

**TOWN OF SOUTH WINDSOR**  
**PLANNING & ZONING COMMISSION**

*Dorothy W. Reid, Arc*  
**RECEIVED JAN 24 2024**  
*@ 9:53 am*

**MINUTES**

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**JANUARY 9, 2024**

**MEMBERS PRESENT:** Stephen Wagner, Bart Pacekonis, Robert Vetere, Alan Cavagnaro, Kevin Foley, Michael LeBlanc, Stephanie Dexter

**ALTERNATES PRESENT:** Paul Bernstein, Despina Buganski, Michael Ouellette

**STAFF PRESENT:** Michele Lipe, Director of Planning; Michael Lehmann, IT Support; Joshua Stern, Recording Secretary

**PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE**

**REGULAR MEETING**

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

**PUBLIC PARTICIPATION:** None

**MINUTES:** 12-12-23 Special Meeting; 12-12-23 Regular Meeting

The minutes were approved by consensus.

Chair Wagner welcomed new Alternate Commissioners Despina Buganski and Michael Ouellette. He briefly outlined the protocols for participation of alternates in PZC meetings.

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

1. **Appl. 23-49P, Town of South Windsor** – request for renewal of a two-year temporary and conditional permit for a 500 sf business office within the Community Building for the South Windsor Chamber of Commerce, on property located at 1776 Ellington Road, RR zone

Director of Planning Michele Lipe represented the application and provided the Planning report.

1. A request for renewal of a two-year temporary and conditional permit for the Chamber of Commerce's non-profit use of 500 square feet of space within the Town's Community Building located at 1776 Ellington Road, RR zone.
2. The Chamber has been utilizing 500 sf for an office. The hours of operation are from 9:00 am to 4:30 pm, Monday through Friday. They have 2 part time employees, and 1 intern who works approximately 12 hours per week. On average the applicant will use less than 3 parking spaces.
3. The applicant holds committee meetings on average 5 times per month. These meetings consist of 4-8 attendees. Larger meetings and events are held at different locations.
4. New signage was installed over the year on site. Staff has not heard of any concerns.
5. The wording of the T&C permit regulation is that "Temporary and conditional permits may be granted by the Commission for a period not to exceed two years. Such approval may be given after a Public Hearing if, in the judgement of the Commission, the public convenience and welfare will be substantially served, and the appropriate use of neighboring property will not be substantially or permanently injured, and traffic and other hazards will not result from such use."

If this application is approved, there are no requested modifications.

Commissioner Pacekonis made a motion to approve the application with the following conditions:

1. The Temporary and Conditional permit will expire on January 25, 2026.
2. All free standing signs and/or building signs require the issuance of a sign permit before they are erected.

Seconded by Commissioner Vetere. Motion passed unanimously.

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2. **Appl. 23-50P, Pete's RV T & C** – request for renewal of a two-year temporary and conditional permit for the storage of up to 50 campers on property located at 317 Chapel Road, I-291 Corridor Development zone

Ryan Ayoub, Sales Manager, Pete's RV Center, presented the application. The location has been used as an extended storage lot for about six years and is not used to show vehicles to customers. There have been no changes since the previous approval.

Director of Planning Michele Lipe provided the Planning report.

1. A request for renewal of a two-year temporary and conditional permit for the storage of campers of approximately 50 campers on property located at 317 Chapel Road, I-291 Corridor Development zone.
2. The original permit was approved on July 9, 2020.
3. Sales and storage of recreational vehicles are allowed in the General Commercial zone when associated with a business. (GC is the zone in which the main Pete's RV sales facility is located.) There are no provisions for temporary storage yards in the I-291 CD zone.
4. The storage on site is located to the rear of the existing and in the existing parking area. Historically, this area had been cleared or the temporary storage of temporary wood products in 2004. At that time, pines were added to screen the activities from Chapel Road.
5. The wording of the T & C permit regulation states "Temporary and conditional permits may be granted by the Commission for a period not to exceed two years. Such approval may be given after a Public Hearing if, in the judgment of the Commission, the public convenience and welfare will be substantially served, and the appropriate use of neighboring property will not be substantially or permanently injured, and traffic and other hazards will not result from such use."

