

**MINUTES OF PUBLIC HEARING
HELD BY THE PLANNING AND ZONING COMMISSION
NOVEMBER 27, 2012**

ROLL CALL:

Members Present: Joseph Diminico, Chairman
Andy Kidd, Acting Vice Chairman
Eric Prause, Acting Secretary
Horace Brown
Mike Stebe

Alternates: John Chaput

Absent: Anthony Petrone
Susan Shanbaum

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

The Chairman opened the Public Hearing at 7:07 p.m. The Acting Secretary read the legal notice for the application when the call was made.

TOWN OF MANCHESTER PLANNING AND ZONING COMMISSION – an update of the
Town’s Plan of Conservation and Development – Plan of Conservation and Development
(2012-090)

Chairman Diminico explained this Plan of Conservation and Development (POCD) had been in the making for about three years and represented a lot of hard work.

Mr. Pellegrini presented an overview of the Manchester 2020 Plan, the Town’s Plan of Conservation and Development. State statutes require the Planning and Zoning Commission to adopt a POCD every ten years. He said the Plan is intended to be a policy guidance document for the community, identifying the community’s goals in that ten-year planning period and then laying out the steps to take to accomplish those goals. If followed, Manchester should achieve the vision laid out in the planning document. The POCD is used by the Planning and Zoning Commission (PZC) when considering regulation changes, zoning map changes, and land use policies. The POCD should also be used by other boards and commissions for guidance. He said the POCD is not a regulation nor does it carry any force of law, but is meant to embody the aspirations and vision of the community.

Mr. Pellegrini said the planning process has been going on for over two years. It started with a Planning Academy. Expert speakers spoke about various trends in the area of housing,

economics, transportation, open space, and agriculture. This gave the community a feel for what would be affecting the Town over the planning period. For this plan, instead of creating subcommittees to look at particular functional areas such as transportation, housing, or open space as was done in the past, the PZC decided it would involve all boards and commissions as well as community residents at the same time, to look at all of those things that may or may not affect different areas or neighborhoods. He said it was meant to be a comprehensive, holistic look at the community. The process was organized around the State's growth management principles. Discovery workshops were held and the Town was divided into four quadrants, with meetings held in each quadrant. Workshops were held on particular issues such as transportation, agriculture viability, and housing. Out of that work, character areas were developed. Staff did research compiling data behind the plan. A full draft of the POCD was prepared and a workshop was held with the PZC, who provided feedback that resulted in the draft before the public now. He said after this public hearing, the Commission will consider the feedback received and use it to develop a final recommendation.

Mr. Pellegrini reviewed the aspirations, goals, major trends and opportunities, and challenges and threats. He displayed a map showing clusters of natural, historical, and cultural assets, as well as a map showing clusters of activity and major transportation corridors. With all of that identified, the next step was to collect the data and convey it in a message and image that we can continue to work toward.

Mr. Anderson explained that past POCDs generally had a Proposed Land Use map which spelled out the types of uses proposed for each area of Town. In Manchester 2020, the qualities that make Manchester a great place were looked at and a series of community character descriptions were developed.

Mr. Anderson reviewed and described the eleven character designations: Mixed Use Center, Mixed Use Regional Center, Neighborhood Center, Community Corridor, Commercial Corridor, Business Park, Core Neighborhood, Traditional Suburban, Suburban, Rural/Agricultural, and Natural.

Mr. Anderson explained the Plan was organized around the State's growth management principles. He reviewed each goal and displayed the objectives of each as it related to the growth management principles. The nine goals were to redevelop and invest in existing and potential corridors and activity nodes, promote vibrant, walkable neighborhoods, enhance connectivity between housing, amenities, and services, increase the supply of a diverse housing stock to meet the needs of all residents, create an arts and cultural district, invest in attracting and expanding desirable industries, preserve and promote agriculture as a desired land use, preserve land containing natural resources such as forests, watersheds, habitats and adjacent land, maintain existing open space land resources, green the urban landscape and existing neighborhoods, preserve Manchester's existing housing stock, invest in the restoration and preservation of public historic land and buildings, protect at-risk districts and properties, and market and promote historic assets.

