



**REGULAR MEETING OF THE PLANNING AND ZONING COMMISSION
MIDDLETOWN CONNECTICUT
SEPTEMBER 23, 2020**

The Regular Meeting of the Planning and Zoning Commission of the City of Middletown was held live remotely via WebEx.

1. Roll Taking

Present Commissioner Stephen Devoto
Commissioner Nicholas Fazzino (arrived at 7:18 PM)
Commissioner Thom Pattavina
Commissioner Richard Pelletier
Commissioner Catherine Johnson
Commissioner James O'Connell
Commissioner Marcus Fazzino (arrived at 7:18 PM)
Commissioner Shanay Fulton,
Commissioner Kellin Atherton
Commissioner Quatina Frazer

Staff: Marek Kozikowski, AICP, City Planner

Public: Over 20 members of the public

The first 1 ½ hours of the meeting were not properly recorded.

2. Items removed from the agenda and why

None

3. Public comment on items on agenda which are not currently scheduled for a public hearing

None

4. ZEO Certification that all public hearing signs have been properly noticed (when scheduled)

All signs were posted correctly

5. Public Hearings (when scheduled)

- 1. Proposed two lot resubdivision of the property of Roger & Marylou Spurr at 88 Preston Street. Applicant/agent Roger & Marylou Spurr/Pat Benjamin, P.E. S2020-3**

Commissioner Thom Pattavina moves to close the public hearing. Commissioner Catherine Johnson seconds the motion. The chair calls for the vote. The chair states the matter passes unanimously with 7 affirmative votes.

Commissioner Thom Pattavina moves for approval for a two lot resubdivision of the property of Roger & Marylou Spurr at 88 Preston Street. Commissioner Nicholas Fazzino seconds the motion. The chair calls for the vote. The chair states the matter passes unanimously with 7 affirmative votes.

- 2. Continued: Proposed zoning map amendment from MX (Mixed Use) to SMH (Substance Abuse/ Mental Health) Floating zone for property located at 392 Washington Street. Applicant/agent Hartford Dispensary dba Root Center for Advanced Recovery/ Timothy S. Hollister, Esq., Shipman & Goodwin LLP Z2020-7**

The public hearings for items 5.2 and 5.3 were combined on September 9, 2020. Seated Commissioners: Devoto, N. Fazzino, Pattavina, Pelletier, Johnson, O'Connell, Atherton (for M. Fazzino)

- 3. Continued: Proposed special exception for a change of use from automobile repair garage and site plan review of a new clinic for mental health and/or substance abuse counseling, Diagnosis and Treatment (methadone treatment services) at 392 Washington Street in the proposed SMH zone. Applicant/agent Hartford Dispensary dba Root Center for Advanced Recovery/ Timothy S. Hollister, Esq., Shipman & Goodwin LLP SE2020-5.**

The following are speakers from the public that were not recorded:

- Mr. McKeon
- Wendy Sheil
- Michelle Memran
- John DeSena
- Maryellen Shuckerow
- Lori Davis
- Nichole Bell
- Brian Hurlickey
- Virginia Negrell
- David Roane
- Jared Coggins
- Aliza Castro
- Sonia Santavenere
- Nick Connelly

- Jay Sheil wanted to comment on some of the comments spoken here tonight and said that this is in fact a residential zone. He said most of the previous speakers are in favor of a methadone clinic, just not in this spot.
- Ray Bishop of 163 Fisher Road lives very near the proposed site. He loves the neighborhood and the City. He stated that he thinks the area and the surrounding neighborhood would be enhanced by this building. The problem is already here in Middletown and it would be prudent and a benefit to the whole community to allow easier access to as many people as possible to a viable and prudent treatment option.
- Roy Anderson resident of 109 Butternut Street for past 20 years said the traffic is a major concern and a safety issue.
- Shandra Bernie of 7 Ridgefield Drive has lived in Middletown for 25 years. She used to live at 693 Washington Street. She is in favor of the methadone clinic.
- Chris Cardella of 1545 Country Club Road is in support of a methadone clinic in Middletown. He is a social worker for the State of Connecticut. The majority of his clients are involved with substance abuse and a good amount of them have to go to Hartford, New Britain or North Haven to get their methadone. This puts a good amount of stress on them to coordinate to get their daily doses. This clinic would be a tremendous benefit. He has dealt with the Root Center and they have been great.
- Chris Peterson currently lives in Essex and has lived in Middletown for 7 years. He works at the Root Center as Director of Nursing and is in recovery himself. He heard a lot of fears and stereotypes tonight. He is saddened by some of the judgments and from the discrimination tonight.
- Martha Stevens does not think the location is good for a methadone clinic. She has worked for the Rood Center for many years and has witnessed activity at 4:00 in the morning and she does not think a residential area is good. There is drug use, overdoses with no security and no police activity. There are needles in the parking lots, cigarette butts everywhere, bags with residue and how could the Root Center stop this? They won't even implement security. The ratio between counselors to patient is about 99 to 1 right now. This should be placed elsewhere.

At 8:50 PM Commissioner O'Connell moves for a 10 minute recess. Commissioner Fazzino seconds the motion. The chair calls for the vote. The chair states the matter passes unanimously with 7 affirmative votes.

Commissioner Devoto thanked all the speakers from the public for their comments. It is very important for their deliberations.

