

TOWN OF SOUTH WINDSOR
PLANNING & ZONING COMMISSION

MINUTES

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SEPTEMBER 22, 2020

MEMBERS PRESENT: Bart Pacekonis, Stephanie Dexter, Stephen Wagner, Bill Flagg, Kevin Greer (left at approximately 8:15 pm), Frank Bonzani (arrived at approximately 8 pm)

ALTERNATES PRESENT: Michael LeBlanc, Paul Bernstein, Elizabeth McGuire

STAFF PRESENT: Michele Lipe, Director of Planning; Jeff Doolittle, Town Engineer; Michael Lehmann, IT Support; Lauren Zarambo, Recording Secretary

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Acting Secretary Dexter read the legal notice as it was published in the Journal Inquirer on Thursday, September 10, and Thursday, September 17, 2020.

Chairman Pacekonis appointed Alternate Commissioner McGuire to be seated for Commissioner Foley, and Alternate Commissioner Bernstein to be seated for Commissioner Bonzani.

Chairman Pacekonis stated the meeting is being live-streamed through a Webex conference call on the Town website as well as local channels, and will be operating under the following procedures:

- This session is being audio-recorded and video recorded.
- To ensure sound quality, the default rule for this meeting is that everyone will remain on mute.
- Commissioners and staff will generally remain on mute except when speaking or voting, and will generally be keeping video of themselves on throughout the meeting.
- Applicants should feel free to leave their video on or off. However, they will be asked to turn on their video when speaking.
- The public can provide public comments by email and/or phone. The email address and phone number with meeting code can be found on the front of the agenda.
- During public meetings, all of the normal rules, including stating, and now spelling your name, still apply.
- If you are speaking at this meeting and have an exhibit to submit to the Commission, which was not distributed in advance of the meeting with the rest of the materials, please indicate that you wish to submit an exhibit. You will need to hold it up to the camera so that the Commission and all members of the public may review it. In addition, you will be required to email the exhibit, or take a photograph of it and email it to planningzoningcomments@southwindsor.org, and it will be included in the permanent records of the Commission.
- Members of the public may only speak during public participation for an item not on the agenda and during the public hearing comment period.
- Lastly, a reminder to the public on the phone to press *3 to indicate that you want to speak and # to get back to the main menu.

PUBLIC HEARING / Webex Conference ONLINE MEETING 7:00 PM

1. **Appl. 20-02P, Kilkenny Heights II Subdivision-** request from Mannarino Builders Inc. for a Special Exception to Section 7.14 and Site Plan approval for an Open Space Subdivision of 21.5+ acres, to create a total of 12 new lots, on property located at R024 and 420 Abbe Road and 248 Maskel Road, A-30 and RR (**Continued from 9/8/20**)

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Mr. Jay Ussery of J.R. Russo & Associates, LLC with partner Mr. Dana Steele continued the presentation on behalf of applicant Robert Mannarino of Mannarino Builders, Inc. with updated information including a red line revision eliminating Lot 6, redesigning the detention basin, increasing the size of Lots 2 and 3, preserving more trees and wooded areas, adding screening and conservation easements.

Director Michele Lipe gave staff comments in answer to commission questions regarding cul-de-sac lengths, special exceptions and the school district study. The Director read a memo from Director of Parks & Recreation Ray Favreau with recommendations for a reinforced turf open space parking lot, arborvitae screening planted on private property rather than Town property, and for the Town to maintain the proposed sidewalk along 416 Abbe Road until the current owner sells the property.

Town Engineer Jeff Doolittle requested the improvement plan for Abbe Road and noted the suggested arborvitae screening needs to be on private property.

Chairman Pacekonis asked if anyone from the public was waiting to speak.

Commissioner Dexter read letters written with concerns from Mr. and Mrs. Rajan and Anu Kumararajan of 239 Maskel Road, Mr. Edward Michalski of 416 Abbe Road, Mr. and Mrs. Ajayu Sharda and Zahra Mansouri of 240 Maskel Road, Mr. and Mrs. Mark and Laurie Smith of 324 Abbe Road, Surinder Singh Kainth of 215 Maskel Road, and Shai Tenzer-Urtz of 190 Abbe Road. (Exhibit A)

Chairman Pacekonis asked if anyone from public was waiting to speak.

Mr. Steven Straight of 427 Abbe Road spoke in support of preserving the woodlands that cannot be replaced once developed asking if the Town could purchase the land for preservation since the entire neighborhood, except for one property, is against the plan, and asked the Commission to reject the proposal.

Mr. Lehmann stated the website went down and could not take calls. Director Lipe confirmed that callers could leave a message that will be transcribed and be included as part of the record. (Exhibit B)

Commissioner Wagner suggested a gate or bollards at the open space access point, and discussed a vegetative easement for arborvitae screening on private properties with the Chairman. Commissioner Wagner discussed the letter from the Smith's at 324 Abbe Road with Town Engineer Doolittle who described work on upgrades for Abbe Road and the drainage channel due to be scheduled.

Commissioner Greer concurred with comments from Commissioner Wagner that property owners have the right to develop their properties.

