

TOWN OF SOUTH WINDSOR
PLANNING & ZONING COMMISSION

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OCTOBER 11, 2022

MEMBERS PRESENT: Bart Pacekonis, Steve Wagner, Stephanie Dexter, Alan Cavagnaro, Robert Vetere, Michael LeBlanc

ALTERNATES PRESENT: Atif Quraishi, Paul Bernstein, Carolyn Carey (arrived at 7:15pm)

STAFF PRESENT: Michele Lipe, Director of Planning; Michael Lehmann, IT Support; Caitlin O'Neil, Recording Secretary; Marek Kozikowski, Council Liaison

SPECIAL MEETING MADDEN ROOM- 6:15 P.M:

CALL TO ORDER:

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION: None

SPECIAL MEETING

1. Conduct interviews for Plan of Conservation and Development RFPs

Chairman Pacekonis and Director of Planning Michele Lipe reviewed the process for the interviews.

- a. SLAM- 6:30- 7:10pm

Michael Zuba and Patrick Gallagher of SLAM were present and Glenn Chalder of Planimetrics joined them via phone to review the presentation (Exhibit A). Mr. Zuba gave a brief overview of SLAM and how this team joined together. Mr. Zuba commented that combined the team has completed in total of 82 POCDs across the state of Connecticut. He added that that between the three of them they have had a blend of working and helping both rural towns and cities in Connecticut. Mr. Zuba commented that Pat Gallagher would be the Project Manager and Glenn Chalder and himself would be joining Mr. Gallagher to help attribute with their individual strengths. Mr. Zuba commented that Mr. Chalder has had ample experience working with the Town South Windsor as he assisted them with their 2013 Plan of Conservation and Development the recently approved Affordable Housing Plan.

Pat Gallagher commented that both Planimetrics and SLAM operate similarly with their approach for Plans of Conservation and Development. Mr. Gallagher commented that the team would be the experts that would help guide the Committee, however, ultimately the Committee would decide on the changes and improvements that they would like to see in South Windsor. Mr. Gallagher reviewed their process and approach, adding that they would start by identifying key issues and strengths and with input from the community they would begin to adopt a plan.

Mr. Gallagher reviewed the traditional framework for a Plan of Conservation and Development, which includes a conservation, development and infrastructure component. Mr. Gallagher commented that there is a recent additional component that they are beginning to see, which is sustainability and resiliency. Mr. Gallagher commented that on the key future issues that they see for South Windsor, these issues included sustainability and resiliency, housing dynamics, community facility capacity, economic development, opportunity/growth areas. Mr. Gallagher, Mr. Zuba and Mr. Chalder reviewed these key futures issues in more detail. The group explained that their goal is to be facilitator by issuing questionnaires, working with town staff, and engaging the community to understand achievable community goals. Mr. Gallagher and Mr. Zuba also discussed the issue of school enrollment in South Windsor and across Connecticut and how to grow the grand list while maintaining services.

The group briefly discussed how to achieve successful community engagement. This would be accomplished by facilitating conversation, gathering public input and educating residents on the project to help them

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understand what is needed to help pinpoint community values. Mr. Gallagher commented that they would be using a mixed method approach by offering engagement both virtually and in person.

Mr. Gallagher and Mr. Zuba summarized that a successful Plan of Conservation and Development requires an effective integration of various boards, town staff and the community. Additionally, Story Map platform would be an option that they would recommend to help with community involvement and input. Mr. Gallagher commented that their intended timeline would be an 18-month schedule and reviewed the outline for how they intend to achieve this timeline.

Chairman Pacekonis asked for Commissioner questions and comments.

Commissioner Wagner questioned how they intended to get input from other local boards and commissions. Pat Gallagher responded that they would recommend sending boards and commissions a questionnaire early in the process to understand goals that they would like considered. Once they begin the process they would recommend following up with these boards and commissions. Commissioner Wagner questioned if they would be using a digital program. Mr. Gallagher commented that they would be open to utilizing both Zoom and in person meetings. Mike Zuba added that hybrid meetings could be an option as well.

