NEWINGTON TOWN PLAN AND ZONING COMMISSION

Regular Meeting

January 23, 2019

Chairman Frank Aieta called the regular meeting of the Newington Town Plan and Zoning Commission to order at 7:00 p.m. in the Conference Room L101 in the Newington Town Hall, 131 Cedar Street, Newington, Connecticut.

I. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

II. ROLL CALL AND SEATING OF ALTERNATES

Commissioners Present

Chairman Frank Aieta
Commissioner Michael Camillo
Commissioner Anthony Claffey
Commissioner Michael Fox
Commissioner Domenic Pane
Commissioner Stanley Sobieski
Commissioner Stephen Woods
Commissioner Hyman Braverman-A

Commissioners Absent

Commissioner John Bottalico-A
Commissioner Giangrave-A

Staff Present

Craig Minor, Town Planner

III. APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Chairman Aieta: Do you have any corrections to the agenda?

Craig Minor: Yes. New Business Item eight C, Newington Ridge Preserve Bond Reduction, I got an e-mail from the developer asking that his bond reduction request be postponed, he is not available tonight, so I recommend that the words, bond reduction be deleted and Newington Ridge Preserve be left on the agenda so that if the Commissioners have any questions or want to talk about the project in general, they can, but the bond reduction, the applicant has asked that that be postponed.

Chairman Aieta: I'm going to ask that we move that Item C up to before the public hearing. Is that all right with the Commissioners?

Commissioners agreed.

IV. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (For items not listed on the agenda; Speakers limited to 2 minutes )

None
V. REMARKS BY COMMISSIONERS

None

VI. PUBLIC HEARING

Chairman Aieta: I had indicated that Newington Ridge Preserve would be moved prior to the Public Hearing and then I went right into the public hearing, so why don't we just have that item taken up quickly because there are people from the neighborhood who I don't think should have to wait until the end of the meeting, seeing that we took the bond reduction out. Are there any comments or issues at this time on the Newington Ridge Preserve?

Commissioner Sobieski: Mr. Chairman, can you tell us, or maybe Craig can, how much money is actually in this bond? I'm seeing $165,000 he wants reduced.

Craig Minor: The amount of the bond is $176,000 I believe, so he is asking for the lion's share of it.

Commissioner Sobieski: Thank you.

Chairman Aieta: There is information in your packet on the request and the concerns of the staff. Do the people from the Reserve have any questions? Now we will go into the Public Hearing.

A. Petition 01-19: Special Permit (Sec. 3.2.1: Churches and Places of Worship at 2172 Berlin Turnpike. Lifeway Church, Applicant, Berlin Turnpike of Newington LLC, Owner, Gary Weber, 220 Sunrise Avenue, Newington CT, Contact.

Chairman Aieta: Mr. Planner, under New Business there is a site plan modification, same owners, same application, can we take them both at the same time?

Craig Minor: If this were a controversial application I would recommend that you keep them separate, but since I don't think there are going to be any issues with this, discussing them at the same time won't be a problem.

Chairman Aieta: Any Commissioner comments on that?

Commissioners: Fine with that, no problems.

Commissioner Sobieski: I just have one question, has this gone before Wethersfield yet, because the majority of this building is in the Town of Wethersfield.

Craig Minor: Right. My understanding is that Wethersfield is going to take it up next week.

Commissioner Sobieski: Okay, thank you.

Chairman Aieta: Okay, the applicant is here. Please come forward, state your name and address for the record and make your presentation.

Commissioner Pane: Should we read the other petition into the record since you are going to do them both together?
B. Petition 02-19: Site Plan Modification at 2172 Berlin Turnpike, Lifeway Church, Applicant; Berlin Turnpike of Newington LLC, Owner; Gary Weber 220 Sunrise Avenue, Newington CT, Contact.

Stephen Cianci: Good evening, I just want to thank you for the opportunity of allowing me to speak. Even though I'm a pastor, I'm not going to go on for too long. My name is Stephen Cianci, and I am the lead pastor of Lifeway Church in Newington. Gary Weber, by the way, on the application is one of my board members. He is here if there are questions on the site plan, he is here to help with that.

For the past four and a half years we have been setting up and tearing down as a church at the Shriners Banquet Hall on the Berlin Turnpike. Currently we are under contract to purchase 2172 Berlin Turnpike, the Super Club for Kids building. We are planning to continue the current use as a day care with the pre-school and after school programs, but we are applying today, as you know for a special permit under Section 3.2.1 under the zoning regulations, to use the building as a church. So the additional usage will be to assemble for worship on Sunday at the same building, so it would be shared, and Craig, I'm not sure if the actual floor plan is that something that you have on the projector as well if people want to see, I know that it is available.

Craig Minor: Let me take this off line and see if I can find the floor plan.

Stephen Cianci: Essentially it shows that right now where they have a gymnasium, we would set that up and use that as our assembly area for worship and we have a drawing of that. So our goal is to assemble there for worship on Sunday and also to meet as small groups during the week. I'll describe those in just a minute. I just want to give you a little bit of background about us. My wife Tina and I planted the church back in 2014. I grew up in Newington, graduated from Newington High, after college we lived in a near-by town, but looking for a better school system we moved back into Newington and shortly after returning to the town we really felt the call to plant a new life giving church. Even before we launched, we had a very strong community mission. We partnered with the Human Services in town on a lot of different projects, food drives, things for the homeless, we sponsored gifts every year at Christmas time for families. We have also, in coordination with Human Services we have done service projects like landscaping, painting, cleaning up of blighted properties in town, snow removal, mostly for the elderly and the disabled, and in addition we hold free community events at the church, right now at the Shriners. We hold an annual trick or treat, Easter egg hunts, we are active members of the Rotary and the Chamber of Commerce. We support every single town event by sponsoring a booth at the Newington Business Showcase, Waterfall Festival, Classic Car Show and the Extravaganza, so all of this community activity is just part of the mission of our church, but we do exist to reach people who are lost or disconnected and it is our mission to help them connect with God, others and the community at large.

