

**TOWN OF COLUMBIA
PLANNING AND ZONING COMMISSION**

Adella G. Urban Administrative Offices Conference Room
323 Route 87, Columbia, CT
Monday, April 22, 2024 7:00 pm

**Regular Meeting – HYBRID
Minutes**

Members Present: Chairman Rick Nassiff, Vice-Chair Justin Riendeau, Vera Englert, Thomas Currier, Dave Holcroft, Robert Powell

Members Excused: Walter Tabor, Larry Preston (Alternate), Ed Madrak (Alternate)

Staff Present: Town Planner John Guskowski (via Zoom), Fire Marshal Mike Lester, Fire Chief Steve Postemsky, Asst. Fire Chief Scott Haddad, Board Clerk Mary Kay Hyman

Others Present: First Selectman Steve Everett, Mark Reynolds of Rob Hellstrom Land Surveying, Robert Caldwell (Applicant), 2 Members of the CoDE, and 4 others were present.

1. CALL TO ORDER: R. Nassiff called the meeting to order at **7:00 PM**.

2. ROLL CALL AND SEATING OF ALTERNATES:

No Alternates present to seat.

3. ADDITIONS/CHANGES TO AGENDA: None

4. APPROVAL OF PZC REGULAR MEETING MINUTES of April 08, 2024

R. Nassiff **MOVED** to **APPROVE** the Minutes of April 08, 2024 as presented; J. Riendeau **SECONDED**; R. Powell **ABSTAINED**; **MOTION PASSED 4:0:1**

5. AUDIENCE OF CITIZENS: None

6. UNFINISHED BUSINESS (Discussion/Possible Action)

6.1 PZC 2324-04: Site Plan Application for Robert Caldwell of Caldwell Realty LLC., to Construct a Vehicle Repair Shop at 41 Route 6, Map 002, Lot 020, Zone CM-1, Lot Area 9.68, Section 31.2.6.
(Continued Discussion/Possible Action on Site Plan Application)

R. Nassiff read the Application for the record and asked M. Reynolds for a recap.

M. Reynolds gave a recap of the project from the April 08, 2024 meeting and stated at that time the outstanding items were the Septic Approval and the Commission requested the Applicant, R. Caldwell, be present at tonight's meeting. He then presented the Commission with the letter from Eastern Highlands for the Septic Approval and addressed the concern from the last meeting regarding lighting, he confirmed they will only be building mounted, downward facing lights and quite a distance from surrounding buildings.

V. Englert asked questions about the parking, deliveries, and hours of operation.

R. Caldwell (Applicant) stated his hours will be roughly from 8:30 AM to 3:30 PM.

R, Nassiff asked if the business will be open to the public. R. Caldwell stated it would be basically by appointment only.

R. Nassiff asked about handicap parking. M. Reynolds stated it is a large lot, allowing for turning of vehicles, including delivery vehicles, will be built to code, mildly graded and will be ADA compliant.

V. Englert asked how many staff members will be employed.

R. Caldwell stated it would be just himself.

N. Hammerstone of 5 Oakwood Lane asked for the location of the property and asked what type of vehicle repair will be taking place. M. Reynolds responded with details of the location. R. Nassiff stated that in the discussion at the last meeting it was identified the business would be a vehicle restoration repair shop. R. Caldwell confirmed. N. Hammerstone asked if these would be racing cars. R. Caldwell said no and stated it is mainly the building of custom street rods and hot rods.

S. Postemsky asked for confirmation of the street number of the business, is it number 41 or 47. M. Reynolds stated it is the number on the actual Application. M. Hyman confirmed the street number is 41 Route 6 on the Application.

R. Nassiff **MOVED** to **APPROVE** Site Plan Application for Robert Caldwell of Caldwell Realty LLC., to Construct a Vehicle Repair Shop at 41 Route 6, Map 002, Lot 020, Zone CM-1, Lot Area 9.68, Section 31.2.6. J. Riendeau **SECONDED; MOTION PASSED 5:0:0**

7. NEW BUSINESS (Discussion/Possible Action): None

8. REGULATION REVISIONS (Discussion)

8.1. Sections Related to Multifamily Dwellings

8.2. Section 8.3 Accessory Living Unit

R. Nassiff asked Co-Chair J. Riendeau to present the changes to the full Commission.

J. Riendeau presented a detailed Power Point (see attached).

R. Nassiff explained that the Subcommittee has held several meetings, open to the public for input, to discuss the regulation changes for Affordable Housing and at this time they are only presenting the Regulation Draft to the Full Commission. The Subcommittee was made up of 3 Board Members: Walt Tabor, Justin Riendeau and himself, R. Nassiff. R. Nassiff stated tonight's meeting is not a Public Hearing, but comments can be heard.

