

TOWN OF SOUTH WINDSOR
PLANNING & ZONING COMMISSION

DRAFT MINUTES

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MAY 25, 2021

MEMBERS PRESENT: Stephanie Dexter, Bill Flagg, Bart Pacekonis, Steve Wagner, Kevin Foley

ALTERNATES PRESENT: Paul Bernstein, Michael LeBlanc

STAFF PRESENT: Michele Lipe, Director of Planning; Jeffrey Doolittle, Town Engineer; Michael Lehmann and Scott Roberts; IT Support; Caitlin O’Neil, Recording Secretary

Council Liaison Janice Snyder in attendance.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Commissioner Dexter read legal notice.

Chairman Pacekonis reviewed the procedures under which the online WebEx meeting would be held. Chairman Pacekonis noted that due to COVID protocols the Commissioners should ask any questions directly to the public speaker immediately after giving their statement to allow the speaker to leave the Council Chamber to allow for more room for social distancing.

Chairman Pacekonis appointed Alternate Commissioner Bernstein be seated for Commissioner Bonzani and Alternate Commissioner LeBlanc to be seated for the vacant seat

CALL TO ORDER:

PUBLIC HEARING / Webex Conference HYBRID MEETING 7:30 PM

The public is welcome to email comments to planningzoningcomments@southwindsor-ct.gov or to call in through the above referenced WEBEX call-in number. Please see Page 2 of this agenda for information on how to participate by phone at the meeting.

1. **Appl. 21-11P, REESG Newco South Windsor, LLC** – request for a Zone Change from General Commercial Zone (GC) to Sullivan Ave Mixed Use Development Overlay Zone (SAMUD) of 19 +/- acres and General Plan of Development for the renovation of 60,740 sf of commercial space and the development of 125 apartment units, on property known as Sullivan Avenue Plaza, located at 959, 1017 and 1079 Sullivan Avenue, GC zone **(continued from 5/11/21)**

Mr. Peter DeMallie and Mr. Benjamin Wheeler of Design Professionals, Inc representing applicant Mr. Greg Nanni, REESG Newco South Windsor LLC resumed their presentation addressing items brought up by Commissioners. Before starting presentation Mr. DeMallie confirmed he submitted a 35 day extension. Mr. DeMallie addressed Commissioner Flagg’s recommendation of a staircase up to Sullivan Ave intersection and reviewed an exhibit detailing a potential sidewalk, retention wall and fencing along the Sullivan Ave frontage and associated costs. Mr. DeMallie exhibit showed a sidewalk by building B that would require 60 stairs to walk up approximately 30 feet in elevation change to the Ayers Rd/Sullivan Ave intersection. Mr. DeMallie felt there is little value in adding stairs, along with safety factors to consider in the winter time. Mr. DeMallie does not propose this staircase as part of their general plan. Mr. DeMallie reviewed the exhibit per the request of Chairman Pacekonis regarding a sidewalk on Sullivan Ave. frontage to Strawberry Fields property line. The exhibit showed that a sidewalk would require an 18 foot high retaining and 6 foot fence for safety reasons to connect to the top of Sullivan Ave. Mr. DeMallie explained for the proposed plan total sidewalk length is 1,360 linear feet of sidewalk, estimated cost would be \$56.25 per linear foot which would cost an additional 5 to 6 times the cost of a normal 5 foot sidewalk. Mr. DeMallie summarized that this stretch of sidewalk would be possibly the most expensive sidewalk in town among other concerns of general

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safety of the sidewalk and lack of connection for the sidewalk. Mr. DeMallie concluded that he and his client have developed a plan that meets the commission's zone change text that was adopted in January 2020 and will allow for a modern mix use development that will provide attractive tax benefits for the town and provide jobs.

Director of Planning Michele Lipe had no additional comments. She noted a letter had been submitted by the Chief of Police (Exhibit A)

Town Engineer Jeffrey Doolittle commented that the property owner would be responsible for maintenance of the sidewalk, not the town.