I'm highlighting this community activity because I think it's relevant, but we have grown in other ways besides community activity which really is driving the need for this building. We started out with five people and four of them were related to me, and so we all fit in my living room and that was not a big requirement, but over a few years we grew to over one hundred people and then last year we joined forces with Mill Pond Church, led by my good friend, Pastor Joel Rissinger, who is here this evening, so we now have two vibrant worship services that are relatively full on Sunday morning and we have many small groups that meet during the week. Normally they meet in people's homes, but our goal would be to get them to meet over in the building, and they are all different kinds of groups. There are men's groups, women's groups, youth, children, boys and girls scouting, and we have marriage groups,
financial groups, and in fact, I just found out that Newington residents have paid out over four hundred thousand dollars in debt just going through our financial piece groups. In the end, it's really not about the numbers for us, it's about the individual life changes that are happening, and we have seen that. We've seen relationship reconciled, people reconnecting with God, marriages healed, people overcoming life controlling problems, and many have found their life's calling and purpose at Lifeway Church. So, I'm bringing that all to you and imagine what would happen if we had a building dedicated for that purpose, for our mission, to help people connect with God, others and community. Not only do I believe it would preserve and improve the existing day care that is there and the services for future generations for Newington, but we would also be a visible blessing in the community, a place to gather, a place to encourage, to heal, to fellowship, and to serve our community. I believe this would have a positive ripple effect on the Town of Newington and beyond, so whatever the Commission can do to move our application forward this evening, it would be greatly appreciated. As you may be aware from a letter that I sent out to Commissioner Aieta, that there is a pending foreclosure on the building, and now we have managed to postpone that, but if it does go to foreclosure, it's our understanding, that the school would be closed and that would affect 50 children and 15 employees that are now employed there, so thank you for your attention and your consideration. Please let me know if I missed anything related to the change of use request, or if you have any questions.

Chairman Aieta: I have a question. The ownership of the day care, that will be owned by the church? How is that ownership set up for tax purposes?

Stephen Cianci: It would be by Lifeway Church, Inc., which is a not for profit. We registered a DBA name because we didn't want it to be Lifeway Church, so it is Lifeway Learning Center, but it falls under the, our group exemption, 501C, not for profit, so the name will change, but the staff will stay the same and all of the students, we will potentially have to rehire all of the staff, just a legal thing. Does that answer your question?

Chairman Aieta: Yes it does. Any other questions from the Commissioners before we go to the public?

Commissioner Pane: Are you going to talk about the site plan?

Chairman Aieta: Yes, we are going to get into the site plan and the layout of the parking and so on.

Stephen Cianci: So is it okay for me to call Gary up. I know that there are some changes to the handicapped parking and what not, but maybe Gary can address that.

Gary Weber: Thank you again for hearing us. My name is Gary Weber, a member of Lifeway, a member of the board and I've been onboard with Steve just a few months after he started the church, and I believe in the mission, and I've seen the hard work that he puts into it. I think this is a good project for Newington, being a town resident.

Chairman Aieta: Do you want to get into the site plan itself? Explain, if there are any questions from the staff regarding parking, what our responsibilities are because it is two towns and also there was a question about the parking where you are using what is on the state right of way.

Craig Minor: Let me speak to a couple of issues. The existing site was approved by TPZ a couple of decades ago, and the parking spaces are not conforming to the regulations. The applicants have agreed to make changes to the extent that they can to bring those parking
spaces as much into compliance as possible, namely change some of the parking spaces that are head or parking to parallel parking which would create one aisle, and I believe this still leaves enough parking for them to be in compliance. So in communications with the Town Engineer who brought that to my attention also, they have agreed to make some changes to the site to make the parking spaces more compliant with our regulations. I would recommend that the Commission not make too big an issue out of that since the existing conditions were approved by TPZ a number of years ago. Unfortunately my predecessor did not make a copy of that plan, so I don't have a copy of the plan that was approved by P & Z I believe in 1984, but I do have the minutes from the Commission where they voted to approve a revision to the plan a couple of years after the original plan, so I recommend, as you can see in my memo that you do approve the site plan, that they do make the changes that the Town Engineer was asked for regarding the parking spaces. At the end of my memo, my comments really are limited to just the Newington portion of the site, because that is really the only area that you have jurisdiction over. Wethersfield will do what they need to do.

Commissioner Claffey: About your last comment, the ingress and egress for the amount of cars that can come in and go out and park falls on Newington, not Wethersfield.

Craig Minor: Correct.

Commissioner Claffey: So, as you just said, how do we not have authority over everything?

Craig Minor: Oh, what I meant was, sorry, good point, my point was we don't have jurisdiction over the amount of parking in the back of the building. We can only require parking for the amount of building that is in Newington. Now, if there were large problems with this site, then we would exercise good judgment and require the applicants to make changes in the plans if it was unsafe, even if what was unsafe was in another town, but under the circumstances, the staff doesn't feel that the parking lot in Newington is a problem.

I do want to talk about the lack of permission from DOT for the parking that is in DOT, I mean up to the highway, I do want to talk about that.

Chairman Aieta: Is that part of the calculation for the parking.

Craig Minor: Yes, they are getting credit for those spaces that are half in the right of way and half on their property, but again, that configuration was approved by this Commission some time ago.

Commissioner Claffey: Was that configuration in the Town of Wethersfield calculated in it, at that meeting for this town?

Craig Minor: I don't understand the question?

Commissioner Claffey: You said that on our side of the property line of the town, we approved it many years ago with a calculation of parking. Is that just for what is in Newington or was that for the whole property?

Craig Minor: Okay, I don't know.

Commissioner Pane: We looked at the whole parcel.

Commissioner Claffey: So back then it was approved, we approved parking that was in another town's jurisdiction. Now you are saying that you don't want us to .......

Craig Minor: The Commission may have thought it was doing that, but it wasn't. We only have jurisdiction over the parking spaces in Newington. Obviously the Chairman back then signed the plan that showed improvements in Wethersfield, but TPZ doesn't have jurisdiction over what is happening in Wethersfield.

Commissioner Claffey: Does the Building Department have jurisdiction over what is happening in a building in Wethersfield, even though the entrance is in Newington?

Craig Minor: I don't want to venture a guess.

Commissioner Claffey: I don't understand why we don't have jurisdiction on something that we approved back in the '80's, in '83, and now you are telling us we can only look at the front of the building, which is not even a third of the parcel, or the parking, excuse me.

Craig Minor: I'm not saying that you can't look at what is going on in Wethersfield, in fact if there was something happening in Wethersfield that was problematic I would encourage you to then possibly table that approval, but I don't think that is the case, I don't think there is any problem with this.