Mike Zuba commented that a community survey would be posted early on to be able to gauge the important community values. Commissioner Wagner commented that the town has a Strategic Planning Committee and questioned how the Plan of Conservation and Development and this committee would overlap. Pat Gallagher responded that Town Council and any of its subcommittees would be groups that they would want to engage with early in the process. He added that there may be some redundancy and they would like to try to avoid that. Mr. Gallagher commented that he would recommend sending the committee a questionnaire and also set up a possible meeting.

Commissioner Bernstein questioned if the group had experienced receiving community input and the community wanted to stop development and move back towards farming and agriculture. Mr. Gallagher commented that if this was the response they would try to find out what is driving this concern. He added that a community cannot work backwards but they could discuss how to maintain values that are near and dear. Glenn Chalder discussed the importance of communities adapting to change and the constructive dialogue that would need to take place to help communities preserve important value while still developing.

Commissioner LeBlanc questioned if it was difficult to reach community for engagement. Mike Zuba responded that it is important to engage the community by making the information accessible and creating awareness early on in the process. Mr. Zuba commented that they recommend creating a web base platform to help with participation as well. Glenn Chalder also commented on the importance of social media, which they utilized during the outreach for the Affordable Housing Plan. Commissioner LeBlanc commented on concerns of reaching a certain percentage of the town to gather accurate data. Mr. Chalder and Mr. Zuba reviewed sample sizes needed for data. Mr. Zuba commented that they start with a board online survey and then target more specific issues.

Commissioner Vetere commented that he wanted to be sure that they have a plan to help share the findings from public input and ultimately the Plan of Conservation and Development with the community.

Commissioner Vetere commented that he felt it would be important to be sure the community learns what information had been discussed and the goals being implemented. Mike Zuba commented that he understands the concerns and discussed an example from another local community that had a seven-page summary of the POCD.

Commissioner Cavagnaro commented that he liked the idea of the mixed digital approach and he wants to be sure it is user friendly and easily accessible to the community.

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b. SLR- 7:15-7:55pm

Robert Collins Project Manager from SLR, Meghan McGaffin Senior GIS Coordinator from SLR and Deborah Lawlor, Senior Advisor/Principal Discipline Leader of Colliers were present to review their proposal (Exhibit B). Mr. Collins reviewed the organizational chart, which highlighted who would be involved in the POCD and assisting in various areas such as public engagement, demographic data and research.

Mr. Collins briefly reviewed both companies that would be involved in this proposal, SLR and Colliers, adding that SLR merged with Milone and MacBroom in 2020. Mr. Collins reviewed previous experience for other Connecticut POCDs and other types long range planning. Mr. Collins commented that they were actively working with Norwich and Southbury to complete their Plans of Conservation and Development and recently completed other projects such as UCONN's Active Transportation Plan and Affordable Housing Plans.

Mr. Collins reviewed the primary goals of a Plan of Conservation and Development, help communities grow with both current and future residents' needs met while maintaining the town's uniqueness. Mr. Collins discussed their approach to achieve the goals of the POCD, this included building upon existing documents and recent planning initiatives, identify gaps and desired focus areas and engage community.

The group then discussed the timeline for this process, begin with base line review and assessments, gather POCD data and topics, draft plans vision and goals, draft plans with specific strategies and text and then finally plan adoption with community engagement throughout the process. Mr. Collins added that they intend the plan to incorporate changes to align with Connecticut state statutes and other planning topics, while building on the existing POCDs success and evaluate items that were not completed and any new directions they find needed.

The group then discussed primary subject areas that they thought should be covered in the POCD. These topics included demographics, land use and zoning, housing, economic development and employment, transportation and mobility, community services and infrastructure, parks, recreation and open space, cultural historic resources and environmental and sustainability resources. The group reviewed some of these topics in more detail.

Meghan McGaffin reviewed some data that they gathered regarding South Windsor ahead of the interview. For example, Ms. McGaffin commented that there was a trend of large growth in town over the past few years, with a strong housing market, and increased school enrollment. Some pressures that have come from these trends are need to include more affordable housing, continuing open space planning, and adding public transportation. Ms. McGaffin also touched on the general need around communities to address the change in commercial patterns.

