

**Planning and Zoning Commission's**  
**Affordable Housing Subcommittee**

**Tuesday, June 9, 2020, 12:00 P.M.**

**No physical location. Meeting held electronically.**

**ACTION MINUTES**

P&Z Commissioners and Town Hall Staff in Attendance:

Danielle Dobin, Subcommittee Chair and Planning and Zoning Commission Chair  
Greg Rutstein, Planning and Zoning Commission member and Subcommittee Member  
Michael Cammeyer, Planning and Zoning Commission member and Subcommittee Member  
Neil Cohn, Planning and Zoning Commission member and Subcommittee Member Alternate  
Paul Lebowitz, Neil Cohn, Planning and Zoning Commission member and Subcommittee Member  
Jim Marpe, 1<sup>st</sup> Selectman  
Melissa Kane, 3<sup>rd</sup> Selectman  
Susan Stefenson, Human Services  
Michelle Perillie, Planner

Public in Attendance:

Will Haskell, State Senator and 1177 Post Road East resident  
Jonathan Steinberger, State Representative  
Dick Lowenstein, RTM District 5 Representative  
Sal Liccione, RTM District 9 Representative  
Harold Bailey, 15 Regents Park resident  
Bernice Stine McLeod Bailey, 15 Regents Park resident  
Ross Burkhardt, 34 Clinton Avenue resident  
Claudia Copeland, 119 Harvest Commons resident  
Karen Evans  
Tom Foran, 4 Beachside Commons resident  
Darcy Hicks  
Chrissey Hunt, 2 Clapboard Hill Road resident  
Ellie Lowenstein, 372 Greens Farms Road resident  
Becky Martin  
Laurie Neurenberg 5 West Parish Road resident  
Catherine Onyemelukwe  
Maya Porrino, 4 Edgemark Hill Road resident  
Elizabeth Rubidge, 18 West Parish Road resident  
Marcy Sansolo  
Althea Seaborn  
Matthew Silver, 25 Hitchcock Road resident  
Rob Simmelkjaer  
Danielle Tupika  
Audrey Walkoff-Liberstein  
Krista Wilett

Rahmen

Danielle Dobin welcomed meeting attendees and introduced members of the Planning and Zoning Commission and staff who were present. She stated that she was happy to see so many new faces. Ms. Dobin also stated that she appreciated seeing Mr. Marpe, Ms. Kane and Mr. Bailey who have religiously have joined the Subcommittee. Discussed history of red lining, restrictive covenants and gentleman agreements in Westport since critical to know where we come from to discuss where to go in the future.

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

Mrs. Dobin discussed the future development proposal at 900 Post Road East which would be a family-focused development. She explained that there are two areas where Westport wasn't doing a good job in creating affordable housing: families and adults with special needs. Ms. Dobin indicated that one of the most recent accomplishments in affordable housing was the adoption of a text amendment which expanded the opportunity for group housing.

Ms. Dobin stated that she and Mr. Marpe identified all town and state-owned land in town that could be available for an impactful development. She explained that they have identified 900 Post Road East as an opportunity as the site is almost 11 acres. Ms. Dobin indicated that she did not think that the current use as sand/truck storage facility for the State was the highest and best use of the property. Ms. Dobin stated she felt the town is making headway on the transfer of a portion of the lot to the Westport Housing Authority. She indicated they have had discussions with the Governor and will restart the discussions soon. Ms. Dobin suggested a letter writing campaign to DOT for the transfer of at least 4 acres to the WHA for the development of 40-60 units which would be 90% affordable town houses with 3 bedroom sand 3 baths.

Mr. Rutstein voiced his support for the proposal.

Mr. Cammeyer stated he was looking forward to hearing more about the project.

Mr. Marpe discussed the shortage of affordable housing in Westport, especially for families, and that the Town needs a more diverse multi-cultural population.

Ms. Kane stated that she supports the proposal and is happy to help in any way.

