

**TOWN OF SOUTH WINDSOR
PLANNING & ZONING COMMISSION**

RECEIVED MAY 15 2024
@ 1:40 PM *K. Stahel*
Asst

SPECIAL MEETING MINUTES

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APRIL 2, 2024

MEMBERS PRESENT: Stephen Wagner, Robert Vetere, Alan Cavagnaro, Paul Bernstein

ALTERNATES PRESENT: Michael Ouellette

STAFF PRESENT: Michele Lipe, Director of Planning; Michael Lehmann, IT Support; Joshua Stern, Recording Secretary

SPECIAL MEETING

CALL TO ORDER: Chair Wagner called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Alternate Commissioner Ouellette was seated for Kevin Foley.

NEW BUSINESS: Discussion regarding the Plan of Conservation and Development with consultant SLAM:

1. Discussion of draft plan

Pat Gallagher, AICP, of SLAM, and Glenn Chalder, President of Planimetrics, displayed the draft Plan of Conservation and Development.

Chair Wagner suggested adding more detail to the table of contents, including a list of figures and maps. Gallagher said the introduction may be reworked slightly to be consistent with any updates to the regional and State plans.

Commissioner Ouellette noted that page 2-1 lists South Windsor's population as 26,918 as of 2020 and asked about more recent data. Gallagher said the decennial census is the most accurate population count; for inter-census years, estimates from the Department of Public Health are used. Commissioner Bernstein said the data in the POCD should be aligned with the recent Board of Education presentation; Gallagher noted that the later chapters contain information about the Town's enrollment trends.

Wagner requested edits to several of the maps in the draft Plan, including increasing the color contrast. On page 2-7, he recommended also referencing West Road with respect to the area between Route 5 and Sullivan Avenue. He suggested minor grammatical edits throughout the document as well.

Gallagher said some updates have been made to chapter 3 since the Commission last discussed the Plan. The Wheeler Drive property was switched from Buckland Gateway to its own category of Buckland Periphery, envisioned as non-residential, and some properties just east of the Town Center were added to the Gateway designation. For the Open Space Vision, text was added clarifying that the Connecticut River greenway is envisioned as a passive greenway corridor to protect land as it becomes available, and stressing the need to be sensitive to farmers.

Commissioner Bernstein distributed a statement describing South Windsor that he had drafted as an introduction to chapter 3. He feels the POCD would benefit from a description that speaks more specifically to what makes South Windsor unique. The Vision Statement that opens the chapter is from the Strategic Plan adopted by the Town Council in 2023. Lipe suggested that Bernstein's draft be the basis for the Chairman's Message at the beginning of the POCD. Ouellette recommended that the statement reflect the Town's history of agriculture and future commitment to it.

Wagner asked about the pictures in chapter 3. Gallagher said not all of the pictures are of South Windsor; photos were chosen to represent the Town's visions for different areas, not necessarily their current states. They decided to add language clarifying this intention. Wagner asked if the Neighborhood Nodes designation

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includes the intersection of Strong Road and Route 5. Gallagher said Route 5 intersections are categorized as Cross Street Nodes, but Lipe said the Strong intersection has mostly industrial uses; Lipe also suggested that the I-291 corridor have its own designation. Commissioner Vetere suggested a change to the Sullivan Avenue – West description; in response to a question from Ouellette, Lipe said any new manufacturing or warehouse developments in this area would be smaller than the existing ones.

Lipe noted that the sewer map on page 3-10 should reflect that the sewer has been extended on Abbe Road. In 2006, a church was approved on King Street, and a sewer agreement with East Hartford was planned but never executed; construction never began and the property has since sold. Gallagher said the Water Pollution Control Authority could examine and update the sewer map according to any approved zone changes. Lipe will check with other Town staff for updates to the map of the existing sewer system on page 7-14.

On the map on page 3-14, Lipe advised against marking a greenway corridor along the Connecticut River, as it could be mistaken for a trail, but suggested retaining the text saying a trail there could be revisited in the future. Chalder suggested changing the “Other Greenway Corridor” designation to “Possible Future Greenways.” Bernstein asked if the POCD carries the same weight as the regulations; Lipe clarified that the POCD serves as a vision to guide the regulations over the next 10 years.

Lipe said the list on page 4-2 should include the goals of increasing biodiversity in plantings and discouraging invasive species. Ouellette said the ecological and social sustainability sections should recognize the Town’s farming community as an asset.

Ouellette suggested that the Community Sentiment at the beginning of chapter 5 emphasize which issues South Windsor residents are concerned about, with the paragraphs on stormwater management, water quality, and wildlife habitat following from it. Under objective B on page 5-2, Wagner suggested discouraging the planting of native species that are unlikely to survive due to blights or pestilence. Lipe said the Town’s acquisition of Porter’s Hill and other properties should be noted in the open space section. In response to a question from Wagner, Gallagher said most of the Connecticut River is considered safe for boating but not swimming or fishing.

Lipe suggested edits to some of the conservation objectives in chapter 8; Wagner said the objectives for open space should highlight blazed hiking trails. Chalder suggested moving the Community Sentiment paragraph from page 5-6 to the beginning of the open space section. Town staff will confirm whether the trail map is up to date; Bernstein suggested labeling the major streets.

