

**CORNWALL PLANNING & ZONING COMMISSION
TOWN PLAN of CONSERVATION AND DEVELOPMENT FORUM
JANUARY 30, 2023 SPECIAL MEETING MINUTES**

Present: Regular members Anna Timell, James LaPorta, and alternate members Bruce Bennett, Phill West, and LUA/ZEO Karen Griswold Nelson

Absent: Keith Bodwell, Christine Gray and Alternates Will Evans, Michelle Shipp and Stephen Saccardi.

1) Call to order/Establish quorum

Chairman Anna Timell called the 3rd Annual Town Planning meeting to order at 7:05PM with a quorum established. Alternate Bruce Bennett was seated for regular member Stephen Saccardi.

2) Introduction and presentation by P&Z Commission regarding progress on the Cornwall Town Plan of Conservation and Development - Effective date January 1, 2020 Update .

Chairman Timell opened the meeting by thanking the volunteers who so tirelessly work to make Cornwall the wonderful place it is to live. Chairman Timell gave a brief historical perspective of the inception of Zoning, Planning and Inland wetlands Commissions in the Town of Conwell. Chairman Timell reported on the Planning & Zoning Commission's main activity of the past year, the reformatting, reorganization and updating of the Zoning Regulation to make them easier to read and more understandable, noting that no new amendments had been promulgated in this process and no work done to work on goals of the Plan. Chairman Timell stated that once this process is completed, the next task will be to work to promote and allow more inexpensive housing, stating that in her personal opinion, that the need for more inexpensive and affordable housing is the single more pressing problem facing Cornwall.

Chairman Timell reviewed the goals of the 2020 POCD as presented in a PowerPoint authored by consultant Janell Mullen. Once this process is completed, the next task will be to work with a Housing Subcommittee established in 2022 to review regulations pertaining to Housing."

3) Presentations, submissions of written correspondence or other media from Town Organization and Partners as named in the Town Plan. (Page 4 of the Plan)

Board of Selectman represented by First Selectman Gordon Ridgway.

Chairman Timell gave a historical perspective of Gordon's 40 years of service on various boards and commission starting as an alternate on the Planning & Zoning Commission in 1983 to his current position as First Selectman.

Noting that 40 years can give one a long term perspective, Gordon stated that some issues being worked on today are relatively modern concerns as well as being relevant to long term and past concerns. Gordon addressed the BOS's recent past two years goals and accomplishments relating to the Town Plan, including broadband becoming a reality in 2023, noting that it relates to both emergencies and convenience. Gordon gave credit to Casey Cook for his work as town representative and liaison to Optimum. Gordon listed other accomplishments including support and town approval for a waste water management proposal in West Cornwall, the redevelopment of the Burkhart property in Cornwall Bridge, and pursuit of funding for infrastructure improvements in the village centers for pedestrian and bicycle friendly sidewalks and crosswalks.

Gordon addressed the change in the Cornwall Grand List with a net loss (one million dollars) relating to the acquisition of property by the State of Connecticut. Gordon, noting that while Cornwall is a popular place, stated that there has no increase in housing, either in numbers or diversity (rental etc.). Gordon addressed the median sale price, up 55% from 2022 from \$300,000 (pre-pandemic) to \$500,000 to \$800,000 this year with an average house price to 1.2 million (figures from Jocelyn Ayer). Gordon addressed the increase in students from recent years changing to a decrease of 20 students this year. Gordon stated that due to these changing trends, despite some success in other tasks, BOS had changed the Housing Plan Implementation Committee to a Housing Task Force meeting monthly with the appointment of a housing coordinator, Jessica Brackman. Gordon noted that some of the AARPA funds (approved by town vote) had been transferred to the Cornwall Housing Corporation to help them with their land acquisition and development fund. Stating that one of the primary goals to get 25 units built in 10 years (2020 Town Plan goals) and despite everyone's efforts, there was nothing even in the pipe line. Gordon addressed BOS conversations with Representative Maria Horne to address some state land that can be used in the vast thousands of acres owned and protected by the state that could be used for affordable housing. Gordon, noting that the land of steady habits appeared to an economy, lifestyle and demographics that was moving quickly and that the housing issue was proving the hardest to address, stating that he was in total agreement with the Chair's statement that affordable housing was a pressing issue.

Note was made by Chairman Timell that the West Cornwall septic issue had been a topic of concern for many years and in many Town Plans.

Cornwall Housing Corporation represented by President Ginni Block (and Margaret Cooley)

Ginni Block, representative for the Cornwall Housing Corporation, deemed overall, housing as being a critical need in Cornwall, and supporting Gordon's remarks regarding the cost of housing being an issue.