Ms. Dobin stated that Dick Lowenstein, RTM member, has been supportive of the proposal. She explained that Greens Farms School is underpopulated and the traffic in town is mainly due to through traffic. She indicated that 40 units on 4 acres is not highly dense and it will be a more attractive use.

## **2. Discussion on removing §4-5, Maximum Allowable Multi-Family Dwellings**

Ms. Dobin discussed the fact that many exemptions to this section are adopted by the Planning and Zoning Commission so she did not think it was relevant anymore. She explained that there have been 15 mixed used projects since Ms. Dobin, Mr. Cammeyer and Mr. Rutstein have joined the Commission and 11 have been approved.

Ms. Perillie read the §4-5 regulation and stated the staff is supportive of this change.

Mr. Lebowitz stated the thought process for this section was from decades ago and now is the time to make this change. He stated that Ms. Dobin has been a loud voice on this and there is much support

Mr. Cammeyer and Mr. Rustein both agreed that they would like to see the proposal come forward to the full Commission.

Ms. Dobin discussed bringing this amendment to the full Commission on Thursday. She explained the process of overturning an amendment by the RTM. She stated that many people say they support affordable housing except for the increase in traffic, density or the impacts to schools. She asked that the attendees reach out to their RTM members to support the amendment and to not fall for the 'but'.

## **3. Continue discussion regulation changes regarding Accessory Dwelling Units to encourage the availability of additional affordable dwellings in Westport. Consider proposal to bring to the Planning and Zoning Commission for a Sense of the Meeting**

Ms. Dobin explained the existing regulations regarding Accessory Dwelling Units regarding the number of water use fixtures and stated they are antiquated restrictions and she feels many would take advantage of a having guest house if permitted. She discussed national studies stating Accessory Dwelling Units are naturally more affordable rentals. Ms. Dobin stated suggested changing the regulations to permit a full bathroom, 600 SF floor area and a kitchen all as of right. She stated her thought was that current setbacks and height would remain. Ms. Dobin discussed septic versus sewer capacity. She indicated that naturally occurring affordable housing has been suppressed and this will help create affordable housing.

Mr. Lebowitz stated anything that expands the diversity of housing stock in Westport is a good thing.

Mr. Cammeyer stated his biggest concern was making sure the units architecturally fit in and the sewer capacity. He stated that he is looking forward to the dialogue on this.

Mr. Rutstein stated he was supportive of the initiative and bringing it to the Commission and public.

Ms. Dobin explained this would be a text amendment and they need a public show of force behind us. She explained there would need to be a limit on short term rental because that

would not assist us and other towns have done this because otherwise it could drive up rental costs. She stated they will need to make sure there are no unintended consequences

#### **4. Begin discussing framework for new overlay zone for projects that are 70% affordable**

Ms. Dobin discussed the possibility of a new overlay zone that would permit a development like the one we have discussed at 900 Post Road East. She indicated that when a regulation is adopted the spark for development comes after. Ms. Dobing suggested the proposal could be 70% affordable so that there are many affordable units, as opposed to 20% affordable and the rest market rate. She discussed possibly reducing parking requirements to allow flexibility in design.

Mr. Lebowitz stated the key to overlay zones are tradeoffs and liked the high amount of affordable units.

Mr. Cammeyer stated as long as the regulations required the buildings be architecturally sound and meet the requirements of town departments he would like to talk about it. He discussed the town providing more recreation space as developments are being constructed.

Ms. Dobin stated the Fire Marshal was very supportive of the largest apartment building in Westport because it was built very safe even though many residents were concerned about fire safety.

Mr. Rutstein stated that these regulations will all be thought about very thoroughly. He stated was supportive of this going forward.

Ms. Dobin stated the RTM has super majority oversight on text amendments so we will need support.

Ms. Perillie stated a regulation that includes streamlining permitting would be beneficial for developers.

Ms. Dobin discussed her approach to encourage Commission members to work collaboratively.