R. Nassiff thanked J. Riendeau for his hard work and J. Riendeau thanked everyone for their input throughout the process.

T. Currier Recused himself from discussion due to a conflict of interest.

R. Kincaid of the Coalition of Diversity and Equity thanked the Commission for their hard work and thoughtful openness with the Community. She stated this is a wonderful opportunity for the young and for seniors. She presented a letter to the Commission and stated they are requesting that the Commission consider increasing the square footage of the AUD to 900 sq. feet. Through research they have found that 500 square feet will not accommodate wheelchair accessibility. She stated they have seen one-bedroom structures that are 688 sq. ft. and 2-bedroom units that are 798 sq. ft. and they were tight. The Coalition feels the increase is needed to meet the needs of seniors who may need a second bedroom for live in care, wheelchair access etc.

D. Holcroft arrived at 7:45 PM.

Fire Marshal M. Lester of 56 Szegda Road stated his concerns with these changes is that after they are approved safety access becomes the responsibility of the Fire Department. Therefore, he would like to ask for a review and the possible need for a cistern.

R. Powell asked if this would be part of the Building Permit review.

J. Guskowski responded, not necessarily and that this would mirror something similar to the subdivision process permitting the construction of multiple dwelling units, all at the same time. He said he and J. Riendeau discussed putting some provision in the regulations that any proposed development over two buildings would require a consultation with the Fire Marshall about available water sources and Fire Protection resources because if you're adding multiple buildings you want to make sure that they're adequately protected whether it's through a cistern or an available pond. He also added that sprinkler systems can add a lot of cost but we would want to add a provision that basically any developer building more than a couple of units would have to consult with the Fire Marshall to make sure that they understand what the resources in the immediate area are and what the needs are for the site.

M. Lester asked if these structures under the current Fire Code would fall under apartment-like structures or individual units. J. Guskowski confirmed they could be either. M. Lester stated under the current code if it is a structure of 3 families or more it will need to be inspected by the Fire Mashall.

R. Powell stated this may not fall under the responsibly of Planning and Zoning.

R. Nassiff agreed it may not, but stated safety is of course at the forefront of their minds.

R. Powell stated the sanitarian regional water companies must sign off on it and it would be very easy just to include Fire Marshall. R, Nassiff stated they may not want to to have a sign off as much as we would want detailed input because any of the larger projects would be special permit and there would be conditions that we could impose based on the consultation from the town experts.

R. Powell stated he feels the Commission must be careful because you may be requiring certain information that would normally happen after a Site Plan approval. He stated the Commission does not receive complete architectural drawings, as they are not needed for a Site Plan approval. He stated the same applies to plans for the septic and sprinkler systems etc. It may not be something the Commission would want to require precluding a Site Plan approval, causing unnecessary cost to the applicant. He stated the Commissions is trying to

make the process as easy as possible and to encourage someone to come in front of the Commission.

J. Riendeau agreed and stated his conversations with M. Lester have been focused on the need for a step in the process for Fire access review somewhere in the process.

S. Everett of Route 87 stated if the regulation change is not going to allow or if it is not possible for these structures to be six family dwellings or apartments, he would recommend that the Commission not bring it up in the meetings, as it may cause concern from the public. He then asked for clarity on what the Lake Overlay Area is exempt from. J. Riendeau stated it only applies to the Multi Family piece of the proposed Regulation changes. J. Riendeau explained that the way the current Regulations are written multifamily higher density buildings are not allowed in the Lake Overlay Area. S. Everett asked why not in the Lake Overlay Zone. J. Riendeau explained that the lake area is currently at a higher density and there is the overall protection of the lake. S. Everett asked if Camp Asto Wamah could sell their property under these new Regulations and put-up condos. J. Riendeau stated no, not the way these new Regulations are written. R. Nassiff added that they felt it was best for the Town to move forward with the Affordable Housing Regulation changes in a timely manner and it was best not to allow it in the Lake Overlay Zone, as that would require much needed study as it is a sensitive and protected area and added it is important to protect the jewel.

R. Nassiff also stated that this is a very scientifically based Regulation change as to what you can do with a piece of land for the people.