If this application is approved, there are no planning modifications requested.

Commissioner Cavagnaro made a motion to approve the application with the following condition:

1. The Temporary and Conditional permit will expire on 1/25/26 and will have to be renewed that time if the use is to continue.

Seconded by Commissioner Dexter. Motion passed unanimously.

3. Preliminary discussion with John Swagerty, Washington Prime Group regarding development proposal for 22 Wheeler Road (50 acres behind the Plaza at Buckland Hills), Designed Commercial zone – see attached request

John Swagerty, Senior Vice President of Mixed-Use Development, Washington Prime Group; Donald Poland, Senior Vice President of Urban Planning, Goman + York; and Achan Sookying, Landscape Architect, Langan, presented the development proposal (**Exhibit A**).

Swagerty said Washington Prime Group (WPG) owns The Plaza at Buckland Hills in Manchester, as well as a 57-acre property behind The Plaza within the South Windsor town line. He said WPG sees potential for a residential development on this property due to its proximity to The Plaza and Evergreen Walk and its ability to connect with trails, open space, and public amenities. The development team has tailored a program to address concerns about new residential developments in town.

Donald Poland displayed the map and pointed out the commercial, single-family, multi-family, and industrial developments surrounding the site. He said the property does not have as much access and visibility as other sites along Pleasant Valley Road; the amount of single-family development adjacent to it is small. There is an existing informal trail connection from Evergreen Walk to the Smith Street cul-de-sac, which could connect to

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the project through a piece of frontage on Smith. Poland said in order to prosper, retail developments like Evergreen Walk need housing density around them.

Landscape architect Achan Sookying showed the layout plan and spoke about the desire to tie the development in with its surroundings. The concept plan shows a green ribbon running through the site and connecting to the Evergreen Walk trail; the developers are exploring ways to integrate public and private open spaces and use the natural features of the site. The plan also shows where stormwater basins and vegetation buffers could be integrated, as well as a trail around the perimeter.

Poland said the developers examined the Town's education and municipal budgets as well as enrollment reports from the Board of Education (BOE). As of October, enrollment for the current school year was 5,002 students, 90 fewer than the peak enrollment in 2002-3. It decreased by around 1,000 after that peak and has been increasing again since around 2015. Consultant SLAM's report to the BOE indicates that enrollment growth will continue but is expected to level off in the next few years, with elementary school enrollment projected to remain flat. Of the comparable school districts in the Hartford area, South Windsor's is the only one that has been growing.

Poland noted that the report identifies turnover of existing housing stock as a major driver of school enrollment, but said multi-family housing has been a significantly smaller generator than single-family dwellings or condominiums; multi-family accounts for 53% of housing permits the Town has issued since 2016 but only 14% of enrollment increases. The report shows that South Windsor's home values have increased significantly since the pandemic, which makes the Town no longer an accessible first-time homebuyer market, causing its birth rates to decrease and elementary school enrollments to flatten. He estimated that the development would generate a net fiscal positive of approximately \$2.5 million for the Town (revenue from taxes and user fees minus the cost of general government services), saying apartments subsidize the cost of school enrollments.

Swagerty said the project is still in a conceptual phase, but the buildings shaded in yellow on the concept plan are intended to be market-rate multi-family units and would adhere to the requirements regarding affordable units. The units shaded in orange are intended to be age restricted, including both conventional apartments and cottage-style buildings. The planned total number of units is currently 684.

The Chair asked for Commission questions and comments.

