

**MINUTES OF WORKSHOP
HELD BY THE PLANNING AND ZONING COMMISSION
APRIL 16, 2018**

ROLL CALL:

Members Present: Eric Prause, Chairman
Andy Kidd, Vice Chairman
Michael Stebe, Secretary
Timothy Bergin
Jessica Scorso

Alternates: Patrick Kennedy
Jay Stoppelman
Teresa Ike

Also Present: Gary Anderson, Director of Planning
Renata Bertotti, Senior Planner
Matthew Bordeaux, Environmental Planner/
Wetlands Agent
Nancy Martel, Recording Secretary

REQUIREMENTS FOR PARKING

Mr. Anderson explained to the Commission that Staff feels it is an important time to review parking requirements, in terms of the number of parking spaces, the allowed surfaces, and all issues related to parking. Manchester is a nearly built-out community. There is not a lot of “green land” left for new development, he said, and a lot of commercial development will need to be redeveloped along with mixed use or residential. One of the assets Manchester has in some areas is parking lots, which begs the questions of whether there are ways to allow additional development in already-developed parking lots, whether that would be wise, and whether it should be encouraged. He stated that increasing development costs are an issue; any developer or property owner would agree that everything is more expensive than it used to be and every dollar counts in terms of completing a project. Therefore, any way the Town can decrease the amount of unnecessary requirements will be helpful to the development community.

There are also environmental considerations, Mr. Anderson noted. The State has required all towns in Connecticut to review their storm water management practices, requiring an MS4 permit, which will force the Town to look at the way storm water is permitted in methods which were not typical engineering in the past. Those requirements also pertain to parking lots. Mr. Anderson questioned whether it would be possible to incentivize developers to accomplish this in a way that will not only be helpful to the environment but will also help the Town to implement the permit from the State.

Mr. Anderson reported that there is also interest in multi-modal transportation, i.e., walking, biking, and transit, and questioned whether that has an impact on the number of parking spaces or the location of parking.

Mr. Anderson displayed slides of pertinent items and requested feedback from the Commission:

Parking Minimums

Mr. Anderson said that the zoning regulations regulate the minimum number of spaces required, depending on the use, and this is an inexact science. At times, it seems that the regulations require too much parking, and there may be times when not enough parking is required, he said. There are towns and cities that have parking maximums, Mr. Anderson stated. Recently, there have been examples of developers planning to build 100 spaces beyond what the zoning regulations require, he said, and asked if that should be limited.

Parking Minimum Examples

Mr. Anderson gave some examples of parking minimums required by the zoning regulations:

- Business Establishments: 1 space for each 250 sq. ft. of gross floor area.
- Restaurant: 1 space per 3 seats.
- Hotel: 1 space per unit, plus 1 per staff member, plus 1 for every 4 restaurant seats.
- Places of Worship: One space for every 3 seats. Mr. Anderson noted that the regulations also state that the parking requirement “may be waived in whole or in part provided it can be demonstrated to the satisfaction of the Commission that sufficient spaces are committed and available...”
- Shopping Malls: Between 4 and 5 spaces per 1000 sq. ft. Depending on the size of the shopping mall, the Town requires a certain number of spaces, he explained. The Shoppes at Buckland Hills are an example; most of the time, a substantial amount of those spaces are not used, Mr. Anderson said.
- Schools: “Sufficient to accommodate personnel, students, visitors and service vehicles.”
- Multi-Family Residential: 2 spaces per unit plus visitor parking. Mr. Anderson noted that the regulations state that, “the applicant may request to decrease the visitor parking requirement if the applicant can show that such requirement would not be needed...”

Mr. Anderson suggested that the Commission could think about how the applicant would show that the requirement is not needed, and what might be in place that would meet a set of criteria in which the applicant may not need that many spaces.

Surfaces

Mr. Anderson said that the regulations currently require all parking lots to be paved. He asked if other materials should be considered. He also asked whether additional landscaping requirements should be considered.