Commissioner Claffey: So we are only going to approve parking that is to the, the major part of the site plan, the logistics, how we come into the structure and how you leave, in theory, based on how many parking spaces there are. So what I'm trying to understand is, if we approve it tonight, on the site plan, we are only approving about a third of the required parking, if so what you say is true then we can only......

Craig Minor: A third of the parking, you lost me here.

Commissioner Claffey: The whole lot here has slots in Wethersfield, 7,2,2,3,5,3, all the numbers, but in Newington there's X amount of parking on the plan.

Craig Minor: Right. 40 spaces.

Commissioner Claffey: So we are only allowed to act on 40 spaces and say that's enough even though there are how many other spaces that aren't in our jurisdiction.

Craig Minor: You only have jurisdiction in Newington. I mean, you can parse it different ways.....

Commissioner Claffey: That's my question, how many parking spaces are required for this whole structure. Is it 40, it is 80, is it 100?

Craig Minor: I think the question is, how much parking would Wethersfield require?

Commissioner Claffey: No, I'm asking you, you, I'm asking us......

Craig Minor: I can't answer......

Commissioner Claffey: How can you not answer?

Craig Minor: The answer is, there's 2,350 square feet of floor area in Newington. Now what is in Newington is classrooms, a bathroom, a reception area, the amount of parking required for a classroom and reception area is, would be maybe one space per hundred. You have a lot of categories for that.
Commissioner Claffey: Do we have a category for the building?

Craig Minor: No, the category pertains to uses.

Commissioner Claffey: So the use of the building deems X amount of parking?

Craig Minor: Right, and if the sanctuary was in Newington I could tell you how many parking spaces were required but the sanctuary isn’t in Newington, it’s in Wethersfield, the portion in Newington like I said, it’s a classroom, a bathroom, and a reception area, and there are some forty or more parking spaces in Newington. So there is more than enough parking in Newington for the portion of the building that it is Newington.

Commissioner Pane: I think what Anthony is trying to get at is even though you don’t have jurisdiction over the Wethersfield, as we look at the entire plan as a whole, how much seating is in the area where they are going to hold their church services, what is the seating capacity?

Gary Weber: We have a floor plan on the white board, and it shows 167 or 162 chairs, I’d have to go up and look at the number, but it’s about 165, and the required amount of spaces calculated by the architect according to Newington’s regulations was 62. According to Wethersfield regulations for the building it was 62. You both have the same regulation, it’s the same amount. On the site plan we have 71 or 72 spaces.

Chairman Aieta: That’s the point. That’s the whole point that they are trying to make. Is there enough parking when you have a full service so that people are not parking on the Berlin Turnpike or in the driveway getting into the parcel, and you just answered that, by saying that you have 71, so you meet the requirements of the parking, for both Wethersfield and Newington. The semantics of splitting the thing, we can’t look at it as what is in Newington, we have to look at it, is it going to work without cars parked up and down the Berlin Turnpike when you have services. We want you to be able to contain your activities on your piece of property. Does that answer your question, Anthony? They need 62, they have 71.

Commissioner Claffey: Did we confirm that with the Town of Wethersfield?

Craig Minor: No.

Commissioner Claffey: Then how do we know that they are going to meet, we’re going to approve something (inaudible) for the ownership of this piece of land.

Chairman Aieta: No matter what the semantics are, our regulations require 62 spaces, and they have 71.

Commissioner Pane: If the whole building was in Newington, Newington regulations would require 62. The same thing with Wethersfield, and they have 71 parking spaces and hopefully the church has taken everything into account because I’m sure that they want to make sure that they have parking for all of the people attending.

Gary Weber: We do.

Chairman Aieta: Now the straightening out with the State of Connecticut....
Craig Minor: Yes, that's an issue. The site plan says "lease agreement with the State of CT. Vol 488 Pg 59 (NLR), I don't know what NLR means, but if you go to the volume and page the document that is there is just the warranty deed. It doesn't say anything about any agreement with the State of Connecticut for parking there, so hopefully the applicants can address that tonight.

Gary Weber: There was a lease agreement and the previous owner was paying a lease, a monthly lease, and they got into some financial trouble and they stopped paying the state. We're in the process of catching up on the back lease payments and to continue forward with it. Their only issue was, part of the process of this whole thing is to get approval from you, approval from Wethersfield, before I can even go and talk to the DOT. So, we would be running in a loop if we wait for the DOT. If we are going to move forward to see what we do here, I'll meet with the Town of Wethersfield tomorrow and then I can bring everything down to the DOT and see what their reaction would be.

Craig Minor: Are you saying that DOT refused to help you find the documents in the past gave this permission?

Gary Weber: No, I must have confused it for you Craig, we have to, because it is a change of use for a building, we also have to go before the DOT, after we gain our approval from the town, the lease agreement with the DOT, our Attorney John Kelly is working on that, all we have to do with that is just catch up, because the lease is still in effect. Super Club is still running and they are still using the parking, and the lease fee, I don't remember the number but it was about $86, it was minimal a month due to the DOT. So they are working on that now.

Commissioner Sobieski: Basically what happens is this is a lease between rights of way and Super Club, whoever owns the building, and the lease can be transferred from one owner to another as long as they get approval, in this case from both towns, that's why you won't find this in a volume. What you need to do is, somewhere up in rights of way, Terry Obie's office, you will get a copy of this lease which will tell you what they are actually leasing. It's done quite frequently throughout the state.

Chairman Aieta: Any other Commissioner comments or questions at this time?

Commissioner Pane: Mr. Chairman, I'd like to make a motion that we move Petition 01....

Chairman Aieta: We have to go to the public first.

Commissioner Pane: Oh, I'm sorry.

Chairman Aieta: We will ask the public to weigh in on this. At this time, anyone wishing to speak in favor of this application please come forward, state your name and address for the record. Anyone wishing to speak in opposition to this application? Seeing none......

Commissioner Pane: I'd like to make a motion that we move Petition 01-19 and Petition 02-19 to Old Business for action tonight.

The motion was seconded by Commissioner Fox. The vote was unanimously in favor of the motion, with seven voting YEA.

