



Town of Westport
Planning and Zoning Commission
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MEETING MINUTES

Planning and Zoning Commission

POCD High Level Review Subcommittee

Tuesday, May 11, 2021 12:00pm Zoom Virtual Meeting

In Attendance at the Remote Meeting

Planning and Zoning Commissioners in Attendance:

Michael Cammeyer, Subcommittee Chairman and P&Z Commission Member and Recording Secretary
Danielle Dobin, Subcommittee Member and P&Z Commission Chairman
Paul Lebowitz, P&Z Commission Member, and P&Z Commission Vice Chairman
Neil Cohn, P&Z Commission Member

Other Elected or Appointed Officials in Attendance:

Matthew Mandell, Representative, RTM District 1
Charlie Haberstroh, Chairman, Parks and Recreation Commission
Ward Doonan, Member, Racquets Advisory Committee to the Parks and Recreation Commission
Patty Brill, Member, Racquets Advisory Committee to the Parks and Recreation Commission

Members of the Public in Attendance

Ian Warburg, Co-Chairman, Save Westport Now and interested Westport resident, 16 Owenoke Park
Valerie Seiling Jacobs, Ex Officio, Save Westport Now and interested Westport resident, 11 Compo Parkway

Members of Town Staff in Attendance:

Mary Young, Planning and Zoning Director
Jen Fava, Parks and Recreation Director
Sue Pfister, Center for Senior Activities Director for the Human Services Department

Meeting Start: 12:04pm

1. Recreation Focus:

Michael Cammeyer, Chairman of the *Plan of Conservation and Development (POCD) High Level Review Subcommittee* of the Planning and Zoning Commission introduced himself and his fellow Commission members, provided opening remarks thanking all for attending the remote meeting, and recognized this is the second meeting of this subcommittee, but not the last. Mr. Cammeyer invited meeting attendees to follow along with him as he reviews and discusses Chapter 14 of the 2017 POCD available on the Town's website [here](#), and he asked meeting attendees to introduce themselves to one another.

a. Review Chapter 14: Address Community Facility Needs, from the 2017 Plan of Conservation and Development

Mr. Cammeyer identified Chapter 14 of the POCD is limited to only a few pages, and the subject matter warrants more. The chapter covers a variety of community facilities that will require multiple subcommittee meetings. He advised the focus of today's meeting is on community recreational facilities.

Mr. Cammeyer observed on Pg. 112 of the POCD there exists a list of recreational facilities, but no descriptions. He read aloud from Pg. 114 of the POCD:

“Westport has a broad array of municipal facilities for addressing community needs and desires. Maintaining these facilities in ‘tip top’ shape is both a reflection of the community’s interests and a cost-effective way to maintain these facilities over time.”

Mr. Cammeyer shared his view the POCD document is supposed to serve as a planning document including recommendations for how these facilities should be used and/or improved in the future. Understanding where these facilities exist and how they are currently used is a necessary foundation for planning. He also observed that some of the recommendations to maintain existing facilities have been realized such as Coleytown Middle School; therefore it may be appropriate 4-years into the 10-year plan to update it where applicable.

Mr. Cammeyer reviewed Pg. 117 of the POCD that focuses on Recreation Facilities both indoor and outdoor.

Mr. Cammeyer inquired of Jen Fava if she has an exhaustive list of existing recreational facilities and descriptions and if so, could she forward them to him in anticipation of Mr. Cammeyer preparing a red-lined version of this chapter to bring back at a subsequent meeting for discussion.

Jen Fava confirmed “Yes.” She agreed with Mr. Cammeyer a more robust description along with detailing amenities available at each facility would be more valuable as a starting point for planning.

Matt Mandell suggested any list Jen Fava provides may need to be supplemented by the Board of Education with respect to indoor facilities located within the schools such as how many indoor basketball facilities exist.

Jen Fava concurred with Mr. Mandell.

Mr. Mandell suggested auditoriums within the schools should also be itemized as a resource as they can be used as a revenue generator if rented out to organizations to off-set expenses.

Mr. Cammeyer agreed documenting facilities will require reaching out to the Board of Education for their input.