Chairman Pacekonis asked for public comment. In person speakers included: Mary Justine Hockenberry of 16 Foxglove Ln, Bob Dickinson of 400 Seabury Dr., Bloomfield, Steve King Jr of 926 Ellington Rd reading letter on behalf of Tony Duarte of 210 Brook St, Bill Myers of 1141 Strong Rd, Bill Jodice of South Windsor, Joe Kennedy 81 Allison Dr., Daria Plummer 235 Orchard Hill Dr., Elaine Abouakar of 23 Wapping Ave (please note this speaker included a signed petition of neighbors who are in support of the application- Exhibit B), Margaret Shea of 266 Abbe Rd., Christopher Healy of 6 Beelzebub Rd., Alan Cavagnaro of 83 Pine Knob Dr., Robert Vetere of 49 Wood Pond Rd., Eric Nilsson, Geissler's owner, of 18 Fox Hill Rd., David Chung of 38 Wapping Ave., Bob Rybick President and CEO of Geissler's, Liliana Serrano, South Windsor business owner, Ryan Nilsson, Geissler's owner, of 1554 Main St and John Bereuter of 4D Saint Marc Circle all in support of the proposed application.

Chairman Pacekonis and Commissioner Dexter read letters from Strawberry Fields Association, Chief of Police Kristian Lindstrom, Paul Burnham, Chairmain of the Economic Development Commission, Philip Richards of Copper Ridge Rd., Judith Goldstein of 66 Windshire Dr., Doug Rothwell of 620 Ellington Rd., Bernard Morissette owner of Electrical Systems Technologies, LLC, Mike and Patricia Saimond of 50 Ash Road, Mindy Lewis of 681 Chapel Road, David Basile of 1030 Ellington Rd., Ross Gionfriddo of 122 Pine Knob Dr., Barbara Madara of 29 Highview Rd. (Exhibit C)

Chairman Pacekonis asks for comments from commissioners.

Commissioner Bernstein thanked Design Professionals for developing a plan for sidewalks and commented that there is a general need for sidewalks in town and as a commission they aspire to add more sidewalks as it has become an evolving issue. Commissioner Bernstein brought up the question of who is responsible for the sidewalks, the owner or the town or perhaps both. Commissioner Bernstein commented on conversation on how housing will impact the school system, it is an interesting debate, however, the commission should not make decisions on school impact without consulting the Board of Education. Furthermore, unless the Board of Education approaches the commission with an issue on negative impact on the school due to a development project, Commissioner Bernstein feels it is appropriate to move forward with developments, particularly this application, that include housing projects.

Commissioner Wagner appreciates the applicant taking into consideration the request of potential development of sidewalks and staircases as well as the public comments and letters. Commissioner Wagner feels there are a few options he would like to cover from the presentation. First, the staircase, some commissioners have concerns about school children run up the hill, hopping the guardrail and crossing the street to get to the high school at the busy intersection, the staircase would only encourage this behavior

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unless there is a traffic light, therefore, Commissioner Wagner is not in favor of building the staircase unless the town can establish that the Department of Transportation could support the change to the intersection. Commissioner Wagner asks if Director of Planning Michele Lipe has heard anything from the State regarding changing the intersection, Mrs. Lipe has not heard anything. Commissioner Wagner continues, if a staircase is to be included it should be contingent on an approval from the State for a change to include a light at the intersection. With that said, if no staircase is added, there is still a concern that students will climb up hill, cross guardrail and still cross Ayers Rd. Commissioner Wagner questioned if a fence may help deter this behavior but will leave this up to the Commissioners to discuss further.

Commissioner Wagner asks if a serpentine walkway along the frontage would be a better idea than a staircase. Mr. Wheeler concluded that a serpentine walkway would need approximately 360 feet of walk for the walk to be ADA compliant, not including landings required every 30 feet, when added would total over 400 feet of walk to do a serpentine walk. Commissioner Wagner asked Mr. Wheeler in his opinion what is the best option between a staircase or a serpentine walk. Mr. Wheeler responded neither, a fence to deter students would be the best option to consider. Commissioner Wagner raised his concerns that if a sidewalk was added it should not end at the Sullivan Ave/Ayers Rd intersection, it's a poor intersection to have the sidewalk end, there would need to be some consideration of how to connect the sidewalk to a path from Strawberry Fields or perhaps across the street. Ultimately, Commissioner Wagner not in favor of a sidewalk being added here due to the poor location and the traffic issues.