Chairman Aieta: We will be taking it up under the Old Business section of the agenda tonight.
VII.  **APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

Commissioner Sobieski moved to approve the minutes of the January 9, 2019 meeting. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Fox. The vote was unanimously in favor of the motion, with seven voting YEA.

VIII.  **NEW BUSINESS**

Commissioner Fane: Mr. Chairman, I'm going to recuse myself for reasons stated at previous meetings.

A.  Zoning Text Amendment (Motor Vehicle Regulations.)

Craig Minor: You have a draft amendment in our packet, a memo from me with comments on it. Whatever the Commission's pleasure is, whether to send this to a public hearing or not.

Chairman Aleta: The two items that were basically contested, leaving the distance at 100 feet and the garage door placement facing the street.

Craig Minor: It was my understanding that is what the Commission wants. That can always be revisited during the public hearing, then you might end up with something different. This is just getting to a public hearing.

Commissioner Claffey: Was there a discussion on a roll-up door versus a loading dock door, where you may have a roll-up door or a garage door which does not have a loading dock portion of it.

Craig Minor: What happened was, a couple of months ago, I seem to remember that there was something in the regulations that prohibits roll-up doors from facing the street anywhere in town, but then when I went back and researched that more thoroughly it's really only when there is a loading dock with a roll-up door that the loading dock and the door cannot face the street. So I connected myself in a memo I think a couple of meetings ago.

Commissioner Claffey: So this would then change the current roll-up……

Craig Minor: No, there is no loading dock involved in this regulation.

Commissioner Claffey: But other businesses that have loading docks, that would be precluded, charged,……

Craig Minor: No, because we are not changing that regulation, so it would not be affected.

Commissioner Woods: If we change this, leave it at 100 feet or put it back to 100 feet, I think it is 50 feet now, so put it back to 100 you really make no change in any of the properties as they stand today. The only change is, if there is someone new, if it is 50 feet right now, then it becomes 100 we are making it a little bit harder to, I shouldn't say harder, more distance required now for an automotive use abutting residential.

Craig Minor: Correct, and it is still 100 feet, since 2011 when the current regulation was adopted.

Chairman Aleta: Any other questions from the Commissioners?
Craig Minor: My understanding now is that this is ready to go to public hearing, so I'll make that happen.

Chairman Aieta: Is there any way that we can get a notification to the auto businesses in town? There can't be more than 50. I'm not sure of the number but,....

Craig Minor: Yes, we can do that.

Chairman Aieta: Send a letter to them saying, telling them, it does affect them.

Commissioner Woods: That's a good idea.

Craig Minor: We can do that.

Chairman Aieta: We want their input now while we are having the public hearing, we don't want them coming back after saying that they did not know about it.

B. Newington Ridge Preserve

Discussed earlier in the meeting

C. Kindness Counts

Bill DeMaio: Good evening, my name is Bill DeMaio and I'm the Superintendent of Parks and Recreation. Grew up in Newington for 60 years, lived here, lived on Hopson Avenue, if anyone is old enough to remember Hopson Avenue which is currently Connecticut Avenue, and then built a house on Burden Lane, so went to Elizabeth Green, Martin Kellogg and the high school. I mention that because I want to explain to you how invested I am in Newington, how much I love Newington and how great it is. I am in a position here when I have the opportunity to make even more changes and stimulate interest and make the Town of Newington even better which I think all of you here are interested in too.

I have a program that we call Kindness Counts and we wanted to bring it forward to you and Craig and I spoke, and this is in the category of no good deed goes unpunished. Everything that I do is transparent. I come up with creative and imaginative ideas and I have a litmus test over the last 40 years in this business, and I say, if I can put it printed on the front page of the newspaper and it still feels good, it's probably a good idea.

So we tried to come up with something and I talked with Craig, and we thought the easiest way to tell the Town Planning and Zoning and to be honest and upfront and transparent was to present it as a report that he gives to this body. If I had any idea, I went through for the first time and read your minutes for last month, and it seemed like you guys were so angry and upset and that was the farthest from, that is the complete opposite of what this program is trying to do. We're trying to be kind, and portray a great Town of Newington. You see, there are only about 50 people in my mind that are negative Nellies and have this, what I call, a vocal minority, in that they bash things on Facebook and they say bad things and throw stones at the Town and what we do, but there are a ton a great people in Newington, fabulous people, and this program, Kindness Counts, gives them a conduit to become, put a spotlight on the good people of Newington, give them the opportunity to do more good things, and to be celebrated and to be recognized for it.

So I put together a package that, Eileen Francollino here is our vice-chair, for those of you that don't know. Don Woods is the chair person, he's out of the country right now, so we have
in the package the sign and it’s two sided, it looks like this, it has, on one side it says, if you could be anything in this world, be kind, and then the other side says, Kindness Counts. If you recognize the color, it’s Parks and Recreational green, it’s not red or blue, so it is not political aspirational, none of that stuff. This is (inaudible), non-business, just a good thing for this Town to celebrate.

So in there I have a package and I have two letters of endorsement, one from Don Woods, and one from a mother of three, Cheryl Zembruski and I understand that your rules state that you can’t have public participation if it is on your agenda, so Craig advised me that I should bring two letters. I could have gotten one hundred letters, because everybody loves this idea, however, I didn’t, I just got the two people who wanted to make their opinion known. Because of my lack of eye sight, I asked Craig if he wouldn’t mind reading the two letters into the minutes, so that way people on the TV can hear it. So Craig, if you wouldn’t mind?

Craig Minor: Okay, the first letter is from Don Woods, Chairperson of Parks and Rec Board, dated January 18, 2019:

“Dear Members of the Town Planning and Zoning Board:

I am unable to attend your meeting because I am out of the country. I am writing in full support of the Building a Strong Community Kindness Counts Program that has been unanimously endorsed by the entire Newington Parks and Recreation Board at the monthly meeting on January 15, 2019. In a time where kindness needs to be encouraged, we need to do all we can to support this idea as a community. The Kindness Counts lawn signs will only be up for about 5 to 8 weeks. These signs will raise our Newington residents’ awareness to be kind to each other. This is not a business proposition and it is not a yearlong program. All it simply is, is a program that begins to change people’s thoughts and actions for the positive. Whatever challenges you have with it, the Parks and Recreation board is asking you to accept this new and exciting idea for the good of the whole town. It’s a program of pure innocence and goodness.