The Planning and Zoning Commission took a brief recess at 7:50 p.m. and returned at 8:00 p.m.

Chairman Diminico opened the floor for public comment at this time.

Mr. Malcolm Barlow, 627 Spring Street, said his wife Susan asked him to present her comments to the Commission, which Mr. Barlow summarized. Mrs. Barlow would like to see some language changes to encourage more hiking and biking, conservation of Center Memorial Park and Center Springs Park, and to establish a plan to protect the Great Lawn. She would like some changes concerning walkability, the East Coast Greenway, and the Cheney Rail Trail. Her letter was submitted for the record.

Mr. Barlow reviewed his letter to the Commission as well. His concerns include protecting Center Memorial Park and addressing the needs of the library system. He said the Plan should include language that preserves and protects Case Mountain Park and Center Springs Park.

Mr. John Weedon, 142 Lamplighter Drive, Chair of the Conservation Commission, focused on growth management principle one, and put together recommendations for goals 7 through 10. He said the community wants to protect open space and preserve farmland, and the tools included in this goal will allow us to protect what we have left. The Conservation Commission requests the POCD be approved as put forward.

Mr. Carl Zinsser, 176 Ralph Road, spoke regarding the agriculture and farmland recommendations of the Plan. He said a farmer should have the right to farm and sell his land if he desires. Looking at the plan, it seems the government is getting involved in private property. The Plan talks about Manchester remaining farmland, but asked what happens when an owner wants to sell. It seems the plan is putting the agriculture zone on top of all the other zones. He believes the free market needs to be allowed to work. Government has a place, but it has to know what that place is. It is not the government's role to preserve farming or to take away property rights.

Ms. Denise L'Heureux said Center Memorial Park is on the National Historic register and should stay that way. We should not infringe on it by expanding the library. She said the Town needs to concentrate on a community center and get those types of activities out of the library. The Town also needs a day shelter for our homeless population. Ms. L'Heureux said the Town is letting historic buildings fall apart or be abused by the Fire and Police Departments. She questioned why Broad Street was not addressed in the POCD after the Town spent \$8 million on that property.

Mr. Fred Spaulding, 18 Myrtle Street, concurred with Mrs. Barlow's suggestions regarding bikeways and walkways. He said there are things that can be done with the streets to make them safer for bicycles and pedestrians. Mr. Spaulding cannot think of any place more important to the Town than Center Memorial Park; it is the Town's civic center and displays an image for anyone going through Town. He suggested the Town's empty buildings be catalogued. When addressing the library, the situation should be considered in a comprehensive plan; our libraries are not separate entities, he said. A traffic study will be needed when considering Mary Cheney Library. People live in the area and the streets are only 26' wide and parking is a problem.

Ms. Rita McParland, 63 Nutmeg Road, said page 90 needs to be rewritten. The statement regarding the best plan for the libraries should not include an addition to the Mary Cheney Library.

Mr. Scott Aiken, 92 Laurel Street, thinks the Manchester 2020 Plan is the most comprehensive document created in Manchester since its Charter. He is hopeful about Manchester since reviewing this plan but stressed the Plan needs to be implemented and accelerated. Mr. Aiken said the wording for the library should remain as is in the Plan. He feels strongly about the opportunities here and the only thing holding us back is fear. He suggested voting on issues like the library referendum in odd voting years, as this is when voters with local knowledge will vote. Mr. Aiken likes walkable neighborhoods but thinks the closing of Nathan Hale School kneecapped that neighborhood. If Manchester holds itself back, it will slowly die. People with young children will not move in and young families will move out.

Attorney Tom Moriarty, representing Loren Andreo of 396 Bush Hill Road, explained his client owns 25 acres of property in the Bush Hill Road area. The property is zoned RR and is used to grow hay. His father was a farmer and he grew up on the farm with his parents. The land was handed down to him and he will hand it down to his children. Under the RR zone, the future potential of this property is 20 or 25 building lots. Attorney Moriarty said his client is very concerned about the POCD and what it says about preserving farmland. Attorney Moriarty said Mr. Andreo has lived here all of his life and has seen changes. There is no viable economic opportunity for farming this land. If his client's land is changed to agriculture, it would drastically affect him. It does not seem fair that a precondition to the approval of a building lot is that farming would have to go with it. Attorney Moriarty, on behalf of his client, asked that the farmland goal be rewritten as farming is not currently an economically viable activity.

