

PLANNING & ZONING COMMISSION REGULAR MEETING JANUARY 28, 2017

Present: Regular members David Colbert, Peter Kalmes, Stephen Saccardi, Anna Timell, alternate members Virginia Potter and Benjamin Gray, and LUA/ZEO and Commission clerk Karen Griswold Nelson.

Absent: Jill Cutler and alternate Dermot Woods.

Chairman David Colbert called the meeting to order at 10:05AM. All members were seated for the meeting.

Commission presentation and review of the progress of planning in Cornwall.

Chairman David Colbert, speaking for the Commission, (we and/or our) gave an overview of Commission activities in the past year stating that the issue that absorbed more of our energy in 2016 ended with a whimper rather than a bang. After about 18 months of research and some expense, in July we decided to table discussion of regulating short term rentals. We felt the ground for this issue was shifting under our feet. For example, the State started requiring sales tax. We were told the State was considering further regulatory action. It was far from clear how any regulation of ours would be enforced.

In 2015, a "Village Center subcommittee" was formed to see if any of our regulations were needlessly hampering economic growth in the village centers. As a result, in 2016, we tweaked the parking requirements. Meanwhile, that committee was itching to broaden its mandate. It snuck in a recommendation to eliminate a minimum house size requirement throughout Cornwall. At our January 2017 meeting, it was officially renamed the Economic development subcommittee. It wants to investigate if our regulations could be changed to further encourage, among other things, farm markets and residential bases businesses.

Finally, I want to mention that 2017 should be a large year for planning in Cornwall. It is well known that the demographics of Cornwall seem to be moving inexorably towards an older population with more weekenders. The school population is dangerously low. There is very little affordable housing. These are long term and regional trends. Do we go further down this road, or do we try to steer in a different direction?

We also are nearing the time that we will be required by the State to update our Town Plan. Town Plans may sound grandiose and it may not be immediately apparent as to how useful they are. But they actually prove to be the foundation for any major planning initiatives that take place. There is a very long list of achievements that have been implemented as a result of our last Town Plan. In fact, it is difficult to undertake a regulatory initiative if it is not recommended in the Town Plan.

At our meeting a few weeks ago, we discussed hosting a forum to find out what we as a community want for our community. There may be ways to more than tweak our regulations to encourage new business and create more affordable housing. Look out in the Chronicle for announcements about future Town-wide planning forums. These will be the first steps towards amending the Town Plan. The meetings and forum we are contemplating might result in major recommendations that have real consequences. Mr. Colbert closed by encouraging to stay involved and encourage others to do so as well.

The floor was opened to the floor for representatives from town Boards, Commissions and community groups to share with the community their recent accomplishments and goals.

Cornwall Board of Selectmen.

First Selectman Gordon Ridgway addressed topics of consideration as the Commission starts discussion of the new Plan of C&D, citing housing and economic opportunities as top priorities. Mr. Ridgway addressed ongoing initiatives including the recent Goman & York study done for the EDC and recommendations for changes to Land Use regulations, the HVA "Bend project" in West Cornwall, the West Cornwall septic study and discussion of the declining enrollment in Cornwall Schools and the need to attract young families and provide housing for the same. Mr. Ridgway addressed the need for additional business spaces and opportunities, and housing initiatives, noting the information found in David Grossman's report, Cornwall in the zeros.

Cornwall Economic Development Commission.

Janet Carlson, chairman of the Economic Development Commission (EDC), addressed recent goals set by EDC members including collaboration with P&Z for business and housing initiatives, supporting the West Cornwall septic and water study, mapping existing affordable housing, supporting the Cornwall Business Association, supporting the cross walk initiative in Cornwall Bridge, and promoting Cornwall through branding on the website and Facebook. Ms. Carlson addressed the EDC re-focusing on goals thanks to a real budget and encouraged anyone needing help for housing for business opportunism to contact the EDC or attend their meetings.

Cornwall Housing Corporation.

Margaret Cooley, representing the Cornwall Housing Corporation, addressed the Commission regarding "Cornwall's Current Housing-Friendly Zoning Regulations and read from "Housing Notes - What came before and at P&Z's Town Plan Review ". Written comments submitted and made part of the record.

Cornwall Parks and Recreation.

John Sanders, chairman of the Parks and Recreation Commission addressed the recent hire of Jennifer Markow as the recreation director. Mr. Sanders addressed a new website and Facebook page, the work on trails by Johan Winnser and his son, and new work on the soccer fields

Cornwall Conservation Commission.

Correspondence from the Conservation Commission was read into the record by Commission member Deborah Bennett. (Made part of the record)

Northwest Hills Council of Governments.

Rick Lynn, executive director of the Northwest Hills Council of Governments gave an overview of current initiatives being undertaken by the NHCOC. Written comments submitted and made part of the record.

Cornwall ZBA

Written correspondence was read into the record by co-chair Priscilla Pavel.

Housatonic River Commission

Phil Hart, Cornwall representative for the River Commission addressed the ongoing progress of the Wild and Scenic designation of the Housatonic River,

Cornwall Energy Task Force

Katie Freygang, chairman of the Cornwall Energy Task Force (the Task Force) gave an overview of recent work undertaken by the Task Force as evidenced in the 2015 Town report. (Submitted and made part of the record.) Ms. Freygang addressed the Task Force's recent Tenth Year Anniversary

Energy Fair in October 2016 at the Cornwall Consolidated School, deeming the event very diverse and a celebration of its ten years work. Ms. Freygang named the Task Force's major successes being opportunities for the Housing, Energy and Land Trust issues being perceived together for greater dialog, and wonderful opportunities for teen and middle school engagement in energy conservation through the production of the Vampire Hunt, and the identify of energy waste. Ms. Freygang explained that the Clean Communities Program was being revised, stating that CT Green Bank is going to continue developing their good financial tools but will not be using a point system to incentivize towns. Eversource is taking over the functions of the Energy Efficiency Fund and will be issuing incentives and a point system. Meanwhile, the concern for climate change and best sustainability practices is being undertaken by a new program that is modeled by Sustainable New Jersey and being managed by the Sustainability Institute at Eastern CT State University. It has taken the SustainableCT.org website that Clean Water Action developed with many action recommendations in place. It is broader than just energy and has ideas on local food and culture/arts building actions for instance. Actions towards energy conservation will be maintained at SustainableCTenergy.org.

In the spirit of local community building, the Task Force has issued a Master Action Plan to the selectmen as a tool for improving town buildings, but will also be having workshops on broader issues such as local food and water quality under the auspices of ECCO (elucidating Ecology in Cornwall). ECCO will promote the broader activities of SustainableCT as well. Our websites will be flexing to encompass these new developments.

Cornwall Conservation Trust.

Hector Prud'homme, Conservation Trust member reported on recent Cornwall Conservation Trust acquisitions. Written correspondence submitted for the record.

Cream Hill Lake Task Force.

Betty Spence, representative for the Cream Hill Lake Task addressed recent work on the Lake by address weed growth and conduct water testing.

West Cornwall Water/Septic Committee.

Correspondence from Chairman Tod Piker was read into and made part of the record by First Selectman Gordon Ridgway.

Motion by unanimous vote to adjourn at 12 Noon.

Respectfully submitted,

Karen Griswold Nelson