

**MINUTES OF PUBLIC HEARING
HELD BY THE PLANNING AND ZONING COMMISSION
JANUARY 19, 2011**

ROLL CALL:

Members Present: Joseph Diminico, Chairman
Kevin Dougan, Vice Chairman
Andy Kidd, Secretary
Eric Prause
Horace Brown

Alternates: John Chaput

Absent: Anthony Petrone
Susan Shanbaum

Also Present: Mark Pellegrini, Director of Planning
Renata Bertotti, Senior Planner
Matthew Bordeaux, Environmental Planner
and Wetlands Agent
Ginger MacHattie, Recording Secretary

The Chairman opened the Public Hearing at 7:03 p.m. The Secretary read the legal notice for the application when the call was made.

EVERGREEN CROSSING, LLC – 325 New State Road – for a change to previously approved 182 condominiums to be rental units in a PRD zone – PRD Zone Change and Preliminary Plan of Development (E-51)

Attorney Stephen Penny spoke on behalf of the applicant, which in 2008 filed a PRD zone change seeking to develop 266 units of market rate rental housing on this property. That application was denied. Later in 2008, a new application was filed with substantial changes including a 32% reduction in the number of units to 182 units, change from rental to condominium ownership, the addition of garages and additional guest parking, and the removal of buildings from the upland review area. In February, 2009, the Planning and Zoning Commission (PZC) approved this second application, noting the zone change from industrial to residential posed the least risk to the public water supply aquifer. One condition of the approval was to restrict the development to condominium ownership.

In January 2010, the applicant requested relief from the condominium condition to allow rental units. In March, 2010, the PZC denied the request.

Attorney Penny said the applicants have submitted this new PRD application. He described the location of the property at 325 New State Road between the Hockanum River and Tolland Turnpike. It consists of 29.9 acres and is bordered on the north by Builder's Concrete, formerly Manchester Sand and Gravel, on the east by eight commercial properties, on the south Town owned land and on the west by I-84. The land is mostly flat agricultural fields and is zoned PRD. At the south end of the property there are two depressions which qualify as wetlands, as well as two other wetland areas. There are a variety of land uses in the area and a bus travels by the site every hour, connecting the site to employment centers and shopping, he said.

Attorney Penny said the project will include 182 apartment units in thirteen buildings. There will be surface and garage parking for residents, as well as guest parking. There will be fourteen units per building with 28% being one bedroom units, 58% being two bedroom units, and 14% being three bedroom units. There will be between 65 and 70 carports and a clubhouse.

Mr. Phil Forzley of Fuss & O'Neill explained that the property slopes from north to south and with the high point being at the north, the drainage will go from north to south, sheet flowing into the Hockanum River area. Access to the site will be through a primary driveway from New State Road passing into the central part of the site. There is one other access to the site for emergencies only, which will be over the Manchester Sand and Gravel land (now owned by Builder's Concrete) via an easement. Parking will accommodate 364 spaces for occupants and 46 spaces for visitors, totaling 410 spaces.

Mr. Forzley said the site is very flat so gravity sewer cannot be used. The applicant is proposing a pump station on the northern portion of the site with easy access to Adams Street. He said the State Health Department is satisfied with the location. The applicant has a robust landscaping plan. There will be a buffer around the site with plantings at the property line. He pointed out areas to remain undisturbed on the displayed map. There will be 176,000 square feet of designated open space in eight different areas, which he also pointed out on the plan.

Mr. Steve Mitchell of URS Corporation reviewed the report on traffic impacts. A traffic report was completed with the previous application. The original report was done in the typical way, using traffic counts done in November of 2008. He said this is an identical project with the only change being from condominium to rental units. Mr. Mitchell said the lowest traffic generator is rental apartments, which reduces the trip generation anticipated, but it is not a major change. The existing counts were done in July and again in November 2010. The only difference is a minor change in the morning peak count with additional southbound traffic. The difference is likely caused by the fact that school was in session for the second count. All levels of service at the site driveway are at A or B. Some improvements are recommended for New State Road. A short left turn lane for traffic going northbound and wanting to turn into the site will require a minor widening of New State Road. Circulation within the site is excellent, he said. Roadways loop through the site with access to the buildings from multiple directions. There are no comments on the report from the Town's Traffic Engineer.