Commissioner Ouellette asked about the breakdown of the units. Swagerty said the market-rate housing would account for around 2/3 of the units, approximately 478, and would likely be built in phases. The remaining units would be age restricted. Ouellette asked about the ratios of students in the non-age-restricted units in town. Poland said the numbers from the SLAM reports account for the fact that age-restricted units do not generate enrollment; the ratio has fluctuated between 0.13 and 0.19 students per unit, and Tempo's proportion of students is currently slightly higher at 0.24. The developers have used 0.21 as an estimate for this project. Poland said SLAM calculates high, medium, and low projections and the developers have been using the medium one; he thinks the projections have generally been slightly overestimated. The projections account for the recently approved apartments at Evergreen Walk, Deming Street, and Geissler's Plaza. Ouellette asked if the proposed additional entrance/exit onto Pleasant Valley Road past the hotel is appropriate for the area. Swagerty said traffic studies have yet to be completed and listed the anticipated entrances and exits, saying the goal is to limit the number of new curb cuts and take advantage of existing intersections.

Commissioner LeBlanc asked about the height of the market-rate buildings. Swagerty said these units would be in garden-style buildings, which are typically three to four stories.

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Commissioner Pacekonis noted that the parcel is in the Designed Commercial zone, where this type of development is not currently allowed. He said rezoning and developing the property would eliminate 10-12% of the current commercial area in town, causing the tax base to become more dependent on residential, which he said would not be ideal. He said the number of units is high and asked if the vegetative berms would be eliminated; Poland said the designs incorporate the berms, though it is possible some would be cut through to provide access. Pacekonis said the walking trail as proposed would run along some of the berms. He asked if WPG owns Hampton Inn & Suites; they do not, but it is generally considered part of the site. Pacekonis said the hotel's lack of parking for tractor-trailers causes a hazard as several are currently parked on the road. He asked about collection of stormwater runoff; Sookying said the intention is to install green infrastructure for this purpose. Pacekonis said projections of enrollment figures have often been lower than they should be; he does not think it makes sense that enrollments would level off while the Town continues to grow.

Poland said the developers are aware that the first step would be a zone change or text amendment. In response to the comment that the project would remove around 12% of the Town's commercial land, he said the pandemic likely reduced commercial demand by around 40%. He added that while multi-family housing is a residential land use, it falls into the commercial real estate asset class, and its value and tax revenue exceed those of commercial.

Commissioner Dexter confirmed that the projection of 50 new students, at 0.105 students per unit, refers to new-to-district students. The 0.105 figure does not include the age-restricted units as these do not allow residents under 18, with a few exceptions. Dexter asked about school bus access; Poland said bus routes are determined by the school district and bus company. Dexter asked how the development would impact Town services. Poland said growing pains are a positive sign as they show a community is in demand, and most new development is absorbed into a town's existing structures without increasing demand for services. He said multi-family housing, especially when age restricted, is the most profitable land use in terms of tax revenue and subsidizes the tax burden of new single-family developments.

Commissioner Foley asked what WPG pays the Town of Manchester in taxes for The Plaza at Buckland Hills. Swagerty estimated that taxes for this property are around \$1-1.2 million. Foley said the developers of Tempo Evergreen Walk and South Windsor Woods had each given estimates of how many students would live in those complexes, but he and Poland said significantly more students now live in each. Foley said the process often does not work out in the Town's favor and questioned the estimated \$10,511 cost per student. He expressed a desire to leave the zone as is.

Commissioner Vetere asked what percentage of the development would consist of affordable housing. Michele Lipe said the regulations require between 10% and 18% of units to be affordable depending on the type of housing. Poland said the number of units could increase or decrease from 684, but approximately 206 would be age restricted. He clarified that according to the estimates, the complex would contain 100 total enrollments, including 50 new to the district. Vetere asked about points of egress; Poland said pending traffic studies and input from OSTA, egresses are planned on Pleasant Valley and Wheeler.

