

TOWN OF WESTERLY
COMPREHENSIVE PLAN CITIZENS' ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Regular Meeting – November 9, 2016 – 6:00 p.m.
Development Services Conference Room – Town Hall

A. 6:00 P.M. CALL TO ORDER

Members Present:	Gail Mallard, Chair Joseph T. MacAndrew, Vice Chair Faith Bessette-Zito Stuart Blackburn James J. Federico, III	Members Absent:	Gina T. Fuller Nancy N. Richmond
-------------------------	---	------------------------	-------------------------------------

Liaisons Present: Catherine DeNoia, Planning Board

Staff Present: Jason Parker, Town Planner
Benjamin Delaney, Recording Secretary

B. 6:00 P.M. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Motion by Mr. MacAndrew, seconded by Ms. Bessette-Zito, to approve the minutes of September 29, 2016. Motion **CARRIED** by unanimous vote.

C. 6:01 P.M. DISCUSSION OF FUTURE MEETINGS

Ms. Mallard stated there would not be a quorum for the proposed meeting on November 23, 2016. Meetings were currently proposed for December 14 and December 28, 2016 at 6:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m.

Ms. Bessette-Zito stated she could not be present at the beginning of the December 14 meeting.

Ms. Mallard noted she and Mr. MacAndrew would be meeting with Jack Armstrong, Planning Board Chair, on November 10, 2016 to discuss the Committee's progress.

Mr. Parker stated there was an unofficial timeline proposed earlier in the year which indicated the Committee should complete its review in November. He noted his understanding the draft Comprehensive Plan update (draft Plan) was written to meet the requirements of new state standards going into effect July 1, 2017 in case it was not approved by the State before that date. He noted additional Planning Board and Town Council review and public hearings were needed for the draft Plan's submission to the State.

Ms. Mallard suggested the Committee may submit its reviewed draft Primary Report (draft Report) to the Planning Board to allow it to begin its own review while both may work in parallel to review the draft appendices.

Ms. DeNoia stated for Mr. Federico there were a few references to the draft appendices.

Mr. Parker noted Mr. Armstrong may provide recommendations on how the draft appendices could be reviewed.

D. 6:10 P.M. REVIEW OF THE DRAFT PLAN

Implementation Plan – Natural Hazards

Ms. Mallard overviewed the Committee had discussed the meaning of planning for retreat in vulnerable areas and agreed to insert an action on removing the Potter Hill dam at its previous meeting.

She questioned the meaning and fairness of the second half of the third action.

Mr. MacAndrew suggested the text may be referring to increased elevations.

Mr. Parker suggested the text supported strengthening existing codes to limit development in sensitive areas.

Mr. Blackburn noted there would likely be many exceptions if a new building is implemented in the future.

Mr. Parker stated the action was speaking to provisions similar to those of CRMC, RIDEM and other municipalities and clarified the Town could not modify State codes.

Ms. Mallard cautioned taking away development rights from taxpayers could result in lawsuits. She noted existing law required new constructions in beach areas to be elevated.

Mr. Federico recommended "beach areas" be revised to "personal property."

Ms. Mallard stated her concern that a property owner may have purchased their property with a specific intent but are prevented from that development because a zoning change taking effect after their purchase.

Ms. Bessette-Zito stated her expectation such cases could be subject to a public hearing.

Ms. Mallard recommended the action be left as is and noted the second and eighth actions were eliminated.

Ms. DeNoia and Mr. MacAndrew recommended the seventh action be restored and revised to specify the Town should protect and replant native vegetation in publicly owned vulnerable areas.

Mr. Parker stated a similar requirement for owners of private property could be added to the Zoning Ordinance.

Mr. MacAndrew clarified the requirement could be limited to washout areas.

Ms. Mallard noted CRMC would not allow the destruction of a sand dune.

Mr. Parker questioned why the Town should be reliant only on CRMC.

Ms. Mallard stated the action would need to be revised to be more specific and questioned how it could be measured.

Ms. DeNoia stated the action should protect existing native vegetation in vulnerable areas from any disturbance.

Mr. MacAndrew noted many owners along the Pawcatuck River did not maintain a vegetative buffer, which made their properties more susceptible to erosion.

Ms. Mallard recommended the action should state "Protect and preserve existing native vegetation in vulnerable areas."

Implementation Plan – Character and Heritage

Mr. Parker noted the first policy was similar to the goal.

Ms. Mallard suggested the goal be shortened to state "Preserve the unique character and heritage of Westerly consistent with our history and culture." She questioned the meaning of the fifth policy.

Ms. Bessette-Zito questioned the meaning of 'special viewpoints' in the fourth policy.

Ms. Mallard stated her understanding viewpoints referred to receiving community feedback in specific neighborhoods before undertaking a project.

Mr. MacAndrew recommended the fifth policy be eliminated.

Ms. Mallard, citing the third policy, questioned how design principles helped to improve housing choices, transportation and commuting availability. She suggested the policy be revised as "Consistent

with the character and heritage of Westerly, improve housing choices, transportation and commuting availability.” She noted, as an example, a 15-story apartment complex in the North End would not be consistent with the existing built environment.

Ms. Bessette-Zito stated specific design principles in downtown could be used to foster live-work opportunities and transit-oriented development focused on commuting availability.

Mr. Parker noted the North End was zoned to allow the highest residential density in the town and would be the most appropriate area for the example apartment complex.

Mr. MacAndrew cited some subdivisions have occurred in aesthetically attractive neighborhoods which result in residences inconsistent with surrounding homes.

Ms. Mallard suggested the policy be revised as “Foster design principles consistent with individual neighborhoods to improve housing choices.”