After reviewing the minutes from your last meeting, I wish to correct a few statements. The two sign boards located at the Center Green and at CVS have been managed by the Newington Parks and Recreation Department for over 36 years. They are free to reserve and there has never been a fee attached to them. It is a free service. In fact, the Newington Parks and Recreation Department pays for the construction and the materials to build it. They also maintain the sign boards. About three years ago, the department reconstructed them. A new design was implemented to avoid and discourage graffiti and vandalism that was taking place on the blank white board. The Newington Parks and Recreation Department hung a generic sign permanently as the base or foundation for other civic groups to hang their signs over. This eliminated the white board that was previously part of the design that kept getting graffiti placed on it on a regular basis. So far, knock on wood, this idea has worked. The department in fact takes reservations from civic and church group organizations for over 42 weeks out of 52 weeks per year on the sign boards. Civic groups can reserve one week at a time. If no other group wishes to reserve it, the staff offers the group to leave it up for another week. The department does reserve for its own use, two weeks per year for the Motorcycle Madness Event and for the Life Be in It Extravaganza. They do allow civic groups to use it over their own use. When a group takes their sign down on a Saturday and the next group possibly doesn’t put their sign up until Monday, it may appear to some people that the Newington Parks and Recreation sign is always up. This is just because of volunteers having to find time in their busy schedules to put their group’s sign up.

As far as the signs from Lacrosse, Little League, or other youth groups that you referred to that hang on the Clem Lernire field fence facing Willard Avenue, the department has never
received a penny from them. In fact, the superintendent has asked them to refrain from doing that in order to be sensitive to your wishes.

In regards to your comments about the high school graduation signs at Clem Lemire Sport Complex, those are a Board of Education program. The board of education has agreed and publicizes that the signs can be hung from June 1st to June 30th. This is again a nice program that quite frankly brings a smile to my face and to many others. It demonstrates community pride.

In summary, your board has looked the other way for other great programs such as the high school graduation signs, high school graduation lawn signs, flocking birds, driveway and roofing installation signs, political lawn signs, full size political pictures of candidates, tag sale signs, library event signs, and many others. Why would you discriminate and not informally endorse the Newington Parks and Recreation Kindness Counts program? Saying no to kindness seems very disappointing. It really labels our town in a very negative way. We ask you to reconsider your thoughts and fully endorse the Kindness Counts program that will bring positive nctoriety to our community, something we desperately need.

We fully hope that all of you individually are now inspired to do a random act of kindness for your neighbors, and proudly flaunt a Kindness Counts sign in your own yards. I hope to see you all at the Kindness Counts Recognition Celebration at the culmination of the program on Thursday, July 18, 2019 at Mill Pond Park and be able to congratulate each and every one of you for setting a great example for Newington.

With warm kindness,

Don Woods
Chairperson, Parks and Recreation Board
82 Ivy Lane
Newington CT 06111

The other letter, much shorter, from Cheryl Zembrzuski:

Dear Town Planning and Zoning Board,

I am writing to you today as a resident who loves the Town of Newington. While I am unable to be in attendance for this meeting I wanted to share with you why I believe the “kindness counts” program is important.

As a mother of three I am constantly driving around town to various activities and on several occasions my son specifically would ask, “Mom, what does that sign say” or even “Mom, why does that sign have someone’s picture on it.” I would then have to explain that either someone is running for public office or the sign is to promote a particular sport or activity, never once being able to share with him a significant lesson or meaning.

Being a parent is one of the most difficult jobs in the world. Constantly teaching kids to have good manners, behave and be nice to one another...how amazing would it be to say, “that sign is there because someone was kind to another person.” Instead of just “telling” them about being kind this sign would be a symbol of people who actually “do” kind acts. This town has wonderful people in it who do great things on a daily basis. Driving through town and seeing signs that show how kind our residents are would be something I would be proud
to have my children see. Sometimes the smallest things have the biggest impact. This sign might remind a neighbor to simply say hello, or a friend to check in on someone who lives alone, or even a child to think of ways to be kind to a friend. Kindness does count! To my children, our families and this community! Please consider supporting this initiative for our town.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Cheryl Zembrzuski
63 Harding Ave
Newington CT 06111

Bill DeMaio: Thank you. So basically what the program is, is we start it on May 16th, Motorcycle Madness at Mill Pond Park and make the announcement and we encourage people to be kind to their neighbors. Either bake them a pie or rake their leaves, cut their grass, bring someone to the doctor, whatever variety, etc. Then what happens is that the nominee calls the Parks and Rec Department where they get on our website or Facebook, and we have a form that they can fill out and send in if they wish, and we have a volunteer who will bring out a sign to their (inaudible.) So when the neighbors drive by they say, hey that’s kind of neat, or whether they start talking about it at the dinner table, and the parents say, why don’t we go across the street to Mr. and Mrs. Woods house and help them with a task or a job, or whatever and it starts to encourage people to, it becomes a multiplier. It starts with one to the next to the next and people want to get on board, jump on the bus. Everybody starts to get excited and starts getting a buzz around Newington. It’s six to eight weeks. It’s not a long period of time. We’ll go pick up the signs because we will want to keep them for the following year if the program works, and we think it’s bigger than that. So if Newington starts talking about kindness and goodness, now it stretches out a little farther, people from Berlin, Wethersfield, West Hartford and New Britain are driving through Newington and all of a sudden, they say, hey, Newington has something cool going on, they’re kind to each other, isn’t that a nice idea. So it’s going to be one of those things that starts to develop, so now we have Newington, we’ve got statewide, we have a craft letter in there to Ellen DeGeneres and we went national for a program idea to highlight Newington as a kindness because she believes in kindness and that is something that she does everyday on her show. We hope this goes viral, hope that she uses Newington as a kind example of what we’re all about, and again, highlighting the good people, giving them a value and giving them a conduit to share their goodness.

Once we get that, then we come to the end of the program which is the Thursday before the Extravaganza with a concert and a wine and beer garden, and we ask everyone to come and they get recognized as kind people of Newington. How powerful would that be to have that many people show up, just good people and kind people.

