A, Total EV Installed Spaces. He also said the second item under "Notes" ("EV Installed in Accessible . . .") should be removed.

Commissioner Foley agreed with Ouellette's desire to scrap the requirements but expressed support for a mandate regarding EV-ready or EV-capable spaces. Ouellette asked if on-site rainwater storage requirements would allow EVSE infrastructure to be added underneath a parking lot. Doolittle said rainwater is required to be treated but not necessarily stored on site. Dexter expressed a desire to compare the proposed changes with the current EVSE regulations.

Commissioner Bernstein made a motion to continue the public hearing to the February 27, 2024 regular meeting. Seconded by Commissioner Dexter. Motion passed unanimously.

REGULAR MEETING (continued)

CALL TO ORDER: Chair Wagner called the regular meeting back to order at 9:03 p.m.

MINUTES: 1-16-24 Special Meeting; 1-23-24 Regular Meeting

The minutes were approved by consensus.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

John Holowczak of Cody Circle displayed **Exhibit B**, a photograph of a row of houses on Edgewood Drive and Judy Lane with for-sale signs. He said the picture was taken shortly after the Inland Wetlands Agency's decision on the industrial flex space at 75 Connecticut Avenue; when the developers resurveyed one property, 7-10 feet, including a wetland buffer area, were taken off the property, prompting the owners to sell. As a result of these sales, the neighborhood has gained four or five school-aged children. Holowczak said commercial and industrial developments are prompting many empty nesters in his neighborhood to consider moving, opening up their three- and four-bedroom households to new families with children. He feels the Town should have an action plan in case of a significant influx of students from this housing turnover. In addition, he expressed tentative support for affordable housing but noted recent legal challenges to the State's mandate.

NEW BUSINESS: Discussion/Decision/Action regarding the following:

1. PZC sponsored amendment to modify several sections of Section 6.4.10 *Minimum Number of EVSE Parking Spaces* to clarify the number and timing of required EV installed and EV ready spaces; and modify Section 11.8 APPENDIX H *Electric Vehicle Supply Equipment (EVSE)* to update EV Charger requirements related to: equipment, screening, site signage and EV Charger installation illustrations

The public hearing for this item had been extended to the February 27 regular meeting.

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BONDS: Callings/Reductions/Settings

<u>IWA/CC Bond</u>	<i>AMOUNT</i>	<i>REDUCTION</i>	<i>BALANCE</i>
07-51P, Steeltech Products – E & S	\$ 5,000	\$ 5,000	-0-
11-04P, New Country Auto – E & S	\$ 1,000	\$ 1,000	-0-
11-09P, Satellite Tool Company E & S	\$ 5,000	\$ 5,000	-0-
11-09P, Satellite Tool Company – Stormwater	\$10,000	\$10,000	-0-
11-10P, Jehovah Witnesses Congregation – E & S	\$10,000	\$10,000	-0-
12-09P, Ticket Network – Stormwater	\$ 5,000	\$ 5,000	-0-
12-09P, Ticket Network E & S	\$ 2,000	\$ 2,000	-0-
13-06P, GDS Estimating – E & S	\$ 1,000	\$ 1,000	-0-
14-02P, Distinctive Tree – E & S	\$ 5,000	\$ 5,000	-0-
14-02P, Distinctive Tree – stormwater	\$10,000	\$10,000	-0-
15-52W, Country Distributors – E & S	\$ 2,000	\$ 2,000	-0-
15-03P, Regional Distribution Facility – wetlands	\$10,000	\$10,000	-0-
15-03P, Regional Distribution Facility – wetlands	\$10,000	\$10,000	-0-
15-06P, EW Apartments – E & S	\$ 5,000	\$ 5,000	-0-
15-42P, CT Brewery – stormwater	\$ 2,000	\$ 2,000	-0-
15-63P, JF Distillery – E & S	\$ 2,000	\$ 2,000	-0-
16-59P, Sunset Hill Estates – E & S	\$ 5,000	\$ 5,000	-0-
16-59P, Sunset Hill Estates – wetlands mitigation	\$ 5,000	\$ 5,000	-0-
17-23P, Evergreen Run parking – E & S	\$ 5,000	\$ 5,000	-0-
17-23P, Evergreen Run parking – stormwater	\$ 5,000	\$ 5,000	-0-
18-06, Solar Energy Source – E & S	\$ 5,000	\$ 5,000	-0-
19-28P, 360 Ellington Road – wetlands	\$50,000	\$50,000	-0-
19-37P, The Learning Experience – E & S	\$ 5,000	\$ 5,000	-0-

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<u>IWA/CC Bond</u>	<i>AMOUNT</i>	<i>REDUCTION</i>	<i>BALANCE</i>
19-48P, 240 Ellington Road – stormwater	\$20,000	\$20,000	-0-
19-48P, 240 Ellington Road – E & S	\$25,000	\$25,000	-0-
19-55P, Michel – junk removal – E & S	\$10,000	\$10,000	-0-
20-49P, Valvoline – Stormwater	\$ 5,000	\$ 5,000	-0-
20-49P, Valvoline E & S	\$10,000	\$10,000	-0-
20-50P, Pete’s Tire Barn – E & S	\$ 2,000	\$ 2,000	-0-
21-10P, Messiah Lutheran Church – E & S	\$ 2,000	\$ 2,000	-0-
21-43P, Goddard School – E & S	\$ 2,000	\$ 2,000	-0-
22-37P, NuWay Tobacco – E & S	\$ 5,000	\$ 5,000	-0-

Commissioner Dexter made a motion to release the above IWA/CC bonds. Seconded by Commissioner Ouellette. Motion passed unanimously.

OLD BUSINESS: None

APPLICATIONS OFFICIALLY RECEIVED

Appl 24-04P, South Windsor High School Athletic Fields and Campus Improvements – request for a Special Exception to Table 3.1.1A and Site Plan of Development for the following: a new synthetic turf field including a Special Exception request to 6.4.3.4 for athletic field lighting; seven (7) new tennis courts and four (4) pickleball courts; and traffic and circulation improvements around the school campus, on property located at 161 Nevers Road, A-20 zone

OTHER BUSINESS

Wagner noted the upcoming Annual Conference of the Connecticut Federation of Planning and Zoning Agencies.

CORRESPONDENCE/REPORTS: None

ADJOURNMENT

Commissioner Foley moved to adjourn. Seconded by Commissioner Vetere. Motion passed unanimously. The meeting adjourned at 9:15 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Joshua Stern, Recording Secretary