Mr. Parker stated such a policy would also be seeking to restrict development rights of property owners proposing a structure which would meet all zoning requirements. He noted the policy’s connection to the draft Plan’s identification of neighborhoods. He stated the Town adopting local historic districts would be the only strong alternative for seeking consistent design in neighborhoods. He stated for Mr. Federico the Architectural Review Board made suggestions to applicants, the Planning Board and the Zoning Board of Review and could be referenced in the policy.

Ms. Mallard suggested the third policy be eliminated or combined with the fourth policy.

Mr. Blackburn, citing the fourth policy, stated “and viewpoints” could be eliminated as it was included under “Respect.”

Ms. Mallard suggested the fourth policy be revised as “Foster design principles that respect and support...”

Mr. MacAndrew suggested the sixth policy be revised as “Mitigate further commercial sprawl through adaptive re-use and promote alternative approaches...”

Mr. Parker suggested the sixth policy be revised as “Discourage commercial sprawl and promote alternative approaches to mitigate similar development conditions through redevelopment and adaptive re-use.”

Mr. Parker noted a case of a rezoning of a parcel to General Commercial adjacent to Westerly Crossings which would allow the parcel’s commercial development without expanding the Highway Commercial zone.

Discussion was held regarding the first action.

Mr. Parker suggested the first and second actions be combined and, citing Ms. Bessette-Zito’s noting that the second action referred to properties listed on the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP)and the first action referred to general historic districts, questioned if there would be a case of a historic district being designated nationally and not locally if local designation was available.

Ms. Mallard questioned if historic district designations would seek neighborhood input.

Mr. Parker clarified the second action sought for design guidelines to be created for districts listed on the NRHP.

Ms. Mallard stated the action potentially prevents homeowners from renovating their homes if located within a historic district.

Mr. Blackburn questioned the potential noted by Ms. Mallard and stated he was unfamiliar with the Zoning Ordinance’s regulations for the Shore Commercial – Watch Hill zone.

Ms. DeNoia stated regulations developed for other areas did not need to be as specific.

Mr. Parker confirmed there were no guidelines for renovating a building which was a

contributing structure to a historic district listed on the NRHP.

Ms. DeNoia stated the action would require renovations to be consistent with the structure's history.

Ms. Mallard stated historical neighborhoods should not be required to be designated as a historic district. She questioned if the fourth action was still needed.

Ms. Bessette-Zito recommended the action be revised as "Work with the Architectural Review Board to develop guidelines and strengthen review of structures, landscapes and appurtenances."

Mr. Parker recommended the text of the third action be strengthened.

Ms. Mallard stated there was an excessive amount of parking space for commercial businesses along Route 1.

Mr. Parker stated for Mr. MacAndrew the parking formula used by the Town was dated. He noted excessive parking was noted in sections on Land Use and questioned if the action belonged under Character and Heritage.

Mr. MacAndrew recommended an action to revise parking requirements be included.

Ms. Mallard noted the fifth action was focused on streetscapes and recommended a new fourth action be added as "Develop standards for new construction that reduce the requirement for parking and increases the amount of green space." She also recommended the third action be left as is and that "and revised development standards." be eliminated from the fifth action. She recommended the seventh action be eliminated and suggested the eighth action be revised as "Develop strategies to showcase the arts community downtown."

Mr. MacAndrew recommended the ninth action be eliminated.

Ms. Mallard recommended the twelfth action be eliminated.

Ms. DeNoia recommended the twelfth action be revised as "Encourage the expansion of educational offerings and institutions."

General Implementation Policies

Ms. DeNoia, citing the second policy, recommended "year-round residents" be listed first.

Mr. Parker suggested "regional service and retail" be revised as "commercial enterprises."

Ms. Mallard recommended "seasonal residents" be listed second and "tourism" listed third.

Mr. Parker, citing the fourth policy, questioned if "the Comprehensive Plan Citizens' Advisory Committee" should be substituted by "the Planning Board."

Discussion was held regarding the Committee and other relevant bodies reviewing the progress of the implementation plan.

Mr. MacAndrew suggested the Planning Board invite the Committee twice yearly to conduct a joint-review of progress.

Ms. Mallard recommended "The Comprehensive Plan Citizens Advisory Committee shall continue to meet at least semi-annually..." be revised as "The Planning Board shall meet with members of the Comprehensive Plan Citizens Advisory Committee at least semi-annually (January and July)..." and "The committee shall report, with the Town Planner, to the Planning Board on at least an annual basis." be eliminated.

The Committee was in consensus to revise the fifth policy as "The town must allocate adequate resources annually to maintain and improve GIS capability."

Mr. Parker suggested the seventh policy be revised as "On an annual basis, the Town Council..." as "On an annual basis (January), the Planning Board..."

Ms. DeNoia recommended the ninth policy be revised as "...recycling and conservation of..."

Implementation Matrix

Ms. Bessette-Zito recommended the sentence "It is also anticipated that..." be eliminated.

Ms. Mallard stated the Committee should review maps at its next meeting and recommended it conduct a second review of the draft Report to address the list of additional concerns. She requested the Committee receive updated copies of the Primary Report without tracked changes.

Mr. Parker suggested the Committee begin reviewing the draft appendices at its next meeting.

Ms. Mallard requested the Committee receive digital copies of the draft appendices.

E. 8:10 P.M. PUBLIC COMMENT

None

F. 8:10 P.M. ADJOURNMENT

Motion by Mr. MacAndrew, seconded by Mr. Federico, to adjourn. Motion **CARRIED** by unanimous vote.

Minutes for the November 9, 2016 regular meeting submitted by:



Benjamin Delaney