Danielle Dobin offered her support for Mr. Cammeyer’s approach. She asked, *“How can we plan if we don’t know what we have? If we don’t know what we have, how do we know what we need?”* She described the Plan of Conservation and Development not only helps guide future action by the Planning and Zoning Commission it also serves the Board of Finance in their decision making process on funding. The POCD is a town-wide planning tool. She also cited omissions in the POCD can be equally important to fill. She cited there are discussions concerning a need to relocate the Skate Park, but there is no reference that a skate park even exists or acknowledgement that this amenity is popular, and she suggested many might not favor having no skate park in the future.

Mr. Cammeyer recognized Valerie Seiling Jacobs. Ms. Jacobs shared she agrees with Mr. Mandell there are demands for meeting spaces and she hopes the subcommittee will also include inventorying available space at the library. She shared the demand was present pre-pandemic and will remain post-pandemic. She also shared the value of having a single depository in the form of the POCD to have all relevant information assembled making it more efficient than contacting individual boards, agencies, and departments in her view. She echoed Ms. Dobin’s support for Mr. Cammeyer’s goals for his subcommittee.

Mr. Cammeyer agreed with Ms. Jacobs and described the library renovations are also not referenced in the 2017 POCD as another example of why the time is ripe to revisit this chapter.

Sue Pfister added the Senior Center also completed their renovations so the paragraph on Pg. 117 should be updated to reflect these improvements and offered to inform Mr. Cammeyer of the amenities at the Senior Center.

Mr. Cammeyer encouraged both Jen Fava and Sue Pfister to include any needs or deficiencies they are aware of with existing facilities in addition to amenities so both may be included in the red-lined version he hopes to create of Chapter 14 for the next subcommittee meeting.

Ms. Fava confirmed the items listed on Pg. 117 remain important to better use what the Town has already (more alternative surfaces for use of outdoor space, and more night lighting). She added a need not referenced in the POCD, but should be, is the demand for more pickle-ball courts. She described temporary use of existing tennis courts to accommodate pickle-ball does not work well, as due to the pandemic, the demand for tennis has increased.

Mr. Cammeyer recognized Patty Brill. Ms. Brill agreed with Ms. Fava the demand for pickleball exceeds the supply and there is no dedicated place to meet this need.

Ms. Fava added there is growing interest and demand for platform tennis as well. She also described planning efforts are underway with the Parks and Recreation Commission too. The Longshore site plan is under discussion and there is hope some of the platform tennis demand can be met at Longshore.

Mr. Cammeyer confirmed there exists a demand. He shared he's been asked by friends why the Town only offers two platform tennis courts.

Ms. Fava concluded by stating she sees the opportunities to coordinate planning efforts for updating the POCD while designing the Longshore site plan.

Charlie Haberstroh offered comments. He referenced the "Yaeger property," now Town-owned property, on Long Lots Road. He mentioned the original purpose for purchasing the property was to provide more parking for the school on Long Lots as well as more playing fields. The Community Gardens took over areas needed for fields leaving a field shortage (in addition to needs for pickle-ball, platform, tennis, etc.). He also mentioned the arboretum at Earthplace was originally going to be a school with fields, so another missed opportunity for fields. He acknowledged the need for open space, but cautioned that should be balanced with the need for active recreation that requires playfield fields.

Ms. Jacobs agreed there is a great demand for playing fields and pickleball, but cautioned any planning to address recreational needs should keep neighbor's needs in mind related to their right to their quiet enjoyment of their homes. She reminisced about the "debacle" in the early 2000's involving adding lights at the playing fields at the high school and the promises broken to the neighbors. Neighborhoods should be taken into consideration as we plan. She also cautioned that environmental concerns should be prioritized and discussions of increased use of alternative surfaces such as rubber turf should be balanced with the need to protect the environment. I want to keep beating the drum about climate change and the need to be net zero and actively planning accordingly. She added the need for more indoor swimming pools should be noted. It's shameful that swimmers such as herself are limited to only a few hours at the Staples High School pool. It's disappointing the Senior Center doesn't have an indoor swimming pool. Not everyone belongs to or can afford to belong to the Y.

Mr. Cammeyer identified Mr. Cohn's Economic Growth Subcommittee may be an avenue to address some needs and/or climate change as he personally has expertise in the field of sustainability.