Ginni addressed research into the cost of salaries as relating to teachers in Region 1, noting that current salary for a beginner teacher with a master would not have the salary needed to qualify for a loan to build a house.

Ginni addressed a change in the strategy being used by the Housing Corporation as relating to the Parcel Program, moving forward in seeking state grants as well as private donations to fill the gaps between sale price and construction funds. Noting that fund raising letters were being mailed out in February, and totally supportive of P&Z support of multi-family housing. Ginni addressed the CHC in total support of the P&Z efforts to allow multi-family housing

Written communications submitted by Ginni Block attached to the minutes.

As relating to Affordable Housing, chairman Timell addressed the establishment of a Housing Subcommittee (members James LaPorta, Phill West and Will Evans) to address regulations relating to accessory apartments. Chairman Timell stated that they would also be meeting with planning consultant Janell Mullen to address multi-family housing and remove barriers to affordable housing.

Economic Development Commission represented by chairman Simon Hewitt

Economic Development chairman Simon Hewitt gave a power presentation, naming and giving credit to the 9 member plus Economic Development Commission, for their work, as stated in the mission statement, to develop and maintain a viable business climate.....promote tolerance of economic diversity and the right to work in Cornwall Noting that they are a town Commission with Town funding. Simon outlined key actions recent activities, addressed 2022 goals drawn from the Plan of C&D, and addressed how the Commission did in meeting their goals. (Power Point on video)

Selectman Janet Carlson addressed other various activities in West Cornwall, thanking Simon and the rest of the EDC for the efforts.

Cornwall Conservation Trust represented by president Bart Jones

Chairman Bart Jones, appeared on a pre-recorded video, prefacing his video presentation by thanking Chairman Timell and the P&Z Commission for hosting an annual meeting to periodically address the Town Plan and keep the Plan fresh in the mind of folks in Cornwall. Bart addressed 5 points in the CCT's Strategic Plan:

- Continue to protect land with high environmental and scenic value, stating that the only project in process was the protection of 34 acres on the ridgeline of Quarry Hill above the town to connect to Cathedral Pines to complete a 75 acre preserve.
- Manage CCT properties to include biodiversity and resiliency to climate change and accessibility for the enjoyment by the public for hiking (lead Terrane "Terry" Burke)
- Educate the public regarding the value of conservation, and the importance of the environment and doing what we doing what we can to save it. (lead "Katie" Katherine Freygang)

- Collaborate with other organizations i.e. the P&Z commission and Cornwall Conservation Commission, to insure that we are working together to steer Cornwall to a better future, citing the last year CCT's annual meeting with the topic regarding Affordable Housing and Conservation. Other parts included the creation of an interactive map to show both high priority conservation properties and property suitable for development.
- Figure out a way to sustain the Cornwall Conservation Trust financially going into the future (next 40 years) to sustain the protection of the 2,000 acres of land currently protected. Refine CCT's governance structure to meet the needs of the CCT including finding new board member to go forward.

Conservation Commission represented by member Debbie Bennett

Debbie Bennett read a letter into the record (attached to the minutes) outlining the objectives currently being working on to achieve objectives outlined in the POCD including

- Protecting Cornwall's forests' by addressing the proliferation of invasive species, managing Invasive Species, and protecting our Forests Biodiversity:
- Implementing best practices for caring of hazardous Trees,
- Protecting Cornwall waterbodies,
- Promoting sustainability efforts including Sustainable CT participation
- Addressing concerns of waste i.e. composting
- Protecting Cornwall's horizon-lines and ridgelines

Sustainable CT represented by Katherine Freygang

Ms. Freygang gave an overview of SustainableCT, a state program that outlines sustainability actions that build local economies, support equity, and respect the finite capacity of the environment; offering case studies, technical assistance and funding to help advance sustainability initiatives. Ms. Freygang defined Plan actions, actions being worked in Cornwall, completed projects and projects on the horizon.

Written report submitted by Katherine Freygang attached to the minutes

Cornwall Social Services represented by Social Services director Heather Dinneen

Written report submitted by Heather Dinneen. (Attached to the minutes)

4) Adjourn by Commission action

Motion made by Mr. LaPorta, seconded by Mr. Bennett, to adjourn at 8:00PM; unanimously approved.

Respectfully submitted by Karen Nelson for Commission Secretary Phill West

1/30/23

Affordable Housing is still a critical need in Cornwall. There are 39 people on the waiting list a Kugeman village. We have received 5 inquiries for application through the CHC website in January alone.