Commissioner Flagg spoke with Mr. Ussery about the drainage basin, stop signs, and requested a barrier or vegetative screening to supplement the smaller pines along 416 Abbe Road. Commissioner Flagg noted the difference in grade between the two roads and requested an upgrade to the driveway across from where the new road will enter Abbe Road in addition to the plan that provides for a lip and new driveway apron.

Commissioner Dexter thanked the applicant for coming back with less lots and gaining ½ acre of woods to remain stating Mannarino Builders is a good neighbor and will identify and save all the significant trees they can.

Commissioner Bernstein discussed the elimination of Lot 6 and increase in size of Lot 2 by 10,000 sf and Lot 3 by 14,000 sf with Mr. Ussery who noted buffers behind the Michalski and Appleton's lots created as a result of the change.

Commissioner Bernstein was no longer seated for Commissioner Bonzani who joined the meeting.

Commissioner Bonzani discussed lot sizes and price ranges with Mr. Mannarino.

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Commissioner McGuire discussed with Mr. Ussery the amount of acreage of open space that is wooded, and how land of Maskel Road was originally developed.

Commissioner LeBlanc had no additional comments.

Chairman Pacekonis discussed the conservation easement with Mr. Ussery in detail, and the width of the open space access the applicant increased from 20 to 25 feet, and noted arborvitaes planted on private properties need easements. A conservation easement over the wetlands is in place as part of the approval from IWACC. The open space access and path were discussed in detail.

Commissioner Wagner asked how the property at 426 Abbe Road could be marked with signage along the Eversource easement to designate the Rich's private property, and discussed the reinforced turf surface of the access with Town Engineer Doolittle. and the conservation easement with Mr. Ussery.

A call was connected from Mr. Ajay Sharda of 240 Maskel Road who asked if there will be more traffic with the new road when the pandemic is over, for more recent information from the schools, and will the new houses have enough room for cars to park. Chairman Pacekonis confirmed with Mr. Ussery about the number of cars able to queue in driveways. The data included in traffic study and school report was done in 2019 before the pandemic.

Chairman Pacekonis closed the public hearing at 8:28 p.m. stating any transcriptions of calls received as public comment will be sent to commissioners.

2. **Appl. 20-41P, One Buckland Center LLC** - request for a site plan modification to allow the addition of a left-turn lane through the existing median on Buckland Road to access property at 1 Buckland Road, RC zone

Attorney Brian Smith of Robinson + Cole LLP representing the applicant with Mr. Benjamin Wheeler of Design Professionals, Inc. and Mr. Jim Bubaris of Bubaris Traffic Associates presented the request.

Attorney Smith stated there is currently no access going north to their site, and described access showing a list of clients who declined to enter into leases without full access to the site, and showed a video taken from the entrance of One Buckland Center.

Mr. Wheeler showed and described the site plan prepared in conjunction with Bubaris Traffic Associates.

Mr. Bubaris gave an update of background traffic volumes from Evergreen Walk including the proposed Costco, and described in detail solutions to resolve the site's lack of access. The ultimate plan includes roadway modifications, an opening in the median, a provision for a northbound left turn lane into the site, and signalization. However, for signalization to meet one of the volume warrants required by OSTA, a U-turn would have to be allowed, something Town staff has indicated is not acceptable at this location. The applicant proposes all roadway work as shown on plans be done with the exception of the traffic signal.

Attorney Smith stated all the work within roadway and the site will be covered by One Buckland Center to benefit the development and the town.

Director Michele Lipe gave staff comments:

1. Request for site plan modification to make minor site modifications and to add a signalized left-turn lane heading north on Buckland Road and modify the existing entrance/exit currently serving the two commercial buildings located at 1 and 25 Buckland Road, at the Manchester town line, Restricted Commercial zone.

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2. In accordance with access management principles and our regulations, the original site plan approved in 2015 allows for one access point, a right in, right out entrance along Buckland Road. With that application, the applicant constructed an extension of the right turn lane to provide a taper into this site.
3. The buildings on site total approximately 17,800 sf, and can accommodate a variety of retail and offices uses permitted in the restricted commercial zone. Prior to site plan approval, the applicant rezoned the property from Rural Residential to Restricted Commercial zoning and received variances to reduce these setbacks to 25 and 10 respectively allowing for additional square footage to be built on site. A condition placed on the variance by the ZBA was that there shall be no permanent or construction vehicle access, nor any pedestrian access from Smith Street directly to the site.
4. In addition of the turn lane into the site, other changes include: relocation of right turn out of the site further south; modification to the parking area to accommodate the exit drive; relocation of monument signage and modification to the fieldstone wall on both sides of the entrance drive. These changes result in minor changes to the impervious coverage and the interior landscaping; but appears to meet the zoning requirements
5. There is an existing sidewalk along Buckland Road in front for this property that will be rebuilt through the driveways.
6. A traffic study was submitted by Jim Bubaris, the applicant's Traffic Engineer. Staff had requested the original report be updated to consider potential traffic from the Costco and Gateway Development projects. Some of the staff's concerns include: safety of pedestrians crossing the site; number of vehicles that may use this new turn as short cut during busy intersection times; concern that southbound traffic using this as an u-turn; the potential disruption of the traffic flow along Buckland Road. We requested the Town's on-call traffic engineer, VHB, review the report and provide comments as well as the Police Department. A copy of that report was sent to the Commission. (Exhibit C)
7. Fire Marshal has reviewed the revised plans and does not have any comments.
8. This request has been reviewed by the Town of Manchester Engineering Department and a correspondence from their engineer is attached. (Exhibit D)

If this application is approved, the Planning Department has no additional comments to request.