Ms. Eileen Sweeney, 86 Hawthorne Street, said Manchester 2020 was a good community exercise. She recommended a simple solution for the library, which is returning it to a library. She is supportive of families with children and suggested the use of another public building as a community center. She recommended a day shelter for people who need somewhere to go during the day.

Ms. Sweeney supported the historic preservation recommendations in the Plan and would like to see an ordinance concerning demolition. She said when people apply for a demolition permit, the Town is not providing alternatives. The backdrop of this Town for tourists is the historic infrastructure. She would like to see more sidewalks repaired, installed, and maintained. She does not support developing trails as much because they are isolated and not safe. With public sidewalks, people are around and it provides a better return on investment.

Ms. Sweeney supported community gardens, which encourage intergenerational interaction and healthy eating. She said the industrial parks should be repurposed for medical offices and she would like to see rail and trolley transportation. She does not support the bus line from New Britain to Hartford. She mentioned the median on Broad Street near Saint James Cemetery and asked if there is room for emergency vehicles to get by. Ms. Sweeney said she was hoping for wider sidewalks on Broad Street. Manchester is rich in historic infrastructure and she supports plans to promote our history. She also supports replacing trees that were removed and lining our streets with trees, which will provide shade, cleaner air, and filter the sun for safe driving.

Mr. Kevin O'Brien, 252 Bush Hill Road, spoke on behalf of his neighbor and good friend, Mr. Steve Botti. Mr. O'Brien has lived next to the Bottis for 22 years. He loves the neighborhood, open space, and farmland. It is unfair for the Town to preserve farmland by imposing its desires

on farmers. To add an additional zone is not necessary. He said the RR zone is sufficient. If saving farmland is a priority for Manchester, the Town should come up with money to purchase the farmland.

Mr. Steve Botti, 260 Bush Hill Road, owns over 60 acres and tried to develop it but ran into overbearing expenses. In 2013, his family will have owned the property for 100 years. Over the past 65 years, he and his family members have had to work an outside job and farm just to make ends meet. The agriculture designation will make it that much harder to develop or sell his property. If farming were really that good, more people would be farming, he said. His property is not good, farmable land. If he raises cows, the neighbors complain about the stink. The Boticellos are doing well because they diversified and have a lot of land by the river in South Windsor to support their Manchester property.

Mr. Thomas Danahy, 23 Myrtle Street, thinks the POCD design is fantastic. He would like to see Center Memorial Park left untouched, more trees planted, and a community center in Town.

Ms. Leslie Frey, 30 Florence Street, likes the idea of conserving and restoring green space but hears the concern of the farmers. She suggested the Town look at purchasing properties so the farmers are not penalized. She has a concern regarding page 12 of the POCD and Manchester's changing historic development pattern. Manchester is a historic town with historic buildings that have to be maintained and preserved. She does not want to see development done like it was in the north end of Town.

Manchester owns vacant historic properties. Ms. Frey said the former Youth Services Bureau (YSB) could be used as a day center for the homeless. Cheney School would be a great place for community activities currently taking place in the library. Case Lodge is being vandalized and that needs to be addressed. Main Street is seeing a rebirth. Ms. Frey, referring to page 55, said Manchester needs to invest in restoration and preservation and that should be done through an open committee. There should be a seat on the Building Committee for someone with preservation experience to assist in the adaptive reuse of historic buildings. The Town should provide incentives for rehabilitation of older homes. Many of the prior programs were based on income, but help should be available for any homeowner in the targeted area. Currently the SMARTR Committee is studying the school system's facility needs. She has heard the school age population is decreasing but then heard that elementary school enrollment will increase over the next four to five years. She was very disappointed that Nathan Hale School closed; it was the anchor of the neighborhood.

