NEWINGTON TOWN PLAN AND ZONING COMMISSION
Regular Meeting
August 10, 2022

Chairman Domenic Pane called the regular meeting of the Newington Town Plan and Zoning Commission to order at 7:00 p.m.

I. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

II. ROLL CALL AND SEATING OF ALTERNATES

Commissioners Present

Chairman Domenic Pane
Commissioner Anthony Claffey
Commissioner Garret Havens
Commissioner Jonathan Trister
Commissioner Stephen Woods
Commissioner Hyman Braverman-A
Commissioner Stuart Droz-A
Commissioner Thomas Gill-A

Commissioners Absent

Commissioner Bryan Haggerty-excused
Commissioner David Lenares-excused

Staff Present

Erik Hinckley, Asst. Town Planner/ZEO

Commissioner Droz was seated for Commissioner Haggerty and Commissioner Gill seated for Commissioner Lenares.

III. APPROVAL OF AGENDA

No changes

IV. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (For items not listed on the agenda, speakers limited to two minutes.)

None
V. ZONING ENFORCEMENT OFFICER REPORT

Chairman Pane: Do any of the