The following is an update on POCD tasks where Cornwall Housing Corporation (CHC) is listed as a responsible lead:

The goal in the housing section of the POCD is to "increase the number of affordable housing units by at/least 25 over the next 10 years". CHC is listed as a responsible lead under the task "to encourage private giving of land and funding to Cornwall Housing Corporation (CHC) to allow them to build more housing. Work with Cornwall Conservation Trust [CCT] to see if future donors could be asked to consider a portion of the preserved property being provided to CHC to be used for housing."

CHC has approached CCT to encourage them to ask donors to preserve a portion of donated land for affordable housing. In the Forum organized by CCT in November 2022, Bart Jones, their president, reported that donors are being asked to consider such a donation; none of them had expressed a willingness to do so to that date.

Another goal in the POCD is to "support first time homebuyers and those seeking housing opportunities. CHC is listed as a responsible lead for the task states in this goal to "Increase awareness of Housing Development Fund (HDF)'s down-payment assistance and free first-time homebuyer education classes and online resources."

CHC gives applicants resources including local banks that we have had success with and banks that provide funding through CHFA. Unfortunately both HDF and CHFA do not provide loans for construction, to the best of our knowledge. Applicants for the Parcel Program are referred to a "financial fitness" program provided virtually and must show a certificate of completion for their application to be progressed. However, due to the current cost of building and the difficulty obtaining a construction loan for applicants, we are in the process of changing the Parcel Program model. We are now seeking state grants along with private donations to be able to build houses on our remaining lots and have the gap between sale price and construction price be covered by such grants and donations. This is a model that has been used successfully in both Litchfield and Washington.

We provide support for others seeking rental housing through our website does list contacts for applications to rental units in Kugeman Village and Bonney Brook. In the last year we've had approximately 18 inquiries for these units, 5 of which occurred in the current month.

General update:

We have had two new inquiries into the parcel program in the last year and a lease was signed for one of the available lots on Dark Entry. Our current applicants do not have incomes of even 80% of the county AMI, which is why current applicants are struggling to get a construction loan large enough to cover costs. We believe that the most efficient way to have affordable houses built is by funding as mentioned above (state grants along with private donations). We are thrilled to have received 100,000 of ARPA funds from the Town; this money can be used to provide some of the infrastructure for Parcel program lots.

We heartily support all efforts of P& Z to allow multifamily housing as we continue our search for land to purchase as a first step in making this possible.

Cornwall Housing Corporation
Ginni Block, President

The Cornwall Conservation Commission met monthly throughout the 2021-'22 year, working to achieve objectives outlined in the POCD.

Objectives 1 and 2: Protecting our Forests' and Addressing the proliferation of invasive species

Managing Invasive Species The CC's continuing efforts on the Japanese Knotweed eradication program have shown successful results in many places around the town. This spring, the CCC in association with the Cornwall Garden Club and the Conservation Commission, held a hands-on workshop to educate the public on the impact of *Berberis thunbergia* (barberry).

Protecting our Forests Biodiversity: Implementing best practices for caring for hazardous Trees Housatonic Meadows and the CCC endorsed efforts to repair the damage done by the State Parks Dept at Housatonic Meadows State Park. The goals include the creation of a hazard tree policy with DEEP and replant an educational and ecological garden in the area where many heritage trees were removed.

Objective 3: Protecting our Waterbodies

The Cream Hill Lake Task Force The Lake Task Force (LTF) tested waters during 2021-'22; testing for water clarity, dissolved oxygen, temperature, and nutrients; samples were analyzed by University of Connecticut's Center for Environment and Engineering.

Housatonic Railway Company (HRRC) Right of Way Herbicide Application CCC members are working in collaboration with representatives from six other northwest corner towns to develop recommended *No Spray Zones* in areas close to well water and/or running through state or federally identified critical habitat; and to encourage HRRC to use best practices in applying herbicides. The identified and recommended *No Spray Zones* will be shared with town BoS with the objective of gaining their support of this work.

Objective 4: Promote sustainability efforts including Sustainable CT participation and implementing further energy conservation measures in Statewide Conservation Efforts:

Working Towards Sustainable CT Silver Level (Katie to update this as needed)

CCC continued its efforts with the state's Sustainable CT program. The commission has played a leading in encouraging the state to better tailor its programs to CT's smaller towns so they can more effectively participate in the Sustainable program. In response, the state has reached out with interns and staffing to address those issues. The original strategies for energy conservation administered by the Energy Task Force are still relevant as are many of the program's strategies.