S. Everett stated the watershed area of Columbia sits at the top of the beginning of two rivers and asked if we are not concerned with protecting those watershed areas.

J. Guskowski explained that everyone is in some type of watershed area and there are general guidelines, such as storm management procedures, erosion and sedimentation control and control of impervious surfaces etc. in place, but the Lake Overlay Zone is to protect the lake itself.

S. Everett asked how the density initiative helps with relations to Affordable Housing.

D. Holcroft explained that about a third of a development's cost is the land and if you can put more units on the same piece of land that will generate more profit.

J. Guskowski asked S. Everett to clarify if he was asking about affordability of the developer or the occupant. He stated that lower costs for the developer would hopefully lower the cost for the residents of the units. He stated there are incentives written into the Regulations where setting aside at least 20 % of the units for those making less than the median income the developer would be able to maximize the lot yield on the property given soil conditions and acreage availability vs if you were not setting aside the 20%.

V. Englert stated there have been cases where the units are not more affordable based on how they are marketed with added amenities etc.

R. Nassiff stated that the focus of the Subcommittee was to take some of the cost of development out of the process allowing a developer to decrease the per unit costs, creating a more affordable market for seniors and first-time buyers.

J. Riendeau agreed and stated there was a lot of confusion around the language between Affordable Housing versus low income housing and make it more affordable. He said this is not going to be an influx to the population in Columbia but to make it more feasible for someone's Mom and Dad to retire or someone to downsize and not have to move out of State. These changes would allow for small dwellings with different price points.

R. Nassiff provided an example that was used in the Subcommittee meetings showing just one form of savings, which was road development of a subdivision vs clustered housing. He stated this alone can be a huge savings and possibly take money out of the cost of building housing units.

S. Everett asked if the lot size comes to play in the formula for an Attached Unit.

R. Nassiff stated yes it does because of the need to conform with the Zoning setback Regulations. He stated if it is a non-conforming lot then there is potential to have increased density on that lot based on the existing non-conforming Regulations.

R. Powell stated that they need to review the Fire Marshals emergency access and water supply. He also stated that the State Department of Housing does have a minimum sizing of units taking ADA requirements into consideration and it may be wise to do away off those requirements. He stated he agrees 700 – 900- sq. ft. would be a good size for a unit. He also stated having a minimum size for a structure may no longer be legal. R. Nassiff and J. Riendeau agreed and stated removal of such verbiage is part of this process. He asked if an Accessory Unit had to be for a family member, because he does not feel that is legal. He also stated that currently when subdivisions are done, they require open space set aside. He stated maybe they should consider that as part of this change. J. Riendeau said they steered away from this due to cost and they felt it was not a good fit for this type of development.

R. Nassiff stated once the Full Commission has had a chance to digest, discuss, possibly modify, and if/when they agree to move forward with the changes a Public Hearing will be set. He then requested a formal letter from the Fire Department/Fire Marshal with their request. He also stated the Commission wants to hear input and wants to deliver the best product.

V. Englert stated that she researched information on the Eastford complex and found there is no Zoning but there is a Town Council. She also stated the average cost of a unit is \$270,000.

R. Nassiff stated he visited a model home project in Central PA., and he asked about multiple unit homes and they stated that they primarily only build duplexes because usually for more than 2 unit structures you get into a higher level of building code requirements. He stated he feels this may be what the Town will be looking at is duplex homes, which might be something for the Commission to consider as family structure for 3 or more families, you get into costly Commercial building codes.

R. Nassiff thanked J. Riendeau for his hard work and dedication to the process. He stated for the record that the next meeting will be on Monday, May 13, 2024.

9. COMMUNICATIONS AND REPORTS:

9.1 Town of Hebron Petition #2024-07 to revise Section 5.F.8 of the Hebron Zoning Regulations to regulate lights posts greater than 14 feet in height.

No Comment – non required.

11. COMMISSION OPEN DISCUSSION: None

12. AUDIENCE OF CITIZENS: None

13. EXECUTIVE SESSION: The Commission did not go into Executive Session

Pending Legal Action per State Statutes Section 1-200(6)(B)

14. ADJOURNMENT:

R. Nassiff **MOVED** to **ADJOURN**; J. Riendeau **SECONDED**; **MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY**

The meeting was adjourned at **8:17 PM**.

Respectfully submitted by Mary Kay Hyman, Board Clerk

Please see the minutes of subsequent meetings for approval of these minutes and any corrections hereto.

This meeting can be viewed in its entirety on the Town of Columbia You Tube Channel