We went to the Newington Interfaith Council, which is all of the worship leadership, all of the churches, synagogues, the congregations and the houses of worship, they endorsed it unanimously. The Parks and Recreation Board endorsed it unanimously. Two senior citizens heard about the program, I don’t know how they heard about it, and they already nominated people in their neighborhood for being nice to them. So everyone we have talked to is totally on board with this thing, so I’m hoping that you guys could keep an open mind and get the position that you are in, everybody that does these kind of things, they don’t tell you. They do it. I come here straight out, forward, honestly, telling you straight up, and it seems like Parks and Rec gets hit in the head with a stick. So I’m trying to tell you, please give us a chance because it has the potential to really put Newington on the map and really make people change the culture, change the feeling of the negativity in getting this powerful snowball effect rolling.
I have been told by colleagues in different towns that if we don’t to it, they are going to steal the idea and they are going to do it, so if that is the case, and they just heard about it, I’ve got to say that that is a pretty good indicator that this is a good idea. So with that, I’ll answer any questions.

Chairman Aieta: Any comments or questions for Mr. DeMaio?

Commissioner Woods: Thank you for your presentation, very through as always. This Commission probably cannot support you, but personally I have no problems with this initiative and I actually think it is something that the town definitely needs.

Bill DeMaio: That is what I was trying to do last month, to inform you, but not force a vote or anything.

Commissioner Sobieski: Mr. DeMaio, that was an outstanding presentation, I’m very pleased with it and I definitely would like to support this. I think we need to do something, considering that this town has gotten such a bad reputation recently with all of the problems, and I would like to see something that would bring something positive. Thank you.

Commissioner Fox: I have to agree with Steve and Stan. In the past, as you mentioned and at our last meeting, there are signs out there that go up and come down and go up and come down, they are mostly civic organizations and political signs. With this new program, as you said, it’s all about everybody being kind.

Commissioner Braverman: With so much negativity I think this program fits the bill for positivity and I see no reason not to have it, I see no reason why we, well we should really get involved, but I think from a public perspective to everybody being kind, being nice, being good to each other, there is an awful lot of negativity all around and as we strive to be better we should be kind rather than not kind.

Commissioner Woods: The Lifeway Church, they are in a position to buy a building which actually has a struggling business in it, that if it closes will potentially put fifty families without day care. They are actually making sure that would not be disrupted and I think that is a wonderful example of what you are trying to do in town, and it happened just before you came up to the podium, so I definitely think they deserve a sign out there.

Chairman Aieta: Any other Commissioner comments?

Commissioner Woods: Great job as always, and I’ve got your back on this.

Chairman Aieta: I can’t dispute anything that you said Mr. DeMaio I think that the program is a wonderful idea, explained to the Commission, but the only problem I have is putting the signs on people’s lawns in disregard to our regulations. It we allow you to do that, then we open it up for something that we worked on for years to try to get to a point where our regulations on temporary signs are consistent. If we allow you to do it; then we are setting a precedent where what happens when the next person comes in and says, Parks and Rec can do it, is there another way that you can recognize them without putting the sign on their property. Can you use your sign, can you use the banner that runs across the street in the center of town, as a recognition, a place to put people’s names or something? There has got to be another way. The problem is that this will turn into a fight with us for every other civic organization, and you say, other people are doing it, yes, they are doing it in violation of our regulations. I’m in support of this program, one hundred percent, but I can’t come out in support putting the signs on lawns in disregard to our sign regulations, unless we
go and change the regulations and start making changes to the temporary sign regulations. The way it stands now, the way that it reads is that they are prohibited.

Bill DeMaio: I understand that, and I don’t want to have any kind of, we don’t want to bring any kind of aggravation to you at all. That’s clear. I should say too that every rule has an exception. There is an exception to every rule. The author Jim Collins in his book, says, do the right thing for the right reason, we knocked around a whole bunch of ideas, but in my experience with marketing and advertising if, the analogy is simply this, if a political candidate put just their name on a little sign in the center of town, way up on the banner, over on Market Square it would have minimal effect, you wouldn’t have any results. We feel as a Parks and Rec Department that we wouldn’t have any results either by doing it any other way, but to encourage the neighborhood to get involved and to start to get that buzz going. I mean, we talked about bumper stickers, we talked about different things in the center of town, but it nothing fits the bill really as powerful as what we are looking for, we’re looking to stimulate interest, motivate, get people excited about the program.

Chairman Aieta: Any other Commissioner remarks at this time?

Commissioner Pane: I think it’s a great idea, I wish there were other ways that we could promote it. The political signs were referenced numerous times, the two political party chairmen have agreed for all political signs in the last couple of years to limit the political signs to a one month period. Just throwing that out there, four weeks, not sure if that helps the situation.

Eileen Francoliro: So if Parks and Rec would agree to four weeks, that would be okay?

Commissioner Pane: I’m just throwing it out there.....

Bill DeMaio: We don’t want to put you in the position of voting, I mean, that’s not why we are here. I’m really trying to educate you in what we are doing and why we are doing it. If you voted, you would be disregarding the regulations and I.....

Chairman Aieta: I think our position is pretty clear, these signs are not allowed, they are prohibited signs.

Bill DeMaio: I think by the time that we announce the program, and get it started, I thought it would be six weeks, six weeks, four weeks.....

Chairman Aieta: That’s not it, if this goes forward, then other signs will go up from other organizations and we are back to where we started four or five years ago with the problems with temporary signs littering the Town of Newington. You can see the difference in our actions by just driving down the Berlin Turnpike, and not seeing every business with fifty little lawn signs out and the clutter and the distractions to drivers, and everything else that comes along with it.

Commissioner Pane: For some time now we have been talking about having, trying to get more of the four by eight signs that are similar to the ones in the center of Newington. I think there are three, maybe four in the town,

Bill DeMaio: Two I believe.

Commissioner Pane: One at Cedar, one across from the bank, and then there is another one across from, I think there are three. My question is, if we could find locations and if we could
put another seven of those, eight of those up in town, some on the Town of Newington land and some get permission from private owners, would that help this program, and help you with other programs and help the community with additional space for the other people in the community that are looking for space, like Rotary, Kiwanis, and like that. Would that help?

