

Planning and Zoning Commission's
Affordable Housing Subcommittee

Friday, Jan. 10, 2020, 12:00 P.M.

Room 201/201A, Town Hall

ACTION MINUTES

P&Z Commissioners and Town Hall Staff in Attendance:

Danielle Dobin, Subcommittee Chair and Planning and Zoning Commission Chair
Chip Stephens, Planning and Zoning Commission Vice Chair and Subcommittee Member
Cathy Walsh, Planning and Zoning Commission member and Subcommittee Member
Michael Cammeyer, Planning and Zoning Commission and Subcommittee Member
Neil Cohn, Planning and Zoning Commission and Subcommittee Member
Jim Marpe, First Selectman
Melissa Kane, 3rd Selectman
Ira Bloom, Town Attorney
Elaine Daignault, Director, Human Services Department
Susan Stefenson, Human Services Department
Mary Young, P&Z Director
Michelle Perillie, Planner

Public in Attendance:

Carol Martin, Executive Director, Westport Housing Authority
Sal Liccione, 50 Church Lane resident and RTM District #1 member
Dick Lowenstein, RTM District 5 Representative
Ellie Lowenstein, 372 Greens Farms Road resident
Harris Falk, RTM District 2 Representative
Bob Galan, Human Services Commission
Michael Calise, 8 Sylvan Road South resident
John Suggs, resident
Jessica Bram, RTM District 4 Representative
Helen McAlindin, President/CEO, Homes With Hope
Jeff Wieser, RTM District #4 Representative
Michelle Mechanic, resident
Sandy Lefkowitz, resident
John Greenspan, David Adam Realty and STC Green, LLC
Lisa Mann, 15 West Parish Road resident
Bill Rubidge, 18 West Parish Road resident
Claudia Copeland, 119 Harvest Commons resident
Peter Gold, RTM District 3 Representative, 92 Regents Park resident
Rick Redniss, Redniss and Mead
Nancy Axthelm, Minuteman Hill resident
Karen Kramer, RTM District 5 Representative and Wakeman Road resident
Norman Kramer, Wakeman Road resident
Cathy Talmadge, RTM District 6 Representative
Ellen Lautenberg, RTM District 7 Representative
Christie Stewart, Director, Fairfield County's Center for Housing Opportunity

Danielle Dobin welcomed meeting attendees and introduced members of the Planning and Zoning Commission and staff who were present. She identified hard copies of materials under discussion are available, including:

- 1/10/20 Meeting Agenda;
- Draft Letter to Joseph Giulietti from Jim Marpe and the Planning and Zoning Commission;
- Photos of 900 Post Road East;
- Preliminary Concept Plan for 900 Post Road East, dated January 2020; and
- FAQ Handout *“Affordable Housing Options to Meet Westport’s State Mandated Obligations”*.

1. Review Mission Statement and introduce work of Subcommittee for new attendees.

Mrs. Dobin discussed the mission statement and the state statute requirements regarding the requirement for creating a substantial amount of new affordable housing. Westport does not comply with this statute as less than 10% of housing is now affordable so developers can bypass the zoning regulations. Mrs. Dobin discussed potential projects that can be submitted under §8-30g and the limitations the Planning and Commission have in reviewing projects developed under the statute. She further discussed Westport’s current moratorium and the need to proactively construct new affordable units to apply for a future moratorium. The subcommittee is trying to meet this goal in a way that makes sense for Westport and minimizes density and traffic.

Mrs. Dobin introduced Carol Martin from the Westport Housing Authority and stated the Town will be requesting that the DOT transfer at 4 acre portion of the property at 900 Post Road East to the Westport Housing Authority for the construction of an affordable housing development.

Mrs. Dobin requested that #2 on the agenda be skipped and go right on to #3.

2. Discuss possible land transfer from DOT to Westport Housing Authority on a portion of the lot located at 900 Post Road East, Westport.

Mrs. Dobin explained the subcommittee is very active and they have been looking at capturing the naturally occurring affordable housing and are now looking to be much more proactive. The subcommittee looked at all state and town owned property to determine whether it would be appropriate for affordable housing.

She explained that this land caught the eye of Carol Martin since it is large and flat and this is a unique opportunity. She discussed the hand outs including a draft letter from the P&Z Commission and Jim Marpe to the Commissioner of DOT and illustrations which show options. Mrs. Dobin indicated that there is no option to do nothing. She indicated the Westport Housing Authority is great at developing affordable housing that fits well in Westport.

Mrs. Dobin stated affordable housing includes \$80,000 and below and this will be great housing for police officers and teachers, for people older and younger, and those who have a “normal” income. This is creating opportunities for people who work here to live here.

