

**TOWN OF MANCHESTER
PLANNING AND ZONING COMMISSION MEETING MINUTES
THURSDAY, DECEMBER 6, 2012
TOWN HALL – MANCHESTER ROOM**

MEMBERS PRESENT: Joseph Diminico, Andy Kidd, Horace Brown, Susan Shanbaum, John Chaput

ALSO PRESENT: Gary Anderson, Senior Planner
Renata Bertotti, Senior Planner
Matthew Bordeaux, Environmental Planner/Wetlands Agent
Mark Pellegrini, Director of Planning and Economic Development

Time Convened: 7:15 P.M.

The Commission reviewed a summary of the public comments received at the November 27 public hearing prepared by Mr. Anderson and the staff responses to those comments.

Malcolm Barlow's letter to the Commission suggested the third paragraph on page 90 be amended to reflect the recent referendum results on the proposed Mary Cheney Library expansion. He suggests the language suggest the Town consider relocation of the main library or diverting services to Whiton Library or other locations. Several speakers also suggested options beyond expanding the Mary Cheney Library in place be addressed. The staff agreed the 3rd paragraph under libraries on page 90 should be revised to reflect the results of the November referendum vote. Instead of the language proposed by Mr. Barlow, which identifies specific alternatives, staff suggested the following language:

“In 2008 the Board of Directors authorized the study of options for expanding the Mary Cheney Library at its present location. A bond referendum question was placed on the November 2012 election ballot for funds to add approximately 10,000 sq. ft. of space and renovate the existing 24,000 sq. ft. of the main library building. The referendum question was defeated. As a result, the deficiencies and needs of the main Manchester public library remain, and they should be resolved. It is expected the Board of Directors will reexamine the options to address this need during the planning period.” The Commission agreed to consider the proposed revision.

Also, Mr. Barlow's letter suggested adding the following language regarding Case Mountain: “A goal of the Town shall be to protect and preserve the natural landscape and geology of Case Mountain Park, along with its scenic roadways, waterways and paths.”

Staff noted there are no similar specific recommendations for any of the other Town parks or landscapes, and recommend leaving such detailed goals for subsequent study on a site-by-site basis. The Commission members felt the current draft language was sufficient.

In Susan Barlow's correspondence she requested that Chart D be amended to include Center Memorial Park. Staff said Table D lists historic buildings, and it would be appropriate to strike the word properties and replace it with buildings to more accurately reflect the content of the table. The historic landscapes are mentioned in the 2nd full paragraph on page 24. Staff also

suggested changing the second sentence in the third full paragraph on page 24 to read: “Table D shows the Town owned buildings on the National Register” to clarify the contents of the table. In staff’s opinion this is sufficient to recognize the existence of historic landscapes in historic districts or neighborhoods.

Ms. Barlow also suggested adding the following to GMP 2 Item C: “Adopt regulations to prevent encroachment on Center Memorial Park, Center Springs Park, and other historic parks. Establish a plan to protect the Great Lawn in perpetuity”. Staff recommended such decisions be left to more detailed site-specific study and analyses and the language remain as written.

Ms. Shanbaum noted that under GMP 2 Goals and Objectives, the goal is to invest in the restoration and preservation of public historic land and buildings, however the objectives talk specifically about buildings and there is no mention of historic land or landscapes. Mr. Pellegrini said the staff would draft an objective related to historic landscapes to include under GMP2.

Ms. Barlow’s testimony suggested adding the wording “including Center Memorial Park and Center Springs Park” to GMP 3 Item B-3. Staff suggested the recommended addition would be out of context here. GMP 3 item B-3 addresses architectural assets (i.e. buildings) in the context of redeveloping and revitalizing existing commercial and mixed use centers, not landscapes or parks. The Commission members agreed.

One speaker at the hearing suggested the plan make recommendations for the use of vacant town-owned buildings. Staff noted the GMP 2 Item A-1 calls for establishing a committee to find adaptive reuses for vacant public (i.e. Town) assets. Staff believed this was sufficient as a plan objective. Specific recommendations for adaptive reuses will depend on detailed information and analysis on a building-by-building basis. The Commission members agreed to leave the language as proposed.

It was suggested the words “dispose of” not be used in reference to Town buildings. The words “dispose of” appear on page 12 of the Community Facilities appendix. Disposition could mean the sale or transfer of surplus property, which may in some cases be the best option for some surplus municipal properties. Staff recommends leaving the language as written. The Commission members agreed.

It was suggested the plan call for further incentives for historic preservation. Staff noted there are several recommendations for preservation incentives. The Commission members agreed.

In other testimony, it was suggested Housing Rehabilitation programs and funds be made available to all homeowners, regardless of income. Staff said the language in the plan regarding financial incentives does not refer to income. Income eligibility requirements are typically the domain of the funding source.

It was suggested owner-occupancy be included as a goal under GMP 5. Staff said that owner occupancy varies neighborhood to neighborhood based on the age and type of housing stock. The plan encourages increased owner occupancy in historic neighborhoods, which typically have more multi-family dwellings and where owner-occupancy rates are low relative to town-wide owner occupancy rates. Staff believes the recommendations are appropriate as written. The Commission members agreed.