In the section on agricultural resources, Lipe suggested adding a mention of the agri-tourism regulations, as well as encouraging cottage bakeries. Wagner expressed concern about factory farming of livestock, saying the right-to-farm objective should have limits; Ouellette suggested adding language to encourage traditional farming methods. Chalder recommended that the paragraph about solar facilities acknowledge the Town’s limited influence on the approval process; Wagner noted the possibility of solar and agricultural uses on the same sites.

The Commission and consultants discussed the national and local Historic Districts; a mention of Ferry Lane was added to objective A on page 5-11. Wagner suggested encouraging underground utilities. At the suggestion of Commissioner Cavagnaro, Chalder changed a reference to “character” in objective A to “ambiance”; language was also added to support the Arts Commission and public art. Wagner asked about the scenic area near the center of town shown on the map on page 5-12. Gallagher said this area contains open agricultural fields, and the scenic area designation gives the Commission latitude to protect the views in that area.

The Commission discussed how chapter 6 should address the issue of school enrollment and the expiration in October 2024 of the affordable housing moratorium. Under objective A, they noted that housing growth should

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be kept in alignment with the capacity of the Town's police, fire, and other services in addition to the school system. Ouellette expressed concern about the focus on electrification, saying the current infrastructure cannot support the elimination of natural gas, heating oil, and gas-powered vehicles. Wagner noted that the Plan will cover a 10-year period; Chalder suggested that the Plan emphasize both energy efficiency and a transition from fossil fuels to alternative energy sources.

Wagner asked about the draft Plan's recommendation to establish more flexible zoning standards to support redevelopment. Gallagher said that since greenfield development is often an easier option, some towns allow relief from setback, density, or other requirements in order to incentivize redevelopment of existing buildings; Lipe noted the Geissler's floating zone and the height requirement adjustment for Carla's Pasta as examples. The language was reworded slightly.

Ouellette asked what policies are in place to encourage redevelopment of the Town Center. Lipe said a village district overlay zone was established to allow intensification and greater flexibility in the land use; village district zones are intended to be more design driven than use driven. It is a longer-term vision, but the property owners are aware and beginning to prepare. Wagner asked about revisiting the Main Street study; Lipe said she thinks the existing study is still valid.

In the section about the Buckland Road corridor, Ouellette asked about the statement that there is an opportunity to align the 22 Wheeler Road parcel within the overall vision for the corridor. Gallagher said this parcel currently has its own zoning designation. Lipe said a development there could be subject to similar setback, design, and landscaping criteria as the rest of the Gateway Zone, but the Plan specifies that housing is not envisioned for this parcel. On page 6-10, Wagner asked a clarifying question about access management and suggested updating the photo of Whole Foods. Lipe recommended adding a reference to I-291 to page 6-13; Wagner suggested an edit to the layout of the bar graphs on this page.

Wagner said he will send the consultants the Town's updated energy plan. Chalder proposed to add a paragraph to page 7-2 about the challenges of maintaining the volunteer fire department. Wagner noted that the Parks and Recreation building has some accessibility challenges. Lipe said the Plan should identify Walk and Wheel Ways as a subcommittee of the Park and Recreation Commission, also noting that the Public Works and Engineering departments oversee construction of sidewalks. It was noted that the mountain biking trails at Rye Street Park should be referenced in the conservation section of the Plan.

On the map on page 7-9, Lipe expressed concern about the number of roadways marked for possible thru-truck prohibitions. Gallagher said thru-truck prohibitions do not ban all trucks, but prevent them from using a particular road as a cut-through; the intention was to establish prohibitions on roads running east to west to funnel truck traffic down Route 5 to I-291. Lipe said enforcement would be an issue, but truck routing can also be specified through the approval process. The Commission discussed, and Gallagher made an edit to indicate that truck routing strategies can be an alternative to thru-truck prohibitions.

Wagner suggested adding speed limit reduction to the traffic calming strategies listed on page 7-8, also expressing support for enforcement cameras. It was noted that Town staff are currently updating the Complete Streets plan. Ouellette noted the gap in the sidewalks on Nevers Road. Wagner suggested mentioning the connection between aquifer maintenance and septic use.

Wagner said he does not think the power line that runs to the school bus depot would support electric school buses. Ouellette said there is significant underutilized industrial property in town and expressed concern that a data center for AI would place strain on the grid.

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2. Next Steps/Schedule

SLAM will aim to finalize the draft POCD by Friday, with some map updates to be completed by a later date. The PZC is scheduled to vote on referral of the Plan at the April 9 regular meeting, beginning the 65-day comment period. During this period, the Town Council and CRCOG both provide advisory reviews of the Plan, and the Council has the option of holding a public hearing. The PZC will then hold its public hearing on adoption of the Plan in June. If the Council takes action not to endorse part or all of the Plan, a supermajority of the PZC is required to adopt it.

Bernstein asked if a shortened version of the Plan is available. Gallagher said the appendices could serve as summaries of each of the main sections.

ADJOURNMENT

Commissioner Vetere moved to adjourn. Seconded by Commissioner Cavagnaro. Motion passed unanimously.

The meeting adjourned at 9:27 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Joshua CR" followed by a stylized flourish.

Joshua Stern, Recording Secretary