Commissioner Cavagnaro confirmed that WPG owns 367 Smith Street and that the house on that property would be demolished. He estimated that 684 units would house around 2,000 people and asked if the developers would work with the DOT to connect a bus line to the property. He also asked if the development would have other sustainability features, such as detention basins, rain gardens, or a community garden, as well as if there would be a walking collection to The Plaza. Poland said these options can all be considered later in the process. Cavagnaro asked about bike racks and the low-income housing tax credit; Poland said complying with the regulations would involve consideration of all affordable options. Cavagnaro asked if all units would be renter

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occupied. Poland said the apartments would be renter occupied, but the breakdown of rentals and condominiums among the age-restricted units would be determined by market demand. Cavagnaro said South Windsor Woods attracts a higher number of families with school-aged children partly because it contains both apartments and condos; rental complexes in town have a lower percentage of children. Poland noted that any owner-occupied units in this development would be age restricted. Cavagnaro said the proposed mix of age-restricted and non-age-restricted units is wise and said he will keep an open mind about the proposal.

Commissioner Bernstein noted that the developers' focus seems to be on generating tax revenue for the Town, but the role of the Commission is to represent the interests of the residents. He asked if the developers considered industrial or commercial uses of the property. Poland said at the time the property was zoned commercial, the desire for retail and office space in the area made sense, but no commercial developments have been approved there and the market has since changed. He thinks retail is not an ideal use for the parcel as its visibility and nearby traffic counts are low, and he feels a logistics or distribution center would be too intrusive in that location. Bernstein recalled a presentation the PZC observed around two years ago that contained a student enrollment projection that ended up being highly inaccurate; he is hesitant to participate in a decision on this proposal without the involvement of the BOE. He noted certain factors causing South Windsor's population and home values to increase more rapidly than those of comparable towns in the area. Poland said projections are inherently complicated, but he believes SLAM's calculations are within the margin of error.

Michele Lipe said the property has been zoned Designed Commercial since the 1970s and was approved as the site for the mall, but that decision was appealed and the mall was relocated. A site plan approval in the DC zone requires a 30-acre minimum. Lipe said although some developers have looked at the site, no applications for it have gone through the full Commission review process since the early '90s. The berms were added to protect the abutting neighborhoods in anticipation of a commercial development. None of the recently adopted housing regulations apply to this site.

Carolyn Carey, Town Council Liaison to the PZC, said she does not think the estimate on tax revenue from commercial and industrial properties is correctly aligned as the equipment from these properties is also taxed. She thinks the student population is reason for caution and said the fire department is stretched; she added that wetlands are generally ruled out when calculating ratios.

Chair Wagner asked if condominiums are included in the multi-family designation; Lipe said the regulations do not define the type of ownership for multi-family housing. Wagner said sewer fees for apartments are lower than the developers calculated. He estimated that the proposed number of units would generate 250-300 trips during peak hour and said traffic is a concern; he noted three abandoned barns on Smith Street and said they need to be fenced in or demolished to prevent children from wandering into them. He also questioned the calculation of 50 new-to-district students, saying families that move from within the district would still open houses in the district up to new families. Poland said a large share of the existing housing stock remains student free. He backed up the projection that enrollments will level off by noting that Connecticut's fertility rate is decreasing and that when enrollment peaked in 2002-3, South Windsor's population was 2,600 fewer than now.

Pacekonis asked about the impact of the development on the senior center and if the age-restricted section would include a community room. Poland said the 2/3-1/3 split is subject to change and that most age-restricted facilities do prioritize community assets; the walking trails would also provide on-site recreation. Pacekonis said the Town's senior services are overloaded.

Dexter asked if solar farms are a permitted use of the site as currently zoned. Lipe said roof-mounted solar panels are allowed, but not a solar field.

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Pacekonis asked if the Superintendent of Schools has a report for this year. Lipe will email the Commission a new study that was presented to the BOE in the last month.

The Chair asked all Commissioners to state their views on the proposal as it currently exists.

Commissioner Bernstein said he does not see himself supporting the development as it was presented, but might support a hybrid project. Commissioner Cavagnaro said he will keep an open mind about the proposal pending input from the public. Commissioner Vetere said he thinks the proposal is not ideal, but it is a good starting point for considering the property. Commissioner Foley expressed opposition to the project as he does not support zone changes, and he feels the Commission should be more responsive to the public's feedback. Commissioner Dexter also expressed opposition to zone changes and thinks the proposed number of units is too dense for the site.