Mr. Robert Sonicson of Waldo & Associates served as peer review engineering consultant and described himself as an environmental advocate. This is a sensitive area because of the location of Manchester's public water supply well. Residential development has the least potential for negative impacts, whereas industrial development is the worst in the hierarchy for development with potential negative impacts. Commercial development is better than industrial, but still an area of concern. Agriculture use has traditionally had the highest potential for negative impacts due to the use of herbicides and pesticides used in an uncontrolled manner. Multi-family, specifically, is the best of residential uses in an aquifer protection area due the fact that there is a single entity maintaining the site and is therefore able to control and protect the environment and wetlands.

Mr. Christopher Wood, Planning Consultant, was asked by Evergreen to review the zoning regulations and development plans for consistency in guidelines and requirements. Privately generated housing market data shows sales of single family homes and condominiums dropped quite dramatically over the last six or seven years. The applicant's proposal is consistent with the Plan of Conservation and Development and comports with the Town's zoning regulations.

Mr. Michael Stone of CB Richard Ellis responded to a question from Mr. Diminico by explaining that the rental market is growing. In the greater Hartford area, there is a 95% occupancy rate. Even during this recession, occupancy rates have been maintained, and rental demand is improving. For new development, condominium deals are not financially feasible but rental deals are because rental housing is in demand.

Mr. Steve Goodman, a real estate developer, distributed information to Commission members. He completed a market study surveying the Manchester rental market as a prospective renter. The vacancy rate in Manchester is 3%. Construction lenders do not want to finance condominium projects and the applicant is limited by financing. A buyer today is looking for 90-95% financing. FHA is one of the only avenues for that type of financing.

Mr. Goodman presented the design of the Broadleaf Development. With the "Big House" the development does not feel like an apartment complex, he said. There are fourteen units in each building, each with its own individual entrance. In each building, there are four one-bedroom units between 800 and 1,000 sq. ft. There are eight two-bedroom units between 1,100 and 1,350 square feet, and two three-bedroom units which are 1,600 square feet. The rental rate is between \$1,000 and \$1,700. Approximately 15 school age children are projected for a development of this size.

Mr. Goodman said the development will include a clubhouse, community center, recreation areas, walking areas, and a pool and patio area. There is expansive open space. The site and building plans are exactly the same as the plan that is currently approved.

Attorney Penny concluded by reiterating this plan is consistent with the Plan of Conservation and Development, which emphasizes the availability of affordable housing. The development will improve the environmental conditions on the site. There are no comments from the reviewing Town departments. The change in the type of ownership reflects the reality and major changes in the economic environment.

Chairman Diminico opened the floor for public comment at this time. No member of the public wished to comment on this application.

Ms. Bertotti received two letters in favor of this application. The first was from the Manchester Chamber of Commerce and the second was from Raymond Damato. Ms. Bertotti said Town staff reviewed the applicant's plan. There were no physical changes to the plan and there are no outstanding comments. She reviewed the modifications and conditions associated with the motion to approve this project in the past.

Mr. Pellegrini explained the current approval has the condition that the project be condominium rather than rental units because the applicant offered that as a condition. The question being asked of the Commission now is if there is any concern about approving this project as presented as a rental project.

In response to a question from Mr. Prause, Ms. Bertotti explained that if the Commission denies tonight's application, the applicant can still develop the project as presented and approved as condominium units. The only difference in the plan is the ownership of the units.

Mr. Pellegrini further explained that the application was originally approved with a condition of ownership. The applicant asked that the condition be removed and the PZC did not remove it. The only other avenue for the applicant is to file another application. It is unusual but the only change is from condominium to rental units.

Chairman Diminico closed the public hearing on this item.