#### **Public Comment**

Mr. Lowenstein, RTM District 5 member, stated that the number of times that the RTM has successfully overturned a text amendment is less than one hand. He also mentioned the 900 Post Road East property has a different address on West Parish according to the Tax Assessor. He stated that he wanted to change conversation “yes, nut...” to “yes, if...” Mr. Lowenstein also discussed a blight complaint on the state property.

Harold Bailey, Chair of Team Westport, stated Team Westport has been around for 18 years and have had a hard time increasing the number of races other than white in town. He

discussed transforming Westport and would support all projects. Mr. Bailey stated we need to start getting in sync that these are people we want here and respect. He asked that the attendees could be given dates and some substance on the projects when it comes to writing letters.

Rob Simmelkjaer discussed the fact that housing is a fundamental part of equalizing racial justice. He stated that Martin Luther King Jr. spent the last year of his life on fair housing. He thanked subcommittee for their work.

Darcy Hicks, thanked subcommittee for pushing forward on this topic and stated it was important to keep discussing this. She discussed reinvigorating downtown and the need for open minded thinking. Ms. Hicks stated that there is a stigma for those living in affordable housing complexes and they are not yet properly enmeshed in the community.

Danielle Tupika stated she was interested in finding out more about those looking for diversity when moving to town.

Elaine Daignault, Director of Human Services, indicated her thanks for the subcommittees work on this topic. She stated how important it is to create inclusive neighborhoods and support services. Ms. Daignault stated how important it is to consider transportation in new developments.

Matthew Silver, 25 Hitchcock Road resident, stated he has taken a special interest in this topic and the history of housing discrimination in Westport. He asked questions about CGS §8-30g.

Ms. Dobin explained that new housing units have gotten Westport the moratorium and offered to meet over coffee to discuss other items.

Will Haskell, State Senator and 1177 Post Road East resident, voiced his support on this topic and will be at more meetings in the future. He stated if don't have diversity in schools students won't be ready for 21<sup>st</sup> century work force.

Jonathan Steinberger, State Representative, stated this is an opportunity to be planful on the right kind of affordable developments in Westport.

Elizabeth Rubidge, 18 West Parish Road resident, stated she is next door to the property at 900 Post Road East and she would like this development in her backyard.

**Rahmen** stated she is supportive of more affordable housing but would like to see people of color who do not live in affordable housing treated fairly because they is bias.

Ms. Dobin stated she would be happy to look into any problem with unfair treatment.

Audrey Walkoff-Liberstein, previous resident of Hales Court, stated that her family still lives in Hales Court and that she is so heartened that this is being discussed because there is such a stigma to affordable housing. She stated that this is the time to stamp this issue out.

Carolanne Curry discussed the exploitation of CGS §8-30g and an article written about affordable housing.

Ross Burkhardt complimented the committee on the good work going on. He suggested if we want to address social justice issues that have been going on for centuries we need to incentivize family units.

Sal Liccione, RTM District #9 Member, discussed concerns that renters feel included in town.

Ms. Dobin stated that it is important that everyone feels included.

Becky Martin stated that she was so excited and very supportive. She indicated that design and aesthetics are important.

Karen Evans, Sasco Creek resident, stated the subcommittee is doing a great job and she wants to help in any way she can. She indicated that the opportunity she had with affordable housing allowed her to graduate from college and land her dream job. Ms. Evans stated her desire for Westport to be more diverse and indicated that her son is the only black child in his class. She stated Westport is a great town and would love to make it better.

Ms. Dobin stated she would definitely take Ms. Evans up on her offer to have conversations on this.

Laurie Neurenberg 5 West Parish Road resident, stated listening to this conversation has been a powerful experience. She indicated that the project at 900 Post Road East really aligns with her values and she was in support of it.

Ms. Dobin apologized that she couldn't get to everyone this time. She stated that she and Mr. Marpe may draft a letter on 900 Post Road East and have large number of signatures. Ms. Dobin concluded the meeting offering her thanks to all who attended and adjourned the meeting at 1:45 p.m.

**Respectfully Submitted By:**

Michelle Perillie, AICP; Planner

June 22, 2020