There have been certain projects where the development community has requested pavers, or asked if some of the parking could be deferred, Mr. Anderson said. At this time, Manchester’s regulations do not allow that. Assistant Town Engineer Michelle Handfield is completing a project for her graduate class at UConn, he said. He explained that there are different materials such as pervious asphalt; porous asphalt, which requires maintenance; pervious concrete;

interlocking pavers, which allow storm water to infiltrate into the ground; brick pavers, which can be very expensive; and plastic grid pavers.

Off-Site Parking

Mr. Anderson said the regulations currently require all off-street parking to be on site, except in the Central Business District (“CBD”) and Historic Zones. The regulations do provide for an Off-Street Parking Zone, he said, but only directly adjacent to the associated use, and only “to act as a buffer strip between residence zones and business and industrial zones...” Mr. Anderson asked whether the regulations should allow off-site parking in additional zones and configurations.

He cited an example of an applicant stating that they cannot meet the parking requirements on their property but could meet it with a neighboring property. There is nothing in the regulations currently to allow that, he explained. Staff recently met with a developer and this change would have helped them.

Shared Parking

Mr. Anderson said that the regulations currently allow shared parking in the Form-Based zone (and to some extent CBD and Historic zones.) He asked if it should be allowed elsewhere.

Deferred Parking

Some communities allow a developer to defer constructing some parking spaces to gather data on actual use, Mr. Anderson said. The developer is typically required to show that the parking could be constructed if necessary. Manchester does not currently allow this practice, he said, and asked if it should.

Mr. Anderson reported that some communities’ regulations state that up to a certain percentage of spaces can be deferred. After a year, the use will be reviewed and, if the site works, they will not be required to build the spaces. He noted that an issue would be the turnover of spaces, which may complicate the process. Labyrinth Brewing is a case where deferred parking may have worked, he remarked, but the Town’s regulations prevented it.

Alternative Compliance

Some communities allow further reduction of required parking under certain conditions, Mr. Anderson said, such as access to public transit and multi-use trails and the location of shared vehicle parking spaces, bicycle parking, etc. He asked if Manchester should allow a developer or owner to demonstrate that a combination of these or other strategies would provide adequate parking for a site.

Mr. Prause stated that there has been a great effort. Obviously, there are many inconsistencies between the sections; specifically there are clauses in some sections that allow for waivers or discretion but not in other sections. Perhaps there should be a new section or new process to allow for something outside of the regulations, he proposed. He noted that there should be general requirements for each zoning type or type of development, and suggested adding a new section regarding some type of waiver process or an applicant filing a form with Staff and

coming before the Commission. Mr. Prause stated that, in general, people could apply for a variance through the Zoning Board of Appeals (“ZBA”) for parking, but it would likely be unsuccessful because hardship would be difficult to prove. He questioned the experience with people applying for variances through the ZBA.

Ms. Bertotti responded that some variance applications are approved and some are not. There has been a furniture store that received a huge variance, for 100 spaces, but the business was well established, the use had been present at the site for 20 years, and the spaces required would never be utilized. She reported that the store received several variances over time to expand the building, to expand inside the building into a certain area, so there is a record of that variance. There are also records of parking variance denials, she noted.

Mr. Prause said he assumed that, in the furniture store case, the justification was more that it was an existing non-conformance.

Ms. Bertotti stated that it was not existing non-conforming. The applicant built the building, then sought an addition but did not have enough parking, though she was not sure if they had a hardship.

Mr. Anderson commented that it is a toss-up when appearing before the ZBA, because the request is for something outside of the regulations. Ideally, in his opinion, there would be something in the regulations, a path for a different way forward.

Ms. Bertotti reported that she could recall a parking variance for the surface that was granted and one that was denied. There was a farm that received a variance to have a different surface than paving, she noted, and Labyrinth applied for the same variance but was denied.

Mr. Prause stated that his overall suggestion would be to have some type of common clause in each of the minimum parking requirements. He agreed with the list of alternate compliance drivers, and if anything triggers a reason why a project could not comply, it would be appropriate to submit an application for a waiver.

