



Town of Westport
Planning and Zoning Commission
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Minutes

Planning and Zoning Commission's

Zoning Regulation Revision Subcommittee

Wednesday, July 28, 2021 12:00pm

P&Z Commissioners in Attendance:

Danielle Dobin, Subcommittee Member and P&Z Commission Chair
Paul Lebowitz, Subcommittee Member and P&Z Commission Member
Michael Cammeyer, Subcommittee Member and P&Z Commission Member
Amie Tesler, P&Z Commission Member

Public in Attendance

Patti Brill	Julie Loparo
Michael Calise	Dustin Lowman
Wendy Crowther	Tom Lowrie
Jacob Fitzpatrick (Westport Local Press)	Ann Pollock
Julio Fontan	Lisa Podurgiel
Helen Garten	Sharon Rosen
Gloria Gouveia	Jason Ross
Jesse Harte	Kristin Schneeman
J. Harte	Jonathan Steinberg
Karen Kramer	John Suggs
Katherine Kosiba	Jay Walshon
Maryanne Liesner	Stanley Witkow
Amy Leonard	Leah Zisfein

P&Z Staff

Mary Young, Planning and Zoning Director
Michelle Perillie, Deputy Planning and Zoning Director
Michael Kiselak, Planner

Town of Westport Officials

Jennifer Fava, Parks & Recreation Director
Charlie Haberstroh, Parks & Recreation Commission Chair
Matthew Mandell, RTM Member District 1, Planning & Zoning Committee Chair
Harris Falk, RTM Member, District 2
Jimmy Izzo, RTM Member, District 3

P&Z Zoning Regulation Revision Subcommittee Chairwoman Danielle Dobin welcomed meeting attendees and read the sole agenda item into the record.

1. Continue discussion regarding both a potential rezoning for a portion of Baron's South property and a potential change to the definition to DOSRD-2 in the Westport Zoning Regulations

Ms. Dobin provided a description of the Baron's South site, including that it is a 22-acre hilly property adjacent to Downtown Westport. There are several historic structures on-site and decaying in place due to lack of upkeep. Previous efforts for preservation and adaptive reuse of the mansion, known as Golden Shadows, have been unsuccessful. The property was rezoned in 2015 to DOSRD-2 and the RTM appealed the decision but was unsuccessful in overturning it.

The Commissioners on this Subcommittee seek to thoughtfully preserve the open space but current zoning regulations impede investment by the Town to improve it. Rezoning today is a necessary effort to facilitate investment to restore the site.

The Park should be accessible to everyone, not just those in walking distance, but it currently is not. Current zoning is suffocating the open space and leading to the decay of the buildings.

Ms. Dobin asked what the public would like to see at Baron's South and if there are suggestions to save and fund the historic structures?

Ms. Dobin also raised the idea of site visits with the public to encourage people to see the site.

Ms. Fava, Parks and Recreation Director, stated that the draft language that was presented on June 30th at the previous Subcommittee meeting included more changes than the Parks & Rec. Department envisioned. Parks & Rec envisions maintaining most of the property (the upper area) as open space for woodlands with trails, while a lower area closer to the Senior Center could offer opportunities for some outdoor recreation facilities and/or amenities. No structured outdoor activities are currently allowed by the Senior Center. The draft rezoning map proposed on June 30th could be scaled down to show less rezoning. Accessibility improvements, such as ADA-compliant parking, could benefit the upper portion of the site.

Mr. Lebowitz believes the park is for every member of the Town; therefore, it should appeal to a broad range of people and uses. The passive open space designation over the entire site was too restrictive because it does not allow for the possibility of any other uses. A lot of people would want to use the park but can't because it's inaccessible. He would like to hear people's ideas for uses in the park, either for the whole site or small portions.

Mr. Cammeyer thinks Ms. Fava's vision for the upper and lower portions of the site make sense. He supports keeping the site predominantly open space as well as a small flat/open area in the lower part for recreational uses. He does not want to see the buildings neglected anymore; they need upkeep. Mr. Cammeyer stated that people need a place to go outside in town, and that there are issues with accessibility of existing recreation courts due to school scheduling conflicts.

Mr. Izzo, RTM District 3, said the property belongs to the Town and the Town needs to find a way to utilize it and needs to decide what to do with Golden Shadows. He thinks accessibility is a big issue currently.

Mr. Haberstroh, Parks and Recreation Commission Chair, explained that prior administrations have discussed adding amenities to the site but topography was a challenge. From the Park and Rec Commission's perspective, he wants to keep plans minimalistic, in line with what Ms. Fava explained. The upper part should be made more accessible and amenities in the lower part could benefit the Town. He explained that the site has received inadequate funding in the past for maintenance and upkeep.

Ms. Dobin responded that funding bodies in town have not been motivated to spend additional money on Baron's South.

Mr. Mandell, RTM Planning and Zoning Committee Chair, said he thinks the Subcommittee is looking for a solution to something that isn't really a problem. Funding for Baron's South could be adjusted without zoning changes. The maps and text changes proposed on June 30th are scary things and the land is supposed to be protected until there's a greater use decided upon. He recommends creating a conceptual plan with Parks and Recreation before rezoning.

Ms. Dobin opened the floor for members of the public to speak, including: Helen Garten, John Suggs, Leah Zisfein, Stanley Witkow, Jason Ross, Karen Kramer, Wendy Crowther, Julie Loparo, Jay Walshon, Ann Pollock, Lisa Podurciel, J. Harte.

The general reaction was that the property needs to be more well maintained and it needs additional investment to make it attractive and accessible. Most speakers were in favor of preserving the passive-use and open space aspects.

Ms. Dobin suggests that Parks and Recreation propose a plan at a future subcommittee meeting that focuses on preservation of open space and increased accessibility, including a cost estimate. No specific target date should be set now so as not to rush the plan.

Mr. Lebowitz solicited peoples' ideas about what they would like to see the park used for, and how much of it to change. Emails can be sent to paul4pandz@gmail.com or pandz@westportct.gov.

Ms. Tesler stated that she's intent on listening to the public for their input.

Mr. Cammeyer supports bringing a plan forward to discuss and keep the process moving.

The meeting adjourned at 1:56pm.

A full audio recording of the meeting is archived and available on the Town of Westport's website, [here](#).

Respectfully Submitted by Michael Kiselak on July 29, 2021.