Addressing concerns of Waste: Composting

In conjunction with the Cornwall Garden Club, CCC is developing an educational module on composting that will be presented on Earth Day April 22nd at the Cornwall Library. The commission is also exploring avenues for a collective composting effort. The two-pronged effort is part of an overall objective to reduce solid waste by reducing compostable materials in the waste stream.

Objective 5: Protect Cornwall's horizon-lines and ridgelines, and limit noise and light pollution

The Conservation Commission engaged the mapping services of the Housatonic Valley Association to create Ridgeline Conservation Area maps. These maps were displayed during a formal presentation to the planning and Zoning Commission. Darrell Cherniske of Kent CT attended the presentation to share his expertise gained in the 15 years since Kent adopted a ridgeline protection overlay zone. If adopted, ridgeline protection overlay zones would contribute to the POCD goals of ridgeline protection and limiting light pollution.

P&Z Address 1.30.23

Sustainable CT is a state program that outlines sustainability actions that build local economies, support equity, and respect the finite capacity of the environment; offering case studies, technical assistance and funding to help advance sustainability initiatives.

The actions cover 12 sectors such as:

- Equity
- Economy
- Land and Natural Resources
- Creative Culture
- Planning
- Transportation
- Energy
- Communication and Education
- Material and Waste Management
- Housing and more...

Outside of designated certifications, Cornwall uses the program as a model of best practices, to glean ideas, possibly get funding, and to model ideas for other towns. Our POCD and SCT goals overlap in 14 actions which I have submitted. Action details can be read at SustainableCT.org.

Currently we are focusing on these actions:

- Working with EDC to promote roundtables, business development and the arts
- Promote Composting and add that component to the transfer station
- Revitalize an energy efficiency plan at CCS
- Review of social services with Heather

Projects that are complete and will be submitted to SCT:

- Air quality monitoring report
- Housing/Land Trust panel
- LID education projects
- Invasive species education projects
- Greenway project
- Cream Hill Lake Monitoring

Projects on the Horizon:

- Equity Statement
- Waste water treatment
- Discussion of a Food Hub
- Installation of EV stations
- Inventory of Town Vehicles
- CCS Cultural Calendar
- CCC natural resources inventory
- Sustainable Purchasing Policy
- Brownfield redevelopment

In our POCD we have a call “to enhance communication and collaboration between existing town groups” as well as “to promote sustainability efforts”. I recommend the town act on these goals and install a staff member to enact communication coordination and future coordination with Sustainable CT. The savings from our energy modifications can certainly fund a position.

Respectfully submitted,
Katherine Freygang

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January 30, 2023

Dear Cornwall Planning & Zoning Commission,

In response to your request for a report from the Social Service Office as related to the Town Plan, please find the following remarks. I would be happy to answer any questions at your request.

The past three years, and the past year in particular, have been very difficult for some Cornwall residents. The impacts of Covid-19, including loss of income due to workplace closures, illness and quarantine, and now the ending of Federal and State programs that provided additional funding for income eligible residents, has led to an increase in demand for social service supports.

The Food Pantry continue to operate weekly, with "custom" boxes provided to anyone who requests them. Patrons complete a weekly form with their requests, and dedicated volunteers package the boxes for distribution on Mondays. We continue to rely heavily on donations from the community (both financial and food), but are pleased to have secured a partnership with CT Foodshare in 2022. This allows us to receive weekly deliveries of 500+ pounds of food, which has helped cut back significantly on costs.

An additional burden is the increased cost of electricity, fuel and food. We have seen a significant increase in the number of households seeking help from the State Energy Assistance Program in 2022-23, and unfortunately, despite significant effort from Maria Horn and others, the maximum award for support falls far short of the expense of heating a home for the winter. Thanks to a \$38,000 award from the Cornwall ARPA funds, we have been able to bridge this gap for many this season.

Housing continues to also be a big issue in Cornwall, as many people are looking for more affordable options in order to stay in town. There are very few affordable rentals, and the credit requirements and waitlists for affordable housing the region mean that many families leave the area before qualifying for a home in Cornwall.

But the news is not all grim. In its usual spirit, Cornwall continues to rise to the occasion, with residents consistently stepping up for their less privileged neighbors. Donations to the Food & Fuel Fund continue to come in, and each week there are donations of food items dropped at the Pantry. The Produce to the People Program provides weekly fresh vegetables from Cornwall gardens to the Pantry. And what can't be used with in Cornwall gets shared with other towns. And finally, there has been incredible support from people volunteering their time, some weekly for almost 3 years, showing up in snow and rain and schlepping heavy boxes. We are so grateful for the continued support!

- Heather Dinneen