Mr. Kidd remarked that the general requirements are not enough to insert a section in each one of the different zones on parking requirements, especially with all the options. If the shared use was put in and expanded, and then deferred parking was added, and then maximum parking was added, in his opinion, all of these apply, but he questioned how that would be accomplished. He also shared the concern about the changing use and how that affects everything. Mr. Kidd said he thought it would be prudent to relax the specifics and make it more general, and then address it on a case-by-case basis within some guidelines, but with parking goals with some level of minimum. He discussed the changing uses and the triggering of a re-do to make sure; there may be less requirements, but there might be more requirements, and he asked who would be responsible for that. In his opinion, the new applicant may be responsible; if they want to be in a location, they have to be responsible for the additional parking. Regarding alternate compliance, there are slots for electric cars, which could not be used for anything else, he stated, and he asked how that factors in, especially as more electric cars come online and more businesses seek to support that. He remarked that Highland Park Market has 3 or 4 spots that nobody can park in without an electric car. Regarding rainwater management, he asked if there is an offset for the cost of doing underground work and the particle separators; he suggested researching whether

impervious surfaces may mitigate the need for rainwater underground systems and the maintenance of that.

Mr. Anderson stated that money is a motivator sometimes, and there may be an efficiency that can be built in.

Mr. Kidd noted that there is a cost for landscaping and paving. He questioned whether it may be cheaper to pave. Mr. Kidd speculated on putting a variance in, as the Commission is not typically in the variance business. He said he assumed there is some purview with the Form Based Zoning to allow the Commission to allow the variances rather than going through the ZBA.

Mr. Anderson commented that it would not be called a variance, because the regulation is allowing the Commission to change something.

Mr. Kennedy remarked that, when he was in South Windsor, they used the techniques that have been spoken about, although there were more specific requirements by use. For instance, medical office facilities had more demanding parking requirements, he commented. There were provisions for waivers, he stated; there was latitude for reserved parking on their plans without actually having to pave over and physically put in the parking spots. He informed the Commission that not everything had to be paved; pavers could be utilized. Mr. Kennedy stated that all the strategies proposed are good and allow for flexibility. He stated that he did not see a need for a maximum on parking because people never want to put in more parking than they need. When too much parking is required, he commented, too much ground is being paved and land is being put to unproductive use. He suggested writing in waiver provisions, more flexible techniques, and perhaps requirements that are more specific to particular types of uses; e.g., medical offices need more than ordinary offices and retail is different.

Ms. Scorso questioned whether there is an environmental consideration or bonus to have a consideration of different surfaces.

Mr. Bordeaux replied that it is important to get as much water as possible into the ground so it can slowly work its way to the rivers and all that is being done currently is flushing everything as quickly as possible, which is scarring the rivers. There are a number of reasons why, but it will be required in more intensive forms over the years as State storm water permits are updated; that trickles down from the Federal EPA and State mandates and the best way to do that will be minimizing the extent of the impervious surfaces. He explained that Planning sees many applications that include the wet bottom retention basins; it is important to getting water back to the ground, perhaps having plants renovated so it is cleaner. Mr. Bordeaux initiated discussion about landscaping standards. Manchester currently has islands everywhere and requires a tree in the island, surrounded by asphalt; that is the worst possible situation for a tree to thrive. South Windsor has depressed islands, which are something Manchester needs to consider, in his opinion.

Ms. Scorso inquired what the next steps would be for the surfaces and questioned whether Staff is awaiting more information from Ms. Handfield.

Mr. Anderson responded that they are awaiting that information. Therefore, nothing has been decided and Staff wanted to get the Commission's thoughts on the direction.

Ms. Scorso said it would be for the decorative consideration but also the environmental consideration.

Mr. Stebe stated that the easiest item to build in is the different surfaces. Ms. Bertotti said she disagreed. Mr. Stebe stated it would be a cost for someone, but in the Historic District, it is better to run a Historic District when something can be put in other than blacktop over 400 sq. ft. in front or behind your building. He referred to the discussion a few months back regarding agritourism to enable them to formally bring items in; the Commission should allow other parking to be put in rather than paving, he said. One of the items in dealing with the mill at the Manchester Green was the proximity to the river flow and possibly being able to put something else so it could percolate in and clean itself out before it gets anywhere. Mr. Stebe said he felt the regulations should give people options to be able to say they have parking and they have it as surfaced.