Commissioner Pacekonis said the size of the proposed parking lots could cause accessibility issues for tenants and that certain factors should be examined before the zone is changed. Commissioner LeBlanc said he is also not a proponent of zone changes; he feels apartments are already prevalent in the area and that the Commission should represent the voice of the public. Commissioner Ouellette said he has significant concerns about the enrollment data; he believes the numbers are flatlining because high interest rates are discouraging people from moving, but houses that come on the market are still purchased rapidly, often by families with children. He does not feel a residential development is a good use of the space due to its proximity to retail and heavy traffic areas, as well as concerns about crime in the area. Commissioner Buganski concurred with Ouellette and expressed concern about the development putting pressure on the schools due to the lack of housing in town.

Commissioner Pacekonis said Pleasant Valley serves as a major gateway from Manchester into South Windsor and the Commission should keep in mind the development's impact on aesthetics. Chair Wagner said he is keeping an open mind about the proposal.

- 4. Acknowledgement of zoning regulation renumbering correction for Section 7.24 Hybrid-Use Cannabis Dispensary and Production Facilities and Section 7.25 Freight Truck and Bus Terminals: Warehouses and Distribution Centers

Michele Lipe explained the correction made to the numbering of Sections 7.24 and 7.25 of the zoning regulations. The copy of the regulations on the Town website has been corrected and an acknowledgment of the correction will be published in the *Journal Inquirer*.

- 5. Appointment to CRCOG Regional Planning Agency

Chair Wagner said Commissioners Pacekonis and Cavagnaro have served on the CRCOG Regional Planning Agency up to this point, but Pacekonis has stepped down. Wagner volunteered to replace Pacekonis, and Cavagnaro expressed willingness to continue.

**BONDS: Callings/Reductions/Settings**

<u>IWA/CC Bond</u>	<i>AMOUNT</i>	<i>REDUCTION</i>	<i>BALANCE</i>
19-39P, Aldi – wetland plantings	\$5,000	\$5,000	-0-
15-11P, West River Farms – E and S	\$12,500	\$7,500	\$5,000

Commissioner Cavagnaro made a motion to release the wetland plantings bond for Appl. 19-39P. Seconded by Commissioner Dexter. Motion passed unanimously.

Commissioner Cavagnaro made a motion to release the E&S bond for Appl. 15-11P. Seconded by Commissioner Dexter. Motion passed unanimously.

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**OLD BUSINESS:** None

**APPLICATIONS OFFICIALLY RECEIVED:**

**Appl. 24-01P, Colavecchio Major Home Occupation dba Hair by Diane** – request for renewal of a 5-year major home occupation of a beauty salon on property located at 331 Smith Street, RR zone.

**OTHER BUSINESS:**

Michele Lipe gave the Commission copies of a flyer for the community workshop on the Plan of Conservation and Development, scheduled for January 30 at the Community Center.

Lipe distributed a memo with updated data on the Town's affordable housing status, accounting for the developments that were recently approved at Geissler's Plaza, Evergreen Walk, and Deming Street. She also gave the Commission a publication relating to CGS section 8-30g, as well as copies of the Town's sign regulations, which go to public hearing every four years.

In response to a question from Commissioner Vetere, Lipe said affordable housing points are accumulated once certificates of occupancy are granted. Vetere estimated that once the current affordable housing moratorium expires in October, it will likely be one to two years before the Town can apply for another moratorium. Lipe noted that points and unit count are two different measurements of a town's housing affordability.

Lipe said an application is also expected soon for new lighting for the South Windsor High School ball field.

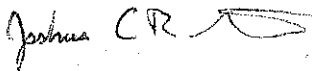
**CORRESPONDENCE/REPORTS:** None

**ADJOURNMENT**

Commissioner Pacekonis moved to adjourn. Seconded by Commissioner LeBlanc. Motion passed unanimously.

The meeting adjourned at 9:09 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,



Joshua Stern, Recording Secretary

