

TOWN OF STAMFORD
PLANNING COMMISSION MEETING
December 9, 2019
(UNAPPROVED)

Present: Planning Commission: Aaron Malachuk, Chair, Kurt Gamari, Helen Fields, Daniel J. Potvin, and Jenifer Hughs.

Sheila Lawrence, Stephen Bechtel, Steve Denault, and David Saldo were not present.

Visitors: James Sullivan, Bennington County Regional Commission.

Wojciech Rum.

Lori Shepard, Secretary.

Aaron Malachuk called the meeting to order at 7:05 p.m. and opened with the pledge of allegiance.

Helen Fields invited Wojciech Rum to attend the meeting. She values his input as a local businessman. She explained that the Planning Commission would like to be more welcoming to small businesses. Mr. Rum agreed that he would like to see the community come together and would like to see more business in town. Helen Fields thought a local Chamber of Commerce to promote businesses would be helpful.

MINUTES

MOTION by Dan Potvin to accept the regular meeting minutes of November 18, 2019 as written.

SECONDED by Aaron Malachuk. All in favor. Motion APPROVED.

VILLAGE CENTER DESIGNATION MEETING

Helen Fields attended the meeting on creating a village center in Dorset, VT. Helen Fields felt it was a great presentation with a slideshow and would have loved even more information. Obtaining this designation will open up grants and other funding sources for the town, which encourages more small business. She acknowledged that Dorset is a high-end resort town, which is much different than Stamford. Jim Sullivan noted that Dorset has a historic village and there was a lot of opposition to increased housing and different style buildings in the town center. Helen Fields could see that parallel in Stamford. Kurt Gamari thought Stamford needed to become a destination place, instead of a drive-through community. Helen Fields suggested the board consider this topic after they complete the Zoning By-law revisions. Jim Sullivan said the BCRC was awarded grant funding for the regional housing study and they will begin after the new year.

BUSINESS FORUM

Helen Fields would like to organize a Chamber of Commerce in Stamford to promote business in town. Jim Sullivan said it's hard for a Chamber of Commerce to survive in small towns. Helen Fields would like the Planning Commission to sponsor a business forum, maybe once or twice a year, and offered to cook for the event. They will invite all business owners in town and anyone else who may be interested, to share ideas and support.

DISCUSSION OF ZONING BY-LAWS

The board discussed the various districts and the different restrictions. Although the board wants to encourage business, the draft of the By-laws was much more restrictive in the rural district and encourages businesses to form mainly in the residential area. Lori Shepard mentioned some businesses

that might be preferable in the rural district over the residential, especially since we do not have any plan in place for municipal water or sewer to support tighter building in the center right now. Jim Sullivan felt if the board wanted to allow the same growth in the rural as the residential districts, then why have both districts? He agreed to add some language to allow some additional commercial use in the rural district but wants the town to restrict its impact on neighbors. Kurt Gamari felt the board should not be isolating businesses, they should be encouraging it. Jim Sullivan was worried about the Planning Commission making By-laws that were totally open to businesses in both districts.

The Planning Commission asked Jim Sullivan to explain the new paragraph he wrote on waivers. Jim Sullivan said variances should only be granted in exceptional circumstances, where without the variance, the property owner would be unable to make any reasonable use of their property. Things such as being unable to meet setbacks, for example, are better handled with a waiver. The variance is an appellate action where the original permit is denied and the property owner must appeal the denial through the Zoning Board of Adjustment. Instead, Jim Sullivan said residents should have the right to a waiver if the addition meets certain criteria set by the board. Jim Sullivan said if most of the ZBA's hearings are due to dimensional requirements, the Planning Board should either reduce their setbacks or allow waivers. The building permit application would have a box that property owners could check requesting a waiver that would be allowed automatically by the Administrative Officer. The board set the waiver criteria at additions of 300 sq. ft. or less or not more than 10% of the total square footage of the structure.

Jim Sullivan explained the new section on Planned Unit Development (PUD). Planned Unit Development allows towns to modify the requirements of the district in order to obtain certain objectives. He said any use allowed in the district could be allowed in the PUD.

The board thanked Jim Sullivan for his hard work in drafting the Zoning By-laws. He felt the By-laws are not perfect, but are more user friendly and much better than what we have now. He will make the revisions decided at tonight's meeting and provide a final copy for approval at the next meeting.

MOTION by Jenifer Hughs to adjourn. SECONDED by Aaron Malachuk. All in favor. Motion APPROVED. The meeting adjourned at 8:55 p.m.

The next meeting is scheduled for Monday, January 27, 2020 at 7 p.m.

Aaron Malachuk
Planning Commission Chair

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