Ms. Bertotti noted this will be a big project but it would be best if things were looked at comprehensively as a combination, perhaps minus the maximum parking. Each of these cases, she reported, will come with a different set of problems. At the mall, regarding the large parking lots, the alternative surface will work out because when paving a large area, the cost of the storm water installation is so high that it will work economically for the developer to pay for these different surfaces, she explained. Ms. Bertotti noted that, on a small site, that may not be an option at all; shared parking, numbers, or deferred parking could work better.

Mr. Stebe stated that he would have a hard time working out what would be the shared parking because, when looking at the reviews for the Manchester Green area between the mill and the Senior Center, there are several property owners between the two end points.

Mr. Anderson questioned whether the Commission would allow an agreement with a next door neighbor in writing that someone could share parking.

Mr. Stebe noted that would turn into an easement on the properties. Otherwise, when someone else takes over the location thinking they have parking already, if it is not written into the property as an easement, the lease would disappear and then there would be a vacant building. He stated that it is similar to not being able to force your neighbor to put in a sidewalk connection when you are re-doing your front; they have to do it of their own free will. There are many situations, such as bed and breakfasts, the historic areas, and the agricultural use, where there could be an ability to have deferred parking or to have an applicant show that the surface of an area proposed for parking is solid enough that they do not have to put anything in, or show that it is available for use if they grow beyond a certain amount. Mr. Stebe offered that the Commission would have to fully research how far we can have off site and still say it counts. The Commission recently discussed having shuttle service between the Town lots on Main Street and back to the inns, he said, and how that would be enforced. He agreed that there is a great deal of parking in town that is underused.

Ms. Bertotti stated that the vacancy issue could happen with any of these scenarios. If waivers are granted, that could trigger future vacancy because, with the next use, if the site is underbuilt and the next lessee does not have incentive or does not have enough money to build the parking in addition to paying rent, the building would stay vacant. With deferred parking, it would be the same situation; the next person would have to build the parking and it may be too expensive, so

there is a risk of the building remaining vacant. The vacancy issue is always there but, in her opinion, that is something the market will have to take care of. Ultimately, parking is more of a market problem in her mind than it is a zoning problem and the Commission should look at it as a site management issue, she said.

Mr. Stebe stated that, regarding deferred parking, the only locations he sees as a possibility are in undeveloped places.

Ms. Bertotti suggested uses for deferred parking on a site that is wholly built. As an example, if a restaurant were built at the Raymour and Flanigan site, there would not be enough parking, she said.

Mr. Stebe responded that is where the shared area is. The parking is already there and paved, and nothing is being deferred. Any place where deferred parking would work is already paved, he reported, other than the Parkade or one of the larger agricultural places that want to expand out to that level. Mr. Stebe noted that, when the restaurant was built in front of Raymour and Flanigan, the number of spaces was counted and the opinion was that there would not be much of an overlap because Raymour and Flanigan is busier in the daytime and Chipotle is busy more at night, so there would not be an issue. The deferred parking would be where something new is going to be developed and the site has not been paved yet, which does not happen very often anymore, he explained. He said the Commission could say there may be five or six occupants but they will double count some of the spaces based on usage in order to have shared spaces, and there could be 100 less spaces than normal. That is what happened to Raymour & Flanigan because they were required to have many more spaces than they needed, he stated.

Mr. Bergin commented on uses somewhat dictating whether there could be deferred parking. In the case of a redevelopment, he said, it was mentioned that the brewery may have benefited from a new policy. Considering the Town is not experienced with a particular use, having had only one other brewery, the Commission does not really know the true need for parking for that use, necessarily. When a site is being redeveloped, the business should get up and running to demonstrate the need, he explained, and if more parking is needed, it could be added in the future.

Mr. Bergin questioned whether the Town regulations prohibit parking garages and if there was a conscious choice to not add that in this discussion.

Ms. Bertotti responded that parking garages are not prohibited, but they are very expensive to build and a developer would need to meet zoning regulations.

Mr. Bergin noted that the focus is on a mix of businesses, and what has been reviewed would have no need for a parking garage.

Ms. Bertotti reiterated that the structures are allowed.