Meeting resumed at 9:00 PM

Marek acknowledged that there were 24 letters submitted from the public (written and emailed). He will not read all of them into the record because they have been available for public viewing on the website. The letters of support are from:

- Samuel Moy PHD, Advanced Behavior Health
- Miriam Delphin-Rittmon, PHD Connecticut Dept. of Mental Health and Addiction
- Jeffrey Shelton, MD, Middlesex Health Center for Behavior Health
- Maryellen Shuckerow, MHSA, St. Vincent DePaul of Middletown

Also many letters and emails against the application were received by the following:

- _____ Wilton, employee of the Root Center is against the proposal
- Robert M. Dodenhoff, MD, resident of Middletown
- Jeff Dziegielewski, owner of local business
- Brian Scrip, owner of local business and abutter
- William Duda
- Joyce Rossitter
- Kayla Bernacki
- Jared Coggins
- Lori Davis
- Sonia Santavenere, local business owner
- Shirley Weaver
- Estee Miller
- Susan Agrelli
- Charlotte McCoid
- Steven Katz, local business owner
- Bill Allen
- Anonymous resident
- Leanne Shoop
- Alyssa Pillion
- Ed McKeon
- Virginia Marino Negrelli
- Destiny Miller
- Steven Dicarlo
- Anonymous resident
- Brian Bousquet
- 2 petition letters with 28 signatures of residents and/or employees in town

He read his updated staff comments of September 22nd into the record.

Commissioner Johnson asked why they cannot stay on Saybrook Road. What is the motivating factor? Was there any other location attempted? When there is group therapy, how many people are parked when the new people are coming?

Commission O'Connell would like the issue that was reported in the Middletown Press on September 18, 2020 attributed to CEO Zuckerman. Mr. Zuckerman said "*the number one reason why people aren't getting addiction treatment has nothing to do with access. It has to do with stigma. People are afraid to be known for this addiction issue*". Now, the proposal is for a stand-alone building for methadone treatment and that is not an issue of people being afraid to be identified for this addiction service?

The following are the applicants responding to comments from the public hearings:

Ron Bonergen spoke of the parking issues that were brought up by the public and Commissioners. The cedar fence along Washington Street will be removed and the area will be mostly landscaped. He also explained the grading in the rear of the property.

Ted Cutler, explained the architecture of the building. Their intention is to remove the rear sign and only having the street facing sign. The monument sign will not be going up either. The façade is not the main entrance to the building. He answered some of the comments that have been brought up. The glass will be clear glass so you can see in the building with shades available for private meetings.

Tim Hollister added that the side entrance and rear exit will promote confidentiality.

Mark Bertucci, Senior Traffic Engineer and Professional Engineer at Fuss and O'Neil discussed traffic and answered all the public comments.

Steven Zuckerman responded to the question that was brought up several times....Why not Saybrook Road? The space on Washington Street will meet the goals of safety and security for a methadone clinic. The space at Saybrook Road is a rented office space and too small for methadone treatment and cannot be renovated to resemble the proposed rehab of the building at 392 Washington Street. Washington Street is also accessible to public transportation and sidewalks. He responded to Marek's visit to two other clinics in CT. New Britain is a very old clinic and not a well-functioning facility at all to meet the adequate need for the exploding opioid epidemic. They will soon be moving to East Main Street. Manchester is more in line with the proposed Middletown facility and works very well. The number one thing that is driving up the opioid epidemic is stigma. More people are out there afraid to get treatment than in treatment. Some of the reasons are the same as what we heard tonight.....it brings down property value, increased crime and the community is going to be destroyed by their presence. People are in fear to get treatment because of the reaction of the community. There have been 22% increase of overdoses this year compared to last year. The only way stigma gets reduced is more communities open up more facilities.

Tim Hollister stated that there have been anonymous speakers and writers which is against the rules. People need to state their name. He is asking any that anonymous speaker or writer to be excluded from the record.

Commissioner Nicholas Fazzino moves to continue the public hearing to October 14th for items 5.2 and 5.3 for a zoning map amendment and a special exception for a change of use from automobile repair garage and site plan review of a new clinic for mental health and/or substance abuse counseling, Diagnosis and Treatment (methadone treatment services) at 392 Washington Street in the proposed SMH zone. Commissioner Thom Pattavina seconds the motion.

Commissioner O'Connell asks the applicant that if they are going to submit new material to please give the Commission sufficient time to go over it.

The chair calls for the vote. It is unanimous to table with 7 aye votes. The chair states the matter passes unanimously with 7 affirmative votes.

6. Old Business

None

7. New Business

None

8. Public comment on topics which are not or have not been the subject of a public hearing

None

9. Minutes of the Regular Meeting, Transcripts, Staff Reports and Commission Affairs

1. Minutes of the September 9, 2020 meeting

There were comments that were not noted in the minutes that the Staff and Commission thought were important and Marek will modify the minutes.

Commissioner Thom Pattavina moves to table the minutes of the September 9, 2020 meeting. Commissioner James O'Connell seconds the motion. The chair calls for the vote. It is unanimous to table with 7 aye votes. The chair states the matter passes unanimously with 7 affirmative votes.

2. River-Cog Report

Commissioner Atherton said that RiverCog had a workshop on affordable housing which was very informative

3. Staff Reports

None

4. Commission Affairs

None

10. Adjournment

Commissioner Thom Pattavina reads and moves for approval 10. Adjournment. Commissioner James O'Connell seconds the motion. The chair calls for the vote. It is unanimous to adjourn with 7 aye votes. The chair states the matter passes unanimously with 7 affirmative votes.

Respectfully submitted,

Mark Kozikowski, AICP
City Planner