Deb Lawlor briefly discussed the opportunity in South Windsor for redevelopment, particularly in the Route 5 corridor. Ms. Lawlor commented that there has been a large change in the economy and there are new types of industries are coming to areas. Robert Collins commented that he would also wanted to examine the types and needs of housing in South Windsor, especially affordable housing.

The group briefly highlighted transportation and mobility, they would like to build off of some of the existing goals in the POCD. Mr. Collins then discussed resilience and sustainability measures and how to focus on this key issue. Some options to for this issue would be to explore renewable forms of energy, incorporate "green" building and development strategies, create opportunities for resilience such as generators for senior housing developments.

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Mr. Collins commented that the other specialized service they have to offer is a strong focus on public engagement. Deb Lawlor commented on her passion for community engagement and the opportunities she has had working with various communities around the country. Ms. Lawlor commented on how online surveys and other online options has helped make it easier to engage the public. She commented that would recommend a project website like Story Map, which is very interactive. Additionally, she would recommend community surveys, public workshops and public work sessions at Planning and Zoning Commission meetings. Ms. Lawlor commented that she likes the approach to be experiential and accessible to all age groups. The group reviewed Story Map in more detail.

Commissioner Wagner questioned which company would be the face or the project since it's a joint effort of SLR and Colliers. The group explained that Robert Collins of SLR would be the Project Manager, however, they have the ability to pull in anyone from the previously reviewed work chart, which includes both SLR and Colliers. Mr. Collins commented that he would be present during all the meetings and often times both Ms. Lawlor and Ms. McGaffin would be joining depending on the subject of the meeting. Commissioner Wagner commented that the town currently has a Strategic Planning Committee and questioned how they would approach working with this group. Mr. Collins commented that they are currently experiencing something similar in the Town of Southbury. He commented that they would be willing to work with the Strategic Planning Committee if this was of interest to the Commission.

c. FHI Studio- 8:00-8:40pm

Francisco Gomes Senior Advisor with FHI Studios and Rory Jacobson, who would be the Project Manager, were present and reviewed their proposal (Exhibit C). Mr. Gomes reviewed FHI's mission statement, which is to provide clients with the guidance they need to build a more livable and sustainable community. Mr. Gomes reviewed the team that would be available to help in creating South Windsor's Plan of Conservation and Development, with the Project Manger being Rory Jacobson. There would be seven additional core team members each with a specialized skill set. Mr. Gomes commented that they would have a subconsultant involved as well, RKG Associates.

Mr. Gomes reviewed the three different service lines for FHI, community engagement, mobility and land use and environmental planning and reviewed these services in more detail. Rory Jacobson discussed the firms past and current experience with other Connecticut town's Plan of Conservation and Development. Ms. Jacobson commented that they have helped other local communities such as Litchfield, West Hartford and Berlin and explained the firm's goal is to give a very tailored experience to each town. Each plan has been unique to each community. Ms. Jacobson commented that the plan would be implementation focused, something that can be easily used by the Commission with specific and achievable goals. Ms. Jacobson commented that FHI prides themselves on their community engagement, they would be looking to hold in person and virtual workshops, open houses, and focus groups.

Ms. Jacobson reviewed the proposed core elements for a successful plan, these include a vision, goals, strategies and actions. Ms. Jacobson then discussed some of the general topics covered in plan and the process of how to achieve some of these issues. Ms. Jacobson summarized how FHI typically set up their plans, they make sure they are very visual, user friendly and well organized.

Commissioner Wagner commented that South Windsor has various boards and commissions, he questioned how the firm would engage these groups. Francisco Gomes questioned who the steering community would be for the POCD. Chairman Pacekonis commented that there is a three-member POCD subcommittee with the Planning and Zoning Commission having involvement. Mr. Gomes commented that from his experience

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with other towns it can be helpful to have a committee that is compromised of members of other commissions and not just Planning and Zoning. Mr. Gomes commented that either way it is important to keep an open line of communication with other boards and commissions and potentially meet with these commissions in a focus group setting. Rory Jacobson commented that in their proposal they recommend meeting ten times with various boards and commissions.