Mr. Cammeyer recognized Sue Pfister. Ms. Pfister spoke about the Senior Center and its' recent renovations and expansion completed in 2019 Due to COVID-19 it has not recently been open for use. She shared she expects it will re-open in the latter part of June or by July 1 of this year. The interior facilities in her view meets all current needs of the programs the seniors enjoy. What is lacking is the outdoor facilities to provide more senior exercise opportunities and outdoor programming which is especially critical due to COVID-19, as requiring users of the interior facilities to be vaccinated is outside her authority leaving some seniors apprehensive about returning. Outdoor programming is limited to the back patio. Right now we're trying to obtain permits to add a canopy over the patio to provide shade. There is a "sacred" meadow [at Barons South] where the topography would permit a walking trail or fitness path. There are also underutilized buildings (homes) on site that might serve to be used as the new building to house the Westport Weston Health District for instance or the Dept. of Human Services to create a campus-like atmosphere.

I'm aware the underlying zone permits only passive recreation, but the property could host volleyball, bocci, pickleball, and the like. There is potential for the park to better serve more of the residents' recreational needs. Intergenerational programs could be created. It would need to be made more safe and the rules would need to be modified.

Mr. Cammeyer recognized Matt Mandell. Mr. Mandell offered when purchased the Barons South property was designated for municipal use. Senior Housing then became the designated use and a lot of us tried hard to make that happen. Then it was rezoned by the Planning and Zoning Commission for open space (the DOSRD designation). This rezoning was appealed to the RTM. A majority of the RTM wanted to overturn the Commission's decision, but a 2/3 vote to overturn is required. It didn't get accomplished. According to current rules, this land is open space fair and square. So we have to figure out what to do. I have been a big fan of having bocci ball offered at the Senior Center. I think the DOSD designation should not have included the Senior Center. It should have been carved out. I think we can add a bocci court if its related to the Senior Center. I also think we can add a pickleball court if its related to the Senior Center. I don't see seniors playing volleyball. I would only make changes if related to the Senior Center; not broader. Regarding the buildings on site, whatever we can come up we should make better use of them. My concern is that if there are proposed changes to this open space; how are other designated open spaces areas protected; they will become fair game to be developed or used in some fashion. Relating future use to the Senior Center is the right path to take. I am an open space advocate. I have saved open space. I would be hard pressed as an open space advocate to support changes that could adversely impact open space. Limiting it to expansion of the Senior Center is the way to go.

Mr. Cammeyer offered pickleball is not just a senior-sport; his kids play pickleball now too. It would be cool if the kids could play pickleball with their grandparents at Barons South. A program of inter-generational pickleball could be great.

Mr. Mandell agreed. He shared Barons South was originally going to be the new home for the Y along with the senior center which could have addressed many of the needs being discussed today.

Mr. Cammeyer inquired of Jen Fava whether there exist any inter-generational pickleball programs.

Ms. Fava responded, not at the moment. She confirmed the idea is a good one, but due to the limited number of courts, she is reluctant to schedule programs as currently the general public has unlimited use. She concurred that inter-generational pickleball at the Senior Center is an idea she supports and could start a trend for other inter-generational sports programs beyond pickleball.

Mr. Cammeyer concurred and advised if/when the Parks and Rec. Department cleans the area up, it would be safer for residents and their children as on his recent visit he encountered a lot of thorny bushes that could be hazardous to kids.

Mr. Cammeyer recognized Charlie Haberstroh. Mr. Haberstroh identified he has gone on record not supporting a DOSRD designation for Compo Beach or Longshore, and at the time had the same position for Barons South. He described most people agree it makes sense for Winslow Park to be open space as it is distinct. He concurred with Mr. Mandell the Senior Center should have been carved out of any DOSRD designation. He shared members of the P&Z Commission previously advised him that if built a bocci court within 50-feet of the Senior Center would be OK, but beyond 50-feet it would not. If this standard is accurate, it does not work as the area is not flat within a 50-foot radius around the Senior Center building. That's why it hasn't happened. We have tried to make the parks more open and more accessible to residents, and raise awareness. He identified plans are already underway to improve the Parks and Recreation page of the Town's website to provide more description of park facilities and their amenities and he support's Mr. Cammeyer's efforts.

Mr. Cammeyer recognized Mary Young. Ms. Young described the word “dedication” is a legal term of art. For the record, the Town Attorney’s Office researched whether there were any limitations concerning future use of Barons South when it was acquired by the Town and found no requirements it be preserved for open space. This research was conducted when senior housing had been proposed. Therefore, it is only the current zoning designation of Dedicated Open Space and Recreation District (DOSRD #2) that imposes limitations. The Planning and Zoning Commission rezoned Barons South to this designation and have the authority to modify this through another rezoning process and/or modify §40, DOSRD, contained in the Zoning Regulations to expand the list of allowable uses. Such a discussion might be reserved for a subsequent meeting.