Referring to the loss of Depot Square, Ms. Frey said Manchester needs to learn from history. When an application comes in to demolish a house over 50 years old, the applicant should be made to wait a certain number of days. Ms. Frey is glad the Parkade building was torn down and grass was planted but she is not happy with the Blue Back Square idea. She suggests senior or over 55 housing in that location. She agrees with previous speakers who said trees need to be replaced. Ms. Frey would like to see Mary Cheney Library upgraded in its current footprint.

Mr. Gene DeJoannis, Scott Drive, has heard a lot of discussion about preserving our historical and cultural assets. He suggested the Town be proactive and have a professional do an inventory of those assets.

Ms. Susan Holmes said the Town needs new tax revenues and should try to attract new, clean businesses. She suggested a sports center at the Parkade and more entertainment. She would not like to see more housing and rejects the urbanization of Manchester. She said a high priority is school renovations. Manchester is a beautiful Town with many assets. We need to maintain the parks we have, not create new parks or bike trails. A lot of Manchester's assets are hidden or unused. Regarding transit, Ms. Holmes said the mall route loses money and suggested this could be an opportunity for a smaller transit vehicle. She would love to be able to take the bus into Hartford, but there are so many transfers it makes it difficult. Sidewalks are expensive and fall apart quickly; she would be interested in woodchip paths. Ms. Holmes does not like the median on Broad Street; she would rather see that money spent on schools or parks. She agrees with the speakers who are saying that the government should not interfere in how people use their property.

Mr. Loren Andreo, Jr. has 25 acres on Bell and Bush Hill Road. His family has not run a farm in 65 years because his family got out of farming. It is inappropriate to change this area to the agriculture designation. He has not built on the property but wants to retain the option to sell or develop his land. He said the agriculture designation would be a hardship.

Ms. Peg DeForge, 130 Broad Street, is familiar with the work going on in the Broad Street area. She knows people voted to have Broad Street revitalized, but does not know if the community knows exactly what is happening there. She said now that the median is in Broad Street, if a car were to break down it would cause gridlock. Ms. DeForge mentioned the library and park issue and wondered if anybody from the community was a part of that process. The design included a terrace and she reminded people that we live in New England; that terrace will be used for about two months. She has heard that we should restore and maintain the Town's historic properties and wondered how the library fits in to that plan.

Mr. Fred Lee, 176 Gardner Street, grew up in the historic east side of town and lived in the historic west side of town. It was heartbreaking for him to see Nathan Hale School closed, especially after the Town spent millions of dollars on the fire house across the street. Mr. Lee would like to see the Town offer more incentives to restore historic properties. He bought a condemned property that is also a farm. He is a farmer and chooses to farm. If land is developed around farm properties, it would help to leave buffer space in the development. Developers have to set aside land for open space, but the land is often swamp land or culverts. The set aside land should be used for good things such as community gardens. Mr. Lee is upset that the agriculture designation recommendation is limited to the southwest quadrant. He owns one little piece of land but farms five other pieces. He suggested Manchester look at Glastonbury, which has done a wonderful job of development and preserving of farming. Mr. Lee applauded the PZC and staff for the growth of the farmer's market. He urged the Commission not to let money become an issue in this decision; the agriculture designation will be an enormous help for people that want to get into agriculture.

Mr. Pellegrini said there was a lot of valuable testimony and his department will compile it for the PZC to review and consider before it makes its final decision. After the Plan is adopted, the next step will be to determine how to carry out the plan.

Ms. Bertotti said she sent a copy of the Plan to the Capitol Region Council of Governments (CRCOG) and the Board of Directors. Comments from CRCOG support it and find it consistent with the State Plan of Development as well as that of other Towns. CRCOG did identify one potential inconsistency with cluster development. She has not received any communication from the Board of Directors regarding the Plan.

There being no further public comment and at the consensus of the Commission members, the Public Hearing on this item was closed at 9:47 p.m.

NOTICE: A DIGITAL RECORDING OF THIS PUBLIC HEARING CAN BE HEARD IN THE PLANNING DEPARTMENT.