Chairman Pacekonis confirmed there is another person from the public on the line who wanted to speak.

Nannette Bosh of 36 Sunrise Lane made comments in support of application.

Commissioners continued comments and questions.

Commissioner Foley questioned the property owner/applicant regarding how long he has owned the property. Applicant has been the property owner for 10 years. Commissioner Foley expressed the need for some type of access for students to safely cross Sullivan Ave to get to the high school. Commissioner Foley asked how the applicant plans to market the development. Applicant explained he is not actively marketing yet, he wants to confirm that approval of the proposed plan before marketing the property. The applicant briefly explains how he plans on marketing the property both for residents and businesses. Commissioner Foley commented that he feels that the current owner has allowed the plaza to fall into further disarray over the past 10 years and asked how they be sure this will not be an issue down the road. The applicant explained he intentionally did not fill the plaza with new tenants once leases expired because they were hoping to redevelop this plaza and only keeping the structure of Geissler's lease.

Commissioner Dexter applauded the applicant on providing a variety of affordable housing units. Commissioner Dexter does not feel that sidewalks are possible on that side of the street. Commissioner Dexter added that she is disappointed that the public feels the commission drags their feet on purpose. The commission is working on behalf of the town and tries to do the best for the town and is committed to asking the tough questions before moving ahead.

Commissioner Flagg stated he understands the majority of people want the new stores and some of the public are interested in the apartments. Commissioner Flagg comments on the staircase and that handicap

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accessibility is not included in plan for staircase. He feels a ramp should be considered for handicap. Commissioner Flagg points out the amount of foot traffic to other local business from apartments will be high and access to a walkway would be beneficial. Commissioner Flagg then discussed the woods in the back of building, indicating that some of the trees may need to be removed and new trees need to be replanted to establish the appropriate buffer to Strawberry Fields. Commissioner Flagg is unsure if the apartment complex will cause an issue on the school system, uses Cheney Mills in Manchester as example of a large complex but few children live in the complex. Ultimately Commissioner Flagg felt that the public is in favor of this development and it's up to the commission to agree to give it to them but does still feel there are some conditions to be considered. Lastly, Commissioner Flagg feels that Strawberry Fields needs an opening to the plaza.

Chairman Pacekonis comments he had hoped Design Professionals would come back with a better option for sidewalks. After reading what Police Chief expressed for concerns, a sidewalk on Sullivan Ave with a crossing to Ayers Rd seems feasible and all the Police Chief's concerns could be addressed with a crossing signal at Ayers Rd and the State to remove the do not cross sign. Therefore, the State would need to take down the "No crossing" sign. Chairman Pacekonis has photos of the street that he shares with Design Professional. Chairman Pacekonis asks Mr. DeMallie if they planned to remove the overgrown trees and vines on Sullivan Ave frontage. Chairman Pacekonis stated it is important to remove and replant the trees at this location as to not take away from the beauty of the project. Mr. DeMallie agreed, explains there is also a wetland area which they will not touch but from the southeast corner to the east of the detention basin that buffer area will be touched, they could take down all vines and most trees to allow for a fresh start. Chairman Pacekonis echoes Commissioner Flagg there should be a slightly higher berm as a part of the buffer adjacent to Strawberry Fields. Plantings on the berm can be designed to grow in and provide the best coverage at 5 years. Mr. DeMallie agreed.

Chairman Pacekonis pointed to the photos he took of Sullivan Ave illustrating that most of the area that sidewalks are proposed is mostly flat, not severe enough of a slope to eliminate sidewalks which ultimately comes down to changing the existing grade. The applicant is creating the need for retaining walls by cutting into the grade. Chairman Pacekonis pointed out Evergreen Walk had a similar issue in front of the Harbor Chase development and made it work by utilizing retaining wall and winding path from the parking to the sidewalk on Buckland Rd.

Chairman Pacekonis then echoed Commission Dexters comments about the public suggestion that the commission drags their feet and further explains that is the Planning & Zoning Commissions job to do the due diligence to ask the questions and do the research on the projects in front of them.