Mr. Cammeyer inquired of Danielle Dobin whether such a discussion would be appropriate at a future meeting of the Zoning Regulation Revision Subcommittee that she chairs.

Ms. Dobin agreed stating the POCD High Level Review Subcommittee would not be the right forum to discuss any rezoning efforts. She agrees with Matt Mandell it would likely be a slippery slope to discuss rezoning property currently used for open space, but perceives modifying what uses are allowed within the DORD could be a topic for the Zoning Regulation Revision Subcommittee to discuss. She also shared she agrees with Mr. Haberstroh and others to focus attention on and around the Senior Center without necessarily limiting activities to seniors as she also supports the ideas mentioned earlier about intergenerational programs. She agrees it is timely for a dedicated meeting to discuss the future of Barons South which she volunteered to host, to be attended by all persons present at today’s meeting and other interested parties.

Mr. Cammeyer recognized Sue Pfister. Ms. Pfister inquired of Jen Fava or Charlie Haberstroh the status of the Youth Commission’s pursuit of miniature golf as she perceives like pickleball mini-golf would also provide an opportunity for intergenerational programming perhaps to be located at Barons South.

Jen Fava confirmed the Youth Commission remains interested in miniature golf and are actively trying to find a location acceptable to the Town.

Danielle Dobin shared her son serves on the Youth Commission and he informed her that they are preparing to approach Jen Fava with a proposal at Barons South, and she advised her son not to pursue this as the Parks and Recreation Director will not be able to grant their request due to the zoning constraints. Ms. Dobin inquired whether seniors would be interested in mini-golf?

Mr. Pfister confirmed yes for the less active and less able seniors; and shared there have been intergenerational golf programs at Longshore and at Staples that set the foundation for long lasting relationships between students and seniors.

Charlie Haberstroh confirmed miniature golf would be great intergenerational, but he doesn’t know how many seniors would play on their own. He confirmed zoning regulation changes would be required to allow this use at Barons South.

Next Steps: Mr. Cammeyer will create a red-lined version of Chapter 14 to add more substance and information once received from Jen Fava on facilities and amenities and he will reach out to the Board of Education to receive a complimentary inventory so both can be added into Chapter 14. He clarified he will send an outline first to Jen Fava and Sue Pfister so they know what information he is seeking. He confirmed the red-lined version will be made available prior to the next meeting so folks can be prepared to offer feedback. He anticipates the next meeting will be in approximately one-month.

b. Solicit feedback from any members of the public with regard to planning for community facility needs.

Danielle Dobin offered that at a future meeting she hopes to discuss other facilities like the Fire Department headquarters and invite their personnel to participate as she recently learned they have a lot of constraints in their current facilities.

Charlie Haberstroh agreed with Ms. Dobin space is a real problem for the Fire Department. They have ordered a vehicle too large to be accommodated in the firehouse.

Mr. Haberstroh inquired about the POCD wondering if it a 10-year fixed plan or is it more of a living document?

Ms. Dobin confirmed it is a living document that can and should be amended when needed and when appropriate.

Mr. Cammeyer recognized Paul Lebowitz. Mr. Lebowitz offered his support for Mr. Cammeyer's efforts and stated it is timely to take things that have been on the back burner and put them onto the front burner. He agrees the POCD is a living document and should be amended if/when there is a need.

Mr. Cammeyer recognized Matt Mandell. Mr. Mandell reminded meeting attendees the 2017 POCD was identified as an "update." He agrees there is nothing to preclude further updates within 10-years. He cautioned to "tread lightly" as he has been witness to developers and others citing the POCD in support of their proposals and he has viewed conflicting language contained in the POCD that can be cited to both support or oppose a particular project; so care should be employed when choosing what language to add.

Mr. Cammeyer recognized Valerie Seiling Jacobs. She thanked Mr. Cammeyer for inviting the public to join this meeting and shared she does not support relying exclusively on outside consultants as has been done in the past. Listening to the people who live here is more important.

Mr. Cammeyer agreed.

At the conclusion of the meeting Mr. Cammeyer invited attendees to send any correspondence to him. Emails to Michael Cammeyer should be sent to PandZ@westportct.gov.

The meeting concluded at 1:10pm.