Mr. Anderson reiterated Ms. Bertotti's statement that would be market driven. If the land is valuable enough, then perhaps a garage would be considered.

Mr. Bergin proposed, hypothetically, if Broad Street was redeveloped with a mix of uses with housing and a high density of parking needed, a parking garage could be proposed.

Mr. Anderson stated that the most recent conceptual plan from LiveWorkLearnPlay shows a garage, though that may not necessarily go there. In thinking about development of that density, a developer may think about that.

Mr. Bergin commented that a parking garage would have only a limited application in certain areas.

Mr. Anderson explained that a parking garage costs approximately \$15,000 per space.

Mr. Prause referred back to the question of what the goal of this is. He referred back to Mr. Anderson's statement that Manchester is quite well built out. It is clear that if there is redevelopment of properties where a good use cannot be achieved, then it makes sense, he stated. The bullet points Mr. Anderson presented speak to environmental considerations, probably alluding to removing impervious surfaces, as well as walking, biking and transit. Mr. Prause noted that those are good Planning objectives. He contemplated how changing the regulations would promote the transportation hub. He said, if the regulations were changed, he assumed people would not begin tearing up their parking lot to add more green space. He questioned if there is another way to accomplish the goal of removing parking spaces. The benefit is that there can be more intense uses, which need less parking spaces, and parking spaces will be utilized because more shared parking is allowed, or some parking spaces can be removed to add buildings. He questioned how to drive the removal of some of the parking lots.

Mr. Anderson reported that he had not considered that. He said he thought of re-using the spaces in a more efficient way, which would be building on them, and in doing that, the parking requirements would have to be limited because there would not be as much parking.

Mr. Prause commented that would be good for parcels such as the Kmart property; when a developer builds on that location, there would be less parking requirements. However, if there are areas with large parking lots, he contemplated how to get rid of some of that parking without removing a whole lot and starting from scratch. Perhaps if there was a less built-out community, he acknowledged, there would be more ways, but now Manchester is stuck with all the parking. He asked how the Town can promote transit and bike paths.

Ms. Bertotti reported that, on the redevelopment of a site, if someone physically needs less parking than what is on the site, if they can do less, they will probably do less. If the Town relaxes the requirements and had the ability to do something along those lines, it would probably help.

Ms. Scorso questioned a landscaping incentive or something along those lines.

Mr. Anderson agreed that there are bonuses that can be built on, such as affordable housing, landscaping or energy efficient buildings; one of the incentives has been less parking requirements. He noted that may generate other issues.

Mr. Prause agreed with Ms. Scorso. He asked how benefits are built in for people re-doing a lot, because if the lot is already there and they just need to re-mark it, that is easier; if an incentive is built in, that may help drive it.

Mr. Kennedy noted that, even in a built-out community, there are still buildings that are torn down and a completely different building is put in its place, such as Willie's Steak House. There will inevitably be properties around town in that situation, but that are invaluable for something else and having more flexible parking regulations would make it more attractive.

Mr. Kidd remarked that some of it could be attached, as is done with other projects, to the size of the development. By default, the Commission tends to have more say on the larger sites such as WalMart on Spencer Street, where the Commission pushed additional requirements, he noted. The larger sites are the most intrusive areas and may reap the most benefit in trying to reduce the amount, he commented, though he noted that the small sites are difficult. Mr. Kidd referred to Mr. Bordeaux's comment that perhaps the Commission should not try to address the landscaping at this time, but in his opinion it should, especially with the larger sites. Perhaps there could be passive rain water management with the swales around those, he conjectured, instead of the parking islands with a tree, and there would be areas collecting water. A limit could be placed on paving impervious surface and the remainder must be pervious, he suggested, and adding a requirement for rain water management practices would be the price of doing business.

Ms. Bertotti reported that the current zoning regulations calculate impervious maximums but that only amounts to rooftops; parking is not included. The site can be completely paved over and it will still be a maximum 30% coverage, she noted.

Mr. Anderson stated that, if there was a maximum pervious requirement, there would then be the option of impervious pavement, landscaping, or open space. He surmised that may be a way of incentivizing. He thanked the Commission for their input to continue working on the project.

The workshop was closed at 8:45 P.M.