Mr. Wheeler responded to Chairman Pacekonis' concerns about sidewalks and of cutting into the grade, the goal of this redeveloped plaza is to have accessible paths from shopping center to apartments and only way to accomplish this is to cut into the grade. Currently Hot Leathers parking lot does not meet current ADA regulation therefore, if they took current existing grade for a sidewalk it would be considered non-compliant, meaning they will need to cut into grade. Mr. Wheeler pointed out they are trying to develop a walkable community. Chairman Pacekonis stated there could be a solution if they had smaller buildings and some grade changes, for example, if Building D could be set lower to the ground, it wouldn't be so much higher than Strawberry Fields. Mr. Wheeler responded that they were looking into general plan zone change, should project get approved they can take all comments and concerns and look at options more in depth with the site

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plan of development. Chairman Pacekonis feels Design Professionals and applicant are against putting in sidewalks in general. Mr. Wheelers does not feel it is a safe condition to end the sidewalk on the property line. Chairman Pacekonis agrees that sidewalk should not end at property line, it should be extended to Ayers Rd intersection and change to the pedestrian crossing. Chairman Pacekonis commented in regards to whether or not they need sidewalks but they will need retaining walls, however, they will need to be a few feet higher.

Chairman Pacekonis asked about recreation of 200 SF per unit and how this was being met. Initially proposed to be met by the clubhouse and pool, saving the plants and vegetation in the buffer. Mr. Wheeler explained the open space requirement as stated in the regulations and explains how this will be met. Chairman Pacekonis summarizes the sidewalk concerns, the time to put sidewalks in is when you are developing and redeveloping, the sidewalks can eventually connect as development and redevelopment continue years down the road. Chairman Pacekonis strong feels this could be part of the approval conditions.

Commissioner Wagner commented that he is still very concerned about the Ayers Rd crossing and people using this, particularly students. Commissioner Wagner suggested to take advantage of internal walk ways in the plaza and find a way to extend these walkways to the Ayers Rd crosswalk that will hopefully in turn get a pedestrian crossing.

Commissioner Pacekonis thanked Commissioner Wagner but does not thinks this covered the concerns of a sidewalk on Sullivan Ave.

Mr. DeMallie commented that he did not think the sidewalk conversation needs to be discussed further at this time. Ultimately, this concern will be discussed more during engineering stage of the planning. Mr. DeMallie feels like he and his client have touched on everything, they will work further with the commission on issues at hand.

Chairman Pacekonis closes public hearing for Appl 21-11 at 10:12pm

- 2. Appl. 21-20P, Evergreen Walk Lifestyle Center LLC** – request to modify the Evergreen Walk General Plan of Development for the realignment of Evergreen Way to accommodate a new 50,000 sf retail building (replacing the existing 53,000 sf of retail known as Units 500 B, C and D), on property located at 151 Buckland Road, Buckland Gateway Development Zone

Charter Realty & Development Corporation Vice President of Development Karen Johnson representing Evergreen Walk Lifestyle Center LLC presented the application with Langan Civil Engineer Dave Gagnon. Traffic engineer John Plante and Landscape Architect Joe Aveni were both on the WebEx meeting available to answer questions. Ms. Johnson and Mr. Gagnon presented updated plans regarding the circulation pattern on site and the highlighted the map showing pedestrian connections. Ms. Johnson reviewed that she has met with Director of Planning Michele Lipe, Town Engineer Jeffrey Doolittle and Fire Marshal Walter Summers on site to review circulation movement and truck routes. Currently, Tamarack Ave is the main road that will soon be completed once Costco is finished. Ms. Johnson is proposing to change what is currently known as the East access road be continued through Evergreen, through the proposed development, past Costco and connect with Tamarack Ave allowing another way to access Evergreen Walk entirely. The proposed name for this road would be Cottonwood Lane.

