

**MINUTES OF WORKSHOP
HELD BY THE PLANNING AND ZONING COMMISSION
JULY 20, 2020
VIRTUAL MEETING HELD VIA ZOOM**

Members Present: Eric Prause, Chairman
Patrick Kennedy, Vice-Chairman
Michael Stebe, Secretary
Jessica Poland
Jessica Scorso

Alternates: Julian Stoppelman
Teresa Ike
Bonnie Potocki

Also Present: Gary Anderson, Director of Planning
Megan Pilla, Senior Planner
David Laiuppa, Environmental
Planner/Wetlands Agent
Kyle Shiel, Senior Planner
Nancy Martel, Recording Secretary

The workshop commenced at 8:55 P.M.

Discussion of allowing drive-throughs in commercial zones where not currently permitted.

Currently, drive-throughs include restaurants, banks, etc., only in three of the commercial zones: General Business, Neighborhood Commercial and Special Design Commercial, all by special exception. The remainder of the commercial and business zones do not allow drive-throughs and none of them allow it by right.

Ms. Pilla stated that staff have received a number of inquiries recently, probably increased due to the pandemic, mainly in the Comprehensive Urban Development zone in the Buckland Hills area, as well as the Form Based zone in the Broad Street and West Middle Turnpike area.

Ms. Pilla reported that she and Mr. Anderson spoke with members of the Engineering Division about any concerns they may have. Some of the reasons why drive-throughs typically are not allowed on a more wide-spread level were enumerated in detail. She relayed Engineering's comment that there are different traffic needs for different types of drive-through uses, i.e., restaurants vs. banks. Even between restaurants there are different needs, such as Starbucks or Dunkin Donuts, compared to other fast food establishments.

Ms. Pilla speculated whether drive-throughs should be permitted in additional commercial zones and if so, where? What regulations or protections might be attached? Should there be certain design standards or should they be permitted by special exception vs. by right?

Mr. Anderson added that one concern triggering the workshop was a direct inquiry from a representative at Macy's at the mall. They are considering establishing pad sites on their property. At this time, the zoning regulations do not allow drive-throughs in the CUD, and Manchester has held the line there for a long time. He explained that there was also an inquiry about the Form Based zone for an ATM drive-through. Mr. Anderson stated that this is not necessarily the Planning Department driving the discussion, but there is some market demand.

Mr. Kennedy commented that time is catching up with Manchester's regulations. He noted that all sorts of businesses use drive-throughs, even before the pandemic, as a way for businesses to compete. The only situations where he has noted a problem have been at the Dunkin Donuts type of businesses. Even though it would be cumbersome, it may be wise to start with permitting them by special exception. If allowed by right, there are sites that are too small for drive-throughs and the assumption is, if a use is allowed by right, it can be done in some manner. It is a use that would work in some zones but not all of them. Perhaps the Engineering Department can come up with any specific designs that there clearly should or shouldn't be. In his opinion, the economy is driving drive-throughs in any business zone.

Mr. Stoppelman added that each proposed drive-through has unique considerations and that it should be by special exception. In his opinion, it may be a necessary change.

Mr. Stebe stated that the special exception would make sense, especially in an industrial area, the CUD, or in the Form Based zone. He added that we would need strong stipulations for traffic flow.

Ms. Potocki commented that, because the PZC is trying to promote complete streets and pedestrian thoroughfares, especially in the Form Based zone, she is concerned about the safety of pedestrians. Additionally, she stated, she is in favor of the special exception, but from a planning purpose, the Commission has to consider where they will be promoting more complete streets.

Mr. Anderson reported that is why Manchester originally did not allow drive-throughs in the Form Based zone. The idea was that it would be a pedestrian-oriented zone and drive-throughs would conflict with the comfort level of pedestrians.

Mr. Prause relayed that he recently heard comments about the new Starbucks at the Plaza at Buckland Hills. He recalled that came through as an administrative approval last year and it was approved as it had been used previously as a drive-through for KFC. The unfortunate impact from the pandemic is that people are utilizing the drive-through exclusively and traffic is backed up. He speculated on how to get an estimated flow for a place like Starbucks, which is very busy in the mornings. Mr. Prause said he struggles trying to dictate how many cars could be in the queue in shared parking spaces in a plaza. He contemplated whether it should be by special exception.

Mr. Stoppelman questioned whether there is a big difference between curbside and drive-through and the general comments were that there is a difference in terms of convenience, though it would be difficult to quantify.

Mr. Prause contemplated whether there should be regulations structured for allocating take-out parking areas. That really is not addressed in zoning but that might be something to be in the Commission's plan.

Ms. Pilla reported that she has observed businesses with both drive-through and parking space delivery. However, the person delivering an order to the individual parking space would have to walk across the drive-through lane, creating a hazard.

Ms. Potocki stated that this subject arose in the Town of Newington off the Berlin Turnpike, which is similar to Manchester's commercial zone. She recalled that the Town removed some drive-throughs because of safety concerns. It may be helpful to check with the Town of Newington Planner Craig Minor about their guidelines regarding drive-throughs.

Mr. Prause asked Ms. Pilla what guidance she is specifically seeking.

Ms. Pilla responded that, initially, staff wants to assess interest, and it sounds like there may be some precedent for expanding the zones in which drive-throughs are allowed, and that permitting them by special exception is preferred, with a very specific set of criteria. She pointed out the exception mentioned of considering zones that are intended to be pedestrian-oriented. Ms. Pilla remarked that she would be interested in the history of the development of the CUD zone, how that has changed over the years, and what the potential of introducing drive-throughs would be.

Mr. Anderson stated that they can do some research and give thought to how to create design requirements in the regulations and thereby the Commission would have some purview over them. And then perhaps staff can make recommendations about which zones could starting points.

Ms. Pilla reiterated that she will definitely look into Newington in her research.

Mr. Anderson assumed that this is a burgeoning subject in the zoning world and that many communities are researching the matter. He stated that Planning staff will put something together for the Commission to review, though he did not think there should be a regulation amendment at this time.

Mr. Prause added that the Town is trying to promote walkable neighborhoods, though the current pandemic has turned the world upside down. He asked for clarification of what three zones allow drive-throughs by right.

Ms. Pilla replied they are the General Business, Special Design Commercial and Neighborhood Business zones.

The Workshop was closed at 9:30 P.M.