Ms. Barlow's memo suggested adding the goal "to provide safe, off-street walking, running, and bicycling, thus to avoid encounters between pedestrians and vehicular traffic" to GMP Item C-1. She also suggests adding: "Establish a plan to open the Cheney railroad as a protected corridor connecting the North End to the East Coast Greenway, thus providing a safe passage for pedestrians and bicycles." to GMP 4 Item C-2. Staff said the revised sidewalk and trails maps submitted with its October 26th memorandum identified several trails, including the Cheney railroad trail, as desired additions to the trail system. Staff suggested the following revision to GMP 4 Item C-2: "Complete or connect bikeway and trail systems including the Cheney Rail trail, Purdy trail, Bigelow Brook Greenway, Charter Oak greenway, and Hop River Trail." After discussing the proposed revised language, the Commission asked the staff to reference trails and multi-use paths as identified on the Pedestrian and Bicycle Infrastructure map.

Several speakers proposed including additional language about complete streets and making biking and walking in town safer. Staff believes the current language of GMP 4 Item C adequately addresses connectivity, walkability, and "complete street" options for the Town to consider.

Several speakers at the public hearing, including property owners and their attorneys, encouraged the Commission to reconsider the idea of establishing an agricultural zone in which substantial open space and/or agricultural set asides are required. The speakers felt this would decrease the economic value of their land. They suggested if the Town were interested in preserving agricultural uses on farm land, the Town should buy the land. It was suggested the current Rural Residence zone is sufficient to ensure rural character.

Staff noted a main goal of the plan was to increase the economic viability of agriculture as a land use so farmers, or owners of current or former agricultural lands, will be able to afford to keep land in agricultural use as opposed to selling land for development. Another goal is to avoid or minimize conflicts between agricultural uses and residential uses so both can coexist. Staff suggests amending the language as follows to keep the goal and objectives in the plan while addressing the concerns of those at the hearing who suggested an agricultural zone would be too rigid or would diminish their economic options. The following language is a combination of the recommendations from the Conservation Commission under GMP 1 Items A-3 & 4 and edits to those sections by staff as follows:

- 3) Review the zoning regulations and consider regulation amendments that would protect and promote the economic viability of active or potential agricultural lands and protect both agricultural and residential uses when they are in proximity to each other. All State defined agricultural activity should be considered as well as accessory activity that would support economic viability. Future residential uses on rural/agricultural lands should be clustered to preserve productive or potentially productive farmland. The Town should support the provision of public or community sanitary sewer utility systems which would be required to accomplish cluster development.

It was suggested the rural/agricultural character area be expanded to other parts of town where farming currently occurs and not limited to the Southwest quadrant. Several speakers emphasized farming is not economically viable in their experience, although other testimony indicated there are working farms in Manchester.

The Commission reviewed the language recommended by the Conservation Commission and discussed adopting a few of the proposed revisions instead of the entire body rewritten for GMP#1. The Commission acknowledged the CC's suggestion that the development of a Town Farm not be limited to a specific site. The Commission also accepted the recommendation of the CC to develop and implement resource management plans. In addition, the Commission requested the specific reference to a dollar amount per capita dedicated to an urban forestry program be removed

Several speakers at the public hearing suggested neighborhood schools were important and the Plan should call for Nathan Hale School to be reopened. One speaker said that while the plan indicates decreasing elementary school enrollment, the SMARTR Committee indicates increasing enrollment in the lower grades.

The Community Facilities appendix section acknowledges that Manchester's public school capital needs must be addressed. It also acknowledges that the SMARTR Committee has been charged with developing a plan for capital improvements to the school system and is currently conducting in-depth research on needs and options to meet those needs. Staff believes the language in the plan should remain as written. The Commission members agreed.

The Conservation Commission recommended the Goals and Recommendations for GMP 1 be reworded as outlined in October 15, 2012 memo to the PZC from Matt Bordeaux, Environmental Planner/Wetlands Agent. These changes better reflect the major themes communicated during the quadrant workshops.

Staff recommends combining the comments in paragraphs 3 and 4 of the Conservation Commission's recommendations to address agricultural issue in GMP 1 Item A. The Commission may decide to adopt the language proposed by the Conservation Commission for GMP 1 Items B, C, and D. Mr. Bordeaux offered to make further revisions to this particular section to reflect the Commission's comments.

Two speakers suggested the Plan should not support bus rapid transit connections to Manchester. The planning process indicated it is important that the Town support bus rapid transit connections between Manchester and Hartford as a means of improving transit options for Manchester resident's and ensuring convenient connections to regional transit opportunities including enhanced commuter rail service. Staff thinks this recommendation should remain in the plan. The Commission members agreed.

Time Adjourned: 9:20 P.M.

I certify these minutes were adopted on the following date:

January 23, 2013
Date

Joseph Diminico, Chairman