Bill DeMaio: That would help, but I don’t know if you know how expensive these signs are to make, and how expensive they are to maintain. We looked into to trying to do a third sign at Willard Avenue where the Board of Education hangs the sheets for graduation, and that is state property, so that was difficult. It’s a big (inaudible) about how many people come into the office to reserve it and do the web site, it’s a job, and I don’t think we are in a position to do any more than our office staff, we only have two people up front. Just so you know, I sort of started the first sign in the center thirty-seven years ago when we started the Extravaganza and we wanted to make a sign to say how much money we were raising for fireworks and Dennis Bonitski, God rest his soul got us the material and helped build the first one, so it’s been in existence a long time, but it’s a big deal, but I think you are under the impression that people aren’t getting their signage, we don’t know of anyone complaining that they didn’t get time on the sign. If you do have anyone, tell them to call me, at the very least tonight I want you to know, if you ever have a question about Parks and Rec, just pick up the phone. I communicate, I’ll tell you why we did something, the facts, and what we do, so I think there are some assumptions that you guys made in last months meeting that really aren’t true, or aren’t factual or whatever, or you are listening to somebody who is yapping that’s not telling the real truth, so like I said, those signs are out there, people are using them, and we let civic groups and churches use it before Parks and Rec. If it’s empty, we’ll use it because it’s there.

Chairman Aleta: Any other Commissioner comments at this time? There is no action to be taken on this?

Craig Minor: Just go onto the next item.

Commissioner Fox: All we can do is wish you luck, thank you.

Bill DeMaio: Thank you, appreciate your time.

Commissioner Fox: Can’t vote on it.

Bill DeMaio: I understand, I was just trying to be upfront and honest and bring this to your attention so that you weren’t surprised, or read it some where else. You got all of the information before anyone else. Thank you very much. I understand the position you are in, I totally thank you for hearing me, thank you for listening, thank you for being respectful, I appreciate it, maybe we can make Newington a better place to live, work, worship and play.

IX. OLD BUSINESS

Petition 01-19
Special Permit (Sec. 3.2.1: Churches and Places of Worship) at 2172 Berlin Turnpike Lifeway Church, applicant, Berlin Turnpike of Newington LLC owner; Gary Weber, 220 Sunrise Avenue, Newington CT, contact.

Commissioner Claffey moved to approve Petition 01-19 Special Permit (Sec. 3.2.1: Churches and Places of Worship) at 2172 Berlin Turnpike Lifeway Church, applicant, Berlin Turnpike of Newington LLC owner; Gary Weber, 220 Sunrise Avenue, Newington CT, contact.
The motion was seconded by Commissioner Woods.

Chairman Aieta: Do you want to put a condition on that they get permission from DOT?

Craig Minor: Do you want to hold that for the site plan approval? Make that a condition of the site plan.

The vote was unanimously in favor of the motion, with seven voting YEA.

Commissioner Claffey: Do you want something on the record that they have to abide by the DOT guidelines pertaining to......

Craig Minor: Why don’t you make the motion, second it and then we can have a discussion, and let’s talk about it then.

Commissioner Claffey: I’m going to read in the conditions, but I can’t read in the condition if you don’t have the condition written.

Craig Minor: We can draft it on the fly. Just make this motion, get a second, and then we will talk about an additional condition.

Petition 02-19
Site Plan Modification at 2172 Berlin Turnpike
Lifeway Church, applicant, Berlin Turnpike of Newington LLC, owner
Gary Weber, 220 Sunrise Avenue, Newington CT, contact.

Commissioner Claffey moved to approve, with conditions, Petition 02-19: Site Plan Modification at 2172 Berlin Turnpike Lifeway Church, applicant, Berlin Turnpike of Newington LLC, owner Gary Weber, 220 Sunrise Avenue, Newington CT, contact.

Conditions:

1. The applicant shall revise the plans to satisfy the Town Engineer’s comments dated January 10, 2019.

Condition number two to be discussed further in said hearing.

Craig Minor: I just drafted this now, so we can certainly tweak it. Condition #2, the applicant shall provide documentation that DOT has approved the parking encroachment. I did it on the fly just now, so I have no pride of ownership of people want to change it, that’s great.

Chairman Aieta Okay, we will make that as condition #2.

The motion was seconded by Commissioner Woods. The vote was unanimously in favor of the motion, with seven voting YEA.

X. PETITIONS FOR PUBLIC HEARING SCHEDULING

None
XI. **TOWN PLANNER REPORT**

Craig Minor: I don't have any report but I just wanted to mention that the Commission’s concern about the motels on the Berlin Turnpike, I will have a memo for the Commission that the ZEO will present at the next meeting.

XII. **COMMUNICATIONS**

Commissioner Sobieski: I was at the CRCOG meeting last Thursday and a few things were discussed, number one, they are talking about trying to have the State of Massachusetts bring passenger service between Worcester and Springfield. That would complete the loop, you would be able to take a train from here straight up to Springfield and then over to Boston. They are pretty confident that that is going to go through so that would make the center rail a little bit feasible.

Secondly, there were two towns that did reject the 8-30G, both Simsbury and Tolland. Basically what I was told was and I'm trying to contact those two representatives to get a copy of what was, they rejected them on ten issues, went to court, the judge threw out four and sent it back. Basically it's a question of safety up there as well as here, and that was it. There is a lot of emphasis being put on rail right now, and the center piece that goes through here that the State is still working on to bring it up to speed, I think it's 80 right now, in certain areas it will go up to 100. Thank you.

Chairman Aieta: Any other communications?

XIII. **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION** (For items not listed on the agenda; speakers limited to two minutes.)

None

XIV. **REMARKS BY COMMISSIONERS**

Commissioner Claffey: I have a question in regards to the Fenn Road Stop and Shop and when they did their last renovation I notice that they added cart facilities in the parking lot and added signage on top of each cart facility. So the roofs, which used to be normal roofs, are now pictures, of vegetables, produce, all over the parking lot. So when you look in there you see these cart holders, which are fine and I guess approved on the site, but I don't know what everyone's take is on what is classified as signage, and what isn't. I know we debated this on stores that put signs from floor to ceilings, in all of their windows, you can't see in, can't see out, it kind of, take a drive by I guess and other Commissioners, if you don't get to that side of Newington as much as I do, it kind of looks a little obtrusive, but I don't know how that came up when they did that new pickup kiosk parking space change. Probably in the last two weeks these things have popped up. It's like red, yellow, green, blues, what is your take?

