

TOWN OF COLUMBIA
PLANNING AND ZONING COMMISSION
Adella G. Urban Administrative Offices Conference Room
323 Route 87, Columbia, CT
Monday, December 12, 2016 – 7:00 p.m.
Regular Meeting Minutes

Members Present: Chairman Rick Nassiff, Vice Chair Vera Englert, E.J. Starkel, Don Schofield, Thomas Currier, Richard Napolitano, Larry Preston (alternate), Walter Tabor (alternate)

Members Excused: Robert Powell

Staff Present: Town Planner Paula Stahl, Board Clerk Terri Lasota, Town Administrator Mark Walter

Others Present: Jeff Viens, Angela Mawson, Ann Dunnack

1. **CALL TO ORDER:** Rick Nassiff called the meeting to order at 7:00pm
2. **ROLL CALL AND SEATING OF ALTERNATES:** Larry Preston was seated for Robert Powell
3. **ADDITIONS/CHANGES TO AGENDA:** None
4. **APPROVAL OF PZC REGULAR MEETING MINUTES OF November 28, 2016:**
E.J. Starkel **MOTIONED** to **APPROVE** the minutes of November 28, 2016
Tom Currier **SECONDED**. **MOTION CARRIED 7:0:0**

5. **AUDIENCE OF CITIZENS:**

Mark Walter said that he and Economic Development Commission Members reached out to the local businesses in town to try to create an informal business association to act as a sounding board and get feedback from those businesses on various zoning regulations. After going door to door and interviewing various businesses, sign regulations were the number one concern. The challenge is for the use of temporary signs, or permanent signs with temporary information such as those for sales and occasional specials, and also with sign location regulations effecting visibility issues. M. Walter continued to say that most businesses in town do not understand how regulations get created, and they worry day to day about business survival, and are not thinking about signage until they are faced with notices from zoning enforcement.

Jeff Viens added that there are other issues as signs can be seasonally specific for things like Christmas sales, etc., when business sales should be at there highest. He believes we should be flexible with the businesses and give them a framework to work within.

Walt Tabor congratulated Mark Walter for going out and meeting the business owners and believes it would also make sense for the zoning enforcement officer and building department to do the same, because people do not know the regulations and are just trying to make a living. Being business friendly sometimes means to make the first approach.

Rick Nassiff said that would like to make it known that while our Zoning Enforcement Officer's job is to enforce the regulations; if people have a concern with those regulations not making sense in the context of doing business, they can always petition for a regulation change.

Paula Stahl noted that she spoke with the ZEO regarding The Batting Cage sign issue, and she was trying to assist them with solutions for the temporary sign requirements, and told them that if an application was

submitted for a temporary sign that she would sign off on it. Rick Nassiff added that he would like to get to the point where applications for temporary signs are not needed. Paula Stahl said that in the draft sign regulations, PZC approval is not needed and town staff could then sign off on it and fees would be less expensive. Currently, temporary signs require staff approval of Planning and Zoning Administrator; all other signs require PZC approval.

Jeff Viens asked about the permit fees, Paula Stahl explained that the town has a \$25.00 minimum zoning permit fee but the state of Connecticut requires an additional \$60.00 zoning fee for any type of zoning permit applied for, making the cost \$85.00.

Angela Mawson, a local business owner, said that \$85.00 is more than the actual cost of printing some signs and deters people. She also said she would like to see the regulations not as restrictive and easier to use. She added that business owners go to school to learn their business and not to learn town business, and through failed experiences you start to remember what needs to be done without getting penalties.

R. Nassiff asked what she would like to do, Angela Mawson explained what she would like to put out signs that advertise specials such as a sandwich board sign or lawn signs, or something that would be large enough to get noticed traveling down Route 66, and also suggested her interest in window graphics.

R. Nassiff reiterated that he would like to take costs away and have the ability to grant instant approval, and make the sign permit process more simple for the majority of all businesses signs, not only temporary, and added that it is understood that sign regulations are confusing, wants to make them easier to understand.

Mark Walters and Rich Napolitano discussed setback concerns, exit signs, and graphics.

R. Nassiff and T. Currier talked about real estate direction signs and how much prettier the Town of Columbia is without them filling up a road corner.

R. Nassiff thanked everyone for their input, and thanked Mark Walter for personally reaching out to the businesses.

J. Viens said that businesses have the impression of the town boards being adversarial and T. Currier commented that if the regulations are not suited to the businesses it can seem that way but they are trying to change things to not come across that way.

A. Mawson asked about separate regulations for separate zones, R. Nassiff said the PZC wants to be able to merge the commercial and manufacturing zones.

6. UNFINISHED BUSINESS (Discussion/Possible Action): None

7. NEW BUSINESS: Meeting on December 19th will be cancelled

8. REGULATION REVISIONS:

8.1 Review of drafts

The members discussed the sign regulations for height and size, Rich Napolitano noted that sizes and quantities needed to still be determined in the draft. There was also question regarding whether to use frontage of road or frontage of the building as a determinant for sign size, or provide the option to choose between the two. R. Napolitano and T. Currier then discussed setbacks and permits for state setback on

Routes 66 and 87. P.Stahl said what the draft is proposing is to have the setbacks at zero, with a mechanism in place to determine the setback from the road pavement according to the height of the sign, so if the sign falls it doesn't fall into the road causing an accident. The line of sight can not be blocked either.

P. Stahl, V. Englert, and the board members discussed A. Mawson's sign and window graphics ideas.

P. Stahl asked the members to review the handout that R. Napolitano provided regarding sign lettering. P. Stahl also provided a handout of photographs depicting sign sizes in comparison to other objects to get a better idea of what the sizes actually look like, to assist in determining height and size. Permanent signs with changeable lettering was also discussed.

R. Nassiff said that regulations don't include sign content, color, etc., only size and placement.

R. Napolitano mentioned electronic message center signs, which the draft regulations allow by a special permit.

D. Schofield suggested that it would be a good idea to distribute the new sign regulations (once they are approved) to the local business owners.

P. Stahl said that the biggest change in the sign regulations is that it is staff approval in most cases rather than having to go through Planning and Zoning approval. T. Currier said he would like to see most of those fees gone.

P. Stahl commented that she and W. Tabor met to start discussing regulations for agriculture.

V. Englert suggested starting a subcommittee for the commercial and manufacturing regulations. T. Currier and the other members agreed. Walt Tabor, Rich Napolitano, and Vera Englert volunteered for the new subcommittee.

- 9. **COMMUNICATIONS AND REPORTS:** P. Stahl and the members discussed February 13th 2017 as a tentative public hearing date for the approval of Sections 7 and 8.
- 10. **COMMISSION OPEN DISCUSSION:** Walt Tabor suggested looking into solar farms as a use. Mark Walter and the members discussed.
- 11. **AUDIENCE OF CITIZENS:** None
- 12. **ADJOURNMENT:**
Rick Nassiff **MOVED** to **ADJOURN** the meeting at 8:16 pm.
E.J. Starkel **SECONDED. MOTION CARRIED 7:0:0**

Respectfully submitted by Terri Lasota, Board Clerk
Please see the minutes of subsequent meetings for the approval of these minutes and any corrections hereto.