The Planning and Zoning Commission took a brief recess at 9:02 p.m. and returned at 9:12 p.m.

TOWN OF MANCHESTER – 395 Porter Street – for renovation and expansion of the Highland Park School including building and parking expansion, addition of a bus loop and site improvements in a Residence AA zone – Special Exception (T-522)

Mr. Henry Thomas of LRC Group explained this plan is designed to Town standards and Department of Education requirements. The school will be vacated at the end of this school year and children will be off site for the 2011-2012 school year. They will return to a renovated school in the fall of 2012. The proposed plan is to fully renovate the building. Portable classrooms will be removed. The character and structure of the site will remain the same. Entrances and exits will also remain much the same. The biggest difference will be the construction of a dedicated bus loop off of Ferguson Road, with a one-way entrance and a one-way exit. Eight parking spaces will be dedicated for staff. This allows the front of the building to be used for parent traffic. The goal is to take the buses away from the front of the school, leaving the larger part of the site for car traffic. Accessible parking spaces will now be much closer to the front door.

Mr. Thomas said there will be a service area in the back that will look basically the same as the existing area, but with some grading improvements. The paved play area will be renovated, as will the existing playground and game field. An accessible route will be provided to the far end of the field. The kindergarten playground will be moved to the existing portable classroom area and will be dedicated and enclosed.

Mr. Thomas described the wetlands and upland review area on the site. The new bus loop will be in the regulated area. Grading will not look substantially different. There will be flat spots for accessible parking spaces. There will be a retaining wall near the new parking spaces.

He said the landscaping is trees and large lawn areas. The plan is to work with the mature trees along Porter Street and keep existing trees near the current play equipment area. An area will be cleared between the existing playground and bus loop area. New plant materials will be placed along Ferguson Road, as well as along the existing parking area and front of the building. Mr. Brown questioned the use of rose bushes in the landscape plan due to thorns.

Mr. John Gynen of Moser Pylon Architects said the original building was 6,000 square feet, with the rest of the building added in 1965. The goal is to hold classes for grades K-5 for 300 children. An elevator will be added as well as a 2,000 square foot media center and an administration area. On the second floor, there will be space for kindergarten, speech, special education, music, and art classes. In the 1928 portion of the building, there will be a smaller addition with an elevator. The school will have insulated windows, a new roof, new heating and cooling units, and C.O. sensors. In response to a question from Mr. Diminico, Mr. Gynen said the maximum capacity is 330 children.

Mr. Don Eukers of LRC Group described the drainage system to the Commission. Mr. Eukers reviewed erosion control measures, which include silt sacks, inlet filters, and stockpile areas with hay bales and silt fencing. Erosion control matting will be used on slopes greater than 3:1.

Ms. Segren Godwa described the nature and features of the on-site wetlands. She explained there is a south flowing stream system with good water quality. There is some bank erosion due to velocity and there are invasive plants in the southern portion of the wetlands. The function of the wetlands is partially for fish passage. The aquatic habitat is not high and there is ample buffer to protect the playing fields, she said. There will be no direct impacts to the wetland and there will be .14 acres of incursion into the 100' upland review area. Any runoff is directed toward the wetlands area.

Mr. Thomas reviewed the lighting plan, which consists of pole mounted full cut off lighting with pole heights of 12' and 20'. Stairways will have built-in step lights. Much of the lighting will be off after hours. In response to a question from Mr. Brown, Mr. Thomas explained the retaining wall will be unit masonry rather than precast.

Chairman Diminico opened the floor for public comment at this time. No member of the public wished to speak either in favor or in opposition to this application.

Ms. Bertotti said there are three outstanding staff comments, but they are all minor and technical in nature. If the PZC wishes to approve this application, these can be included as modifications.

The chairman closed the Public Hearing portion of the meeting at 10:16 p.m.

NOTICE: THE CASSETTE TAPE RECORDING OF THIS PUBLIC HEARING CAN BE HEARD IN THE PLANNING DEPARTMENT.

OFFICIAL TAPE NO. 1099, 1100, & 1101