Craig Minor: I can speak to the enclosures themselves. Stop and Shop did approach me and I checked the regs to make sure it didn't decrease the amount of parking or if it did it didn't decrease it to a level that, but it was fine, so I didn't bring it to your attention. Your point about the illustrations on the top of these enclosures, that's interesting. I'll look into that and get back to you. I'll ask Andrew to research that.

Commissioner Woods: For the next meeting, if we could have a breakdown on how the bond was calculated for Newington Reserve and actually the recommendation, the town's confirmation of what was done and what are open items.
Commissioner Pane: You are probably going to need the Town Engineer here, do you plan on having him here, or ......

Craig Minor: Do you want to take a second and go through it, I can show you the spread sheet right now.

Commissioner Pane: If we have a conversation at the next meeting, if we have questions for the Town Engineer, he's not here, it's going to go on for the next couple of meetings. I think, since this is a project that he is heavily involved in, that he is required to come to the meeting to answer the Commissioners questions.

Craig Minor: I can ask him to do that.

Chairman Aieta: Since he doesn't think we should reduce the bond, I think it is up to him to come here and explain why.

Craig Minor: All right, I will tell him that.

Chairman Aieta: Any other Commissioner comments?

Commissioner Claffey: I guess I'm on a sign kick again. I hate to bring this up because it is going to open up this Pandora's box, but I'd like to get the stance for the next meeting from the Commissioners is, we talked about signs, but I don't think we have ever talked about window signage.

Craig Minor: Yes, actually we have.

Commissioner Claffey: We have, but look around and see how disgusting the town looks when you can't even physically, you look at a building and all you see is signage from one end of the building to the other because they have included every piece of square inch of window it becomes a safety problem and then we, I'm just bringing it up for people to look at, because it does distract from the appearance. I don't think we have ever taken a hard stance on it. We've discussed it, but I think......

Chairman Aieta: Part of the problem is that we don't regulate what is inside of the building.

Commissioner Claffey: But when they get places on the exterior façade of the building. I'm just asking....

Commissioner Pane: Some towns have that regulated in their temporary signs, on how much of the window space can be sealed off. The main reason is for safety, I mean, if there is a police problem over there, they can't see inside, so I think that is one of the reasons why some of the towns limit it to a certain percentage or something.

Craig Minor: My understanding is that when Mike D'Amato was the ZEO, he worked out a, I'll call it a rule of thumb, or understanding with all of the merchants that as long as they didn't block more than, I'll make up a number, say fifty percent of the window, he didn't make an issue out of it, and there was like an agreement with the merchants in Newington and Mike.

Commissioner Caffey: I bring it up because the Main Street Starbucks building, the new package store, liquor store there, I remember they got approval, they came in, they had a few signs in their window, and now, like overnight, all of the windows from the entrance on one
side to the other side is full of signs. You can't even see in the building any more. I know what we can't dictate what you write on a sign, I get that, but I don't know......

Craig Minor: It has come up in years past when the Commission has discussed the sign regulations in general and rightly or wrongly, the Commission has never decided to include window signs in the regulations. If the Commission wants to revisit that, you always can. You can put it on the next agenda to talk about whether to regulate window signage if the Commission wants.

Commissioner Claffey: I, as a Commissioner and as a resident, I think it would be kind of, thinking about on the Berlin Turnpike, the liquor store, you can't see in it. How do you guys feel?

Commissioner Woods: Are you talking about the interior and exterior of the building?

Commissioner Claffey: I'm talking about, you take a whole building and it has windows and glass, but they come in, they get a permit to run a business, or change in occupancy, and then they come in and get a sign for the outside, and they put that up, and then they leave. Then you come back, and every piece of glass is now becoming a sign of some sort that either advertises their business or says what is inside the business, you know, I'm asking, could you classify it as more signage?

Commissioner Woods: My question was, would you regulate interior or exterior signage?

Commissioner Claffey: Some of it is attached to the exterior, of the building and other times it is leaned up on the inside from the business owners, or a hanging sign, so yes, interior signage that is viewed from the outside.

Commissioner Woods: Obviously this Commission has never done that in the past, regulated interior signs, whether it is facing in or facing out. Is it just because the Commission doesn't want to do that, take it on as a whole?

Craig Minor: I think you could, I think you could regulate signage either on the inside of the glass or the outside of the glass, I think you could regulate it if you wanted to.

Commissioner Pane: I would be interested in bringing it to the table, so that we could at least get a report from the Police Department. I think that the signage on the interior of the windows would be important to regulate if the police department felt that it was a safety problem if they ever had to go to an incident there.

Commissioner Woods: Sticking with the plaza on Main Street, those windows wouldn't be a safety issue because they are so high, they are above....the A & P Package store that was on the Berlin Turnpike for years, it's still there but it isn't A & P, there is not a square inch that isn't.......

Commissioner Claffey: That's what I'm talking about, and I know there are some safety concerns, fire and police, and I'm looking at it, I kind of agree with Commissioner Pane, and should we look at it as additional signage.

Chairman Aieta: Put it on the agenda so that we can discuss it.

Commissioner Sobieski: I think, if I'm not mistaken that Commissioner Pane brought up when we were doing the sign regulations, I thought he did say saying about the signage on
the windows. I thought we were going to look at that, or I thought there was something that was in their calculation that was in the minutes, I don't know if it every got approved or not.

Craig Minor: It has been discussed several times, but it never survived to the point where it is actually in the regulations.

Commissioner Woods: We talked about it early on, actually when I was still Mayor, and at that point, you weren't regulating anything on the inside, even though it appeared to be a sign on the outside, it was unregulated.

Chairman Aieta: I'm not surprised there is a problem. It's unsightly and it's a way that they can avoid the sign regulations by plastering the windows.

Commissioner Woods: I don't mean to belabor this, but it would be interesting for a package store that has glass windows, is there a difference if the sign comes down and there are cases of Budweiser or Miller beer? Where there is a will there is a way.

Commissioner Claffey: I think we have a charge as Commissioners to keep the town relatively, to look nice I guess. I don't know the way to say it.

Chairman Aieta: Put it on the agenda, we can discuss it. Any other remarks by Commissioners?

XV. CLOSING REMARKS BY THE CHAIRMAN

None

XVI. ADJOURN

Commissioner Fox moved to adjourn the meeting. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Sobieski. The meeting was adjourned at 8:20 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Norine Addis,
Recording Secretary