Commission Wagner questioned how to engage other organizations in town such as mosques, churches and rotary group. Ms. Jacobson commented that if there were mailing or emailing lists available they would certainly reach out to these groups to engage them in workshops and surveys. She added that in the past they have engaged the senior community by bringing hard copies of surveys to the senior center to allow for their input. Ms. Jacobson commented that is it important to get diverse group of opinions. Mr. Gomes discussed other examples of community engagement that they have done in recent POCDs for other towns.

Chairman Pacekonis commented that the schedule shows a plan of completion in 14 months. He questioned if they should take longer like 16 or 18 months if the price would change. Francisco Gomes commented that the price would not change and they are open for the process taking longer, they do not anticipate the POCD to take longer than 18 months.

Commissioner Bernstein questioned the most effective way to get quality community input. Mr. Gomes commented that he felt surveys were incredibly effective. The survey would be the baseline that they would be working off as they continue other community engagement events. Commissioner Bernstein confirmed that surveys would be offer both online and in hard copy. Mr. Gomes commented that hard copies are distributed to places like senior center and then they manually enter the data. Ms. Jacobson commented that they have had public workshops that have an interactive survey during the presentation can be used as an icebreaker.

Commissioner Pacekonis questioned what other similarly sized communities have they worked with. Mr. Gomes commented that they worked with the Town of Berlin, which has a population of approximately 22,000. Chairman Pacekonis questioned if they had done any work with South Windsor. Mr. Gomes commented that they had not but they were a Hartford based firm and are very interested in working with South Windsor.

Commissioner Quraishi questioned that during the data collection period, do they find they have a control group that they have found through research of other nearby communities. Francisco Gomes responded that they have often found similar responses in like communities, they will identify peer communities and review how South Windsor measures to these communities. Mr. Gomes commented that data will help inform the process, however, the data is only a portion of the input for focuses and issues in the community.

Commissioner Vetere questioned how they intend to make the POCD relevant to the public once it's adopted. Mr. Gomes commented that they need to be strategic with the plan and focus on the issues that need to be addressed. Implementation would need to realistic with attainable timelines, cannot be intimidating and daunting. Ms. Jacobson commented that with other town's POCDs they would try to review why certain goals were achieved or not achieved to help understand if it's an attainable goal. Mr. Gomes commented that through their research he found that the South Windsor community is quite young, 45% of the town is under the age of 40 with families. With that said, these young families have an opportunity to be apart of the future and make positive changes to the community.

Commissioner Wagner commented that they currently have a separate implementation plan from the current Plan of Conservation and Development, would this POCD have an implementation built into it? Mr. Gomes commented that this would be the intent. Mr. Gomes reviewed how they have composed implementation

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plans in other POCDs. He added that they do not have a specific way to tailor a plan, but they do have some baselines for plans, ultimately, they try create each plan based on the community. Ms. Jacobson distributed samples of recently adopted POCDs.

Director of Planning Michele Lipe questioned what role RKG Associates would play. Mr. Gomes explained that they have worked with RKG on recent projects, RKG's focus is housing and economic development and FHI has found that this focus has been very helpful in other municipalities plans. RKG would provide market analysis' that would give some interesting insight to South Windsor.

Commissioner Wagner commented that there is Strategic Planning Committee and questioned how they would envision working with this group. Mr. Gomes commented that this committee would be complimentary to the process. They may have some different goals but would like the ability to share some information with them.

Chairman Pacekonis questioned where they envision South Windsor fitting in in terms of plans. Do they see South Windsor's plan being as large as Danbury's or more in line with West Hartford's plan? Mr. Gomes commented that it is truly the preference of the Commission, Danbury's plan is a robust plan that is two years in the making. Mr. Gomes commented that he does not necessarily envision a 200-page plan for South Windsor, a 100-150-page plan would be a more realistic goal.

2. Discuss interviews

Chairman Pacekonis commented that the Commission would discuss the interviews and make a decision at the next Planning and Zoning meeting during an Executive Session.

ADJOURNMENT:

Commissioner Cavagnaro motioned to adjourned.

Commissioner Carey seconded the motion.

Meeting adjourned at 9:06 pm.

Respectfully Submitted,

Caitlin O'Neil, Recording Secretary