Town Engineer Jeff Doolittle clarified with Mr. Bubaris whether a traffic signal is being proposed or proposing the same geometrics to work without a signal. Attorney Smith stated if the Town concludes a traffic signal is appropriate the applicant is willing to install one.

Town Engineer Doolittle requested analysis to determine how the traffic will work without a signal and without creating safety conflicts. Mr. Bubaris indicated he evaluated the site with and without a traffic signal, and the levels of service would not change either way and remain good. Mr. Bubaris stated he will provide his evaluations updated for the volumes used in the most recent analysis using numbers from Evergreen Walk with the addition of Costco.

Engineer Doolittle asked if the applicant spoke to OSTA preliminarily to allow the signal. Mr. Bubaris stated OSTA indicated a volume warrant had to be satisfied. In discussion, Director Lipe stated the turn lanes along Buckland Road were required by Evergreen Walk's master plan in 2003 and part of their OSTA approval, and asked what impact changes would have on Evergreen Walk's approval. Mr. Bubaris stated they would return to OSTA for their reaction to the changes. Mr. Wheeler continued the discussion.

Chairman Pacekonis asked if anyone from the public was waiting to speak.

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Mr. Lehmann connected a call from the new Chief of Police Kris Lindstrom who stated he has been following this process as Deputy Chief over the last few years. The proposal for using the same geometrics without a traffic signal is a new plan. Their recent reviews of the previously presented plan with the traffic light appeared permissible if timing of signalization is confirmed as correct and queuing capacities are permissible. The Chief indicated the proposal for U-turns at a new median cut would require additional review.

Commissioner Wagner asked Chief Lindstrom if a signal is preferred. The Chief stated they have not yet evaluated the plan using the same geometrics but without the signal and voiced concern about making a U-turn un-signalized with several lanes of southbound travel. Although a signal would allow for a safer U-turn the Chief stated they reserve opinion on a U-turn itself until this is reviewed. Commissioner Wagner noted the gaps in traffic that will be used could create more opportunity for collisions without the signal.

Attorney Smith stated the applicant is willing to install a traffic signal if required by the commission.

Town Manager Michael Maniscalco complimented the commission and staff stating he reviewed the proposals, and noted economic development adds to the grand list and keeps taxes tolerable. One Buckland Center, a front door to South Windsor on Buckland Road, without a left turn lane has empty storefronts and a potential impact on the rest of the town.

Chairman Pacekonis asked for comments from commissioners.

Commissioner McGuire had connection problems but no comments.

Commissioner LeBlanc stated he will leave the decision to the traffic experts.

Commissioner Bernstein discussed with Attorney Smith whether the applicant's plan for access has been shared with their potential tenants, and stated he leaves the decision up to the traffic experts.

Commissioner Bonzani discussed U-turns with Town Engineer Doolittle who described the history of accidents with U-turns and Chairman Pacekonis who referenced the portion of the POCD to not create unsafe conditions.

Commissioner Dexter stated she would like to see a traffic signal at the access.

Commissioner Flagg described what he observed while visiting the site and voiced opposition to the access without a traffic light and discussed the length of queues and signage with Mr. Bubaris.

Commissioner Greer was no longer connected to the meeting.

Commissioner Wagner voiced his support for a traffic signal, but will support it either way because the need is great. The Commissioner suggested crafting a condition of approval calling for the signal version but allowing the applicant options if the signal is not approved by the traffic authorities.

Chairman Pacekonis noted the number one concern of the Commission is safety and stated if the signal is not part of this access, he is a definite no vote. The installation of a light at the access will be based on getting OSTA approval. If approved, this will be a lengthy construction and tie up traffic. The Chairman referenced Mr. Wheeler's comment regarding their impeccable landscape but saw 15 dead trees and some that are gone. The guard rail behind the lot has been removed and the curb has been substituted with an apron. Mr. Wheeler stated the apron was installed for snow removal, and will check original approval conditions. The applicant is aware of the landscaping and is in process of addressing it but it has been a tough year with drought. The guard rail was removed without a change order but will submit one.

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After discussion, Town Engineer Doolittle recommended leaving the public hearing open for more information to address questions raised.

Commissioner Wagner made a motion to extend the public hearing to October 13. Motion seconded by Commissioner Flagg. The motion passed unanimously.

ADJOURNMENT:

Motion to adjourn the meeting at 10:06 p.m. was made by Commissioner Flagg;
Seconded by Commissioner Dexter. The motion passed and the vote was unanimous.

Respectfully Submitted,

Lauren L. Zarambo,
Recording Secretary