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Mr. Gagnon reviewed general plan of development, Figure 1 in the packet, in more detail outlining the applicants proposed replacement of retail building currently known as Units 500 B, C and D. Mr. Gagnon explains they will be developing the 7 acres by demolishing current retail stores and rebuilding one 50,000 square foot retail space with a grocery store with a small tenant. Mr. Gagnon explains the parking lot and truck load entrance for the proposed development. They are increasing the buffer from the wetlands area by pulling the building away, removing invasive species and replacing wetland with enhanced plantings. The Evergreen Walk theme will also be continued in this development. Mr. Gagnon highlighted the parking lot circulation and reviewed the sidewalks that are proposed on the plan. Included in the plan is a sidewalk network to the Independent Living Facility to this development. Mr. Gagnon reviewed the trucking circulation that will not interfere with customer parking and minimal pedestrian conflict. Mr. Gagnon pointed out that they feel the anchor tenant will help revitalize the northern section of Evergreen Walk and will help bring in more business.

Director of Planning Michele Lipe gave brief staff comment. Mrs. Lipe explained she met with South Windsor Fire Marshal who is currently reviewing some of the revisions made for the truck turning radius. Mrs. Lipe believes this issue can be adequately designed to meet the fire needs.

Town Engineer Jeffrey Doolittle gave staff comments. Mr. Doolittle is concerned about the intersection of Hemlock and Cottonwood, which he believes is currently a 2-way stop, he is particularly worried about trucks maneuvering in the intersection. Mr. Doolittle would also like any and all traffic impacts on Buckland Rd as a result of this development to be reviewed before final design. Mr. Doolittle pointed out that most of his concerns could be addressed during final design stage.

No public comments.

Chairman Pacekonis asked for comments from commissioners.

Commissioner Flagg asked if any of the roads, particularly the proposed Cottonwood Lane, will be 4 lane roads or remain as 2 lane roads. Ms. Johnson responded that they will remain 2 lane roads.

Commissioner Dexter had no comment.

Commissioner Foley had no comment.

Commissioner Wagner asked if they have discussed with how this will fit in with Costco's plan, particularly continuing Tamarack Avenue through the back side of Costco's parking lot. Ms. Johnson responded currently the Tamarack extension is designed to go through the Costco parking area with the final extension of Tamarack being completed with the Costco development. Ms. Johnson stated that the plan of extending Tamarack and adding Cottonwood Lane would alleviate some pressure from Buckland Road and allows options for residents in the Tempo apartments and in the independent living complex. Ms. Johnson pointed to the current vacancy rate at Evergreen Walk, that was becoming a problem before COVID. They hope to help reinvigorate the shops with this project. Commissioner Wagner had no further questions.

Commissioner Bernstein had no comment.

Chairman Pacekonis, referred his question to Director of Planning Michele Lipe regarding Panera Bread and their parking lot and current crosswalks connecting the parking area. Ms. Lipe indicated that the applicant has addressed that on their plans and would be incorporating a new crosswalk.

Ms. Johnson pointed out there is an additional sidewalk and cross walk that will provide access to the parking lot across the street for staff parking for Panera employees if needed. Chairman Pacekonis adds that

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he is concerned about trucks coming in without a stop sign and cars not realizing the trucks are not going to stop, wanted to be sure the police chief looked into this.

Commissioner Flagg asked about anticipated construction period. Ms. Johnson responded that if they receive approval they anticipate construction to commence in the spring of 2022.

There were no additional comments from Commissioners or town staff.

Chairman Pacekonis closed the public hearing at 10:48pm.

APPLICATIONS OFFICIALLY RECEIVED:

- 1 **Appl. 21-29P** Davis Resubdivision - request for a Minor Subdivision and a Special Exception to Section 3.2.2 of the zoning regulations and site plan approval for one interior lot and one additional frontage lot, on property located at 591 Pleasant Valley Road, A-20 zone
- 2 **Appl. 21-30P** Hartford Truck Equipment LLC Temporary and Conditional Permit – request for a two-year temporary and conditional permit for a truck storage area to accommodate 100 trucks, approximately 1 acre in size, on property located at 542 King Street, GC and RR zones

OTHER BUSINESS:

CORRESPONDENCE / REPORTS:

ADJOURNMENT:

The meeting adjourned at 10:48 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Caitlin O’Neil, Recording Secretary