Mr. Stephens stated he is working with Mrs. Dobin even though they are on opposite sides of the aisle. He requested that everyone listen and explained that every time an §8-30g application is approved 30% is affordable but 70% is market rate. Mr. Stephens stated we need to work toward 10%.

Mrs. Dobin stated if we can do 40 townhomes that are 90% affordable it may be the same number of moratorium points as 200 units at lower affordability level.

Mrs. Walsh stated this is a beginning conversation with CT DOT.

Mr. Cammeyer stated that he liked that they are trying to be proactive and not reactive. We can build something that works and is safe.

Mrs. Dobin stated this letter is about persuading CT DOT to transfer land to the Westport Housing Authority. There will be a lot of opportunities to comment on this but particular requests from public can be expressed.

Mr. Stephens asked if Mrs. Dobin could identify the property.

Mrs. Dobin discussed the site plan for 900 Post Road East. The parcel is 4 acres that run along West Parish. The DOT would reorganize rest of lot and new community would act as a buffer for West Parish residents and CT DOT facility.

Mr. Stephens says this will be an improvement to the area.

Mr. Marpe stated that as a town we have an obligation to do this and stated that the fact that town employees cannot live in Westport is concerning. He indicated that he felt this is the kind of thing Westport stands for. Mr. Marpe stated we have sent requests to CT DOT to use a portion of 900 Post Road East for school bus parking and we got no response. He stated the current governor seems open to talking about these things and applauded the Commission for taking this up in a bipartisan fashion and a very public fashion.

Mrs. Martin recognized the leadership of the Planning and Housing Commission and expressed her gratitude that affordable housing is at the forefront.

Mrs. Dobin requested public comments.

Cathy Talmadge, RTM District 6 Representative, asked what the Subcommittee is imagining the financial deal will be with the CT DOT.

Mrs. Dobin stated they are requesting that the town purchase or lease the property for \$1.

Lisa Mann, 15 West Parish Road resident and attorney, the area being discussed is really a dumping ground and discussed the noise and lighting issues. She stated it has gotten worse over the last few years. She stated neighbor have put up with a lot but it is worse. Ms. Mann

stated the neighbors prefer not to have access to the development from West Parish Road since there's already so much traffic. She stated there was a nice wooded buffer in the past.

Ms. Mann sent a request to the DOT that they install a screening structure and tilt the lights down so they are not shining in windows at night. She asked for a buffer and asked the Commission be mindful and appreciated the opportunity to get involved.

Mrs. Dobin stated she appreciated that Ms. Mann came to the meeting and it is the Commission's job to protect property values.

Michelle Mechanic, lives in District 6, stated diversity, whether socioeconomic or racial, actually creates progress and increases productivity. Ms. Mechanic stated we don't want to keep people from coming to Westport but also don't want to push Westport's most vulnerable population out, which are wives and children of domestic violence. She stated they become indigent since can no longer afford to live here when come forward. Ms. Mechanic stated they become traumatized, ostracizes and destabilized.

John Suggs, resident, indicated he was extremely alarmed that subcommittee members have prejudged the application and subcommittee is advocating for a single developer. He said this gives the appearance of a conflict of interest.

Bill Rubidge, 18 West Parish Road resident, this is literally in my backyard. He stated it sounds like a great solution to a problem. There are wetlands and flooding issues but overall seems positive.

Sal Liccione, RTM District 9 Representative, stated that the subcommittee should look at other town properties. He suggested looking at traffic.

Dick Lowenstein, RTM District 5 Representative, indicated his excitement for the project. He said it is creative and shows leadership. Mr. Lowenstein questioned who will determine the tenants and asked if the state legislatures support the request.

Peter Gold, RTM District #5 Representative, stated his support for affordable housing but was concerned about where the subcommittee is looking. He discussed affordable housing projects in District #5 and urged subcommittee to look at other sites as well. Mr. Gold suggested creating more housing around train station.

Harold Bailey, TEAM Westport Member and resident of Regents Park, this is a great idea and need to look at reputation of the town from outside of the town. He stated we can turn that dialogue around with this project. Mr. Bailey says Westport is losing out.

Karen Kramer, District #5, stated this is a great idea and should look around train stations as well.

Christy Stewart, Director of Fairfield Country Center for Housing Opportunity, thanked the committee for understanding their responsibility to create a Housing Plan and being proactive. She stated there are thousands of units that are needed in Fairfield County.

Jeff Weiser, RTM District #4 Representative and former President of Homes with Hope, stated it is wonderful that have neighbors supportive of the project. He stated the access to the bus line is important as some residents don't have cars. Mr Weiser stated that we only have 3 years left of the moratorium so need to get this done in 3 years. He introduced Helen McAlindin, the new President of Homes with Hope.

Michael Calise, Sylvan Road South resident, stated that this appears to be a viable project but he is shocked that a P&Z member could be an advocate for a development. He stated proper role would be to write a regulation that encouraged development in those locations and then have the Commission review the application. Mr. Calise stated the Commission cannot be objective and was surprised the subcommittee members are unable to see the conflict.

Ms. Dobin stated she spoke to the Town Attorney prior to beginning this discussion and was told it is appropriate. She stated she would discuss it again with the Town Attorney.

Melissa Kane, Board of Selectman, expressed her support of the exploration of more affordable housing. She stated this is about the economic and environmental health of the town. Ms. Kane discussed bus lines and indicated she was thankful the subcommittee is thinking about these things.

Nancy Axthelm, Minuteman Hill resident, agreed with proactive nature of the project.

Ms. Mann asked if there is any indication from the state that they would do it.

Mrs. Dobin stated there is not. She indicated the town needs to formally ask and that starts the conversation.

Ms. Walsh stated even though this site may not work but the CT DOT may say there's another site that they would be interested in selling or leasing. She stated it is most important that we're all talking.

Mrs. Dobin stated this lot is in Tony Wong's district and legislators understand the important of creating new affordable housing for families in Westport.

Sandy Lefkowitz, resident, stated the subcommittee has given the public an opportunity to think about this topic and feel process is very open.

Ms. Kramer asked if any other sites are being considered.

Mrs. Dobin state she requested a list of town and state owned properties and are considering everything. She invited all ideas to be submitted to the subcommittee. She explained this site is ideal for what they're trying to accomplish.

Mr. Stephens state this is a baby step that could flower or could die. He explained that the subcommittee wants to hear residents support and issues collectively.

Mr. Gold stated this may be the best location but requested that other sites be considered. He discussed bus service in town and housing at Greens Farms train station.

Ms. Dobin stated here have been 15 affordable housing applications since she has been on the Commission and 11 have been approved so it is simply “fake news” when people say we don’t approved affordable housing in town.

Ms. Mechanic stated that the neighbors seem amenable to this location and she wants to be sure not to push affordable housing to the train tracks. She stated she doesn’t want to see Westport segregate itself.

Ms. Suggs reiterated his concern with the roles the Commission members are playing in this process. He urged Commissioners to resign and work directly with Carol Martin. Mr. Suggs stated there is the appearance of a conflict of interest. He was concerned with inappropriate comments from Commission members at their 1/9/20 work session and requested to hear from Town Attorney.

Ira Bloom, Town Attorney, stated they are the Planning and Zoning Commission so they do need to plan. The state wants Commission to initiate some projects. He stated that Mr. Suggs raises an important issue but feels the Commissioners at this point are proper. They are trying to initiate something and is not a problem at this point.

Ms. Walsh stated she is not committing to anything and will deny if does not like the project.

Mr. Cammeyer stated he wants to hear the dialogue and doesn’t have an opinion.

No further comments from the public.

3. Discussion of feasibility of deed restricting town owned dwelling units.

Ms. Dobin stated she has been wanting to discuss town owned units that are not deed restricted but could be and added to affordable housing numbers for Westport.

Mrs. Perillie stated there are six dwelling units at Longshore being leased as well as one at 50 Compo Road South and one at 52 Compo Road South.

Mrs. Dobin asked the Town Attorney if there are any drawbacks to deed restricting units.

Mr. Marpe stated he wasn’t sure if deed restricting limits the flexibility to demolish the units.

Mrs. Dobin indicated that it something that needs to be looked into.

Ms. Young stated she is the face of affordable housing as she lived at Cabin #1 of Longshore.

Mr. Liccione stated it is important to have employees living in town.

Mr. Stephens stated although employees are offered housing they may not want to use it and prefer to live where their friends are. He stated the town has to get away from chasing §8-30g and head toward getting town employees to live in town.

Mrs. Dobin explained since she's active in the schools she hears many teachers and teacher's aides who have expressed their desire to live in Westport.

4. Update from state agencies regarding Westport's Affordability Plan creation obligation Mrs. Dobin discussed requirement for an Affordable Housing Plan in CGS 8-30j.

Mrs. Perillie stated she was in contact with Mike Santoro at the state Housing Department and they are working with Regional Plan Associates to draft a toolbox which will include a template of plan and they are hoping to have it completed within the next 3-6 months.

Mr. Stephens asked who is in charge of creating the plan.

Ms. Stewart stated we are working with Mike Santoro and should have a template by May. She stated there may be grants as well.

Mrs. Dobin indicated it is the obligation of the municipality which would be the Selectman's office.

Ms. Dobin concluded the meeting offering her thanks to all who attended and adjourned the meeting at 2:20p.m.

Respectfully Submitted By:

Michelle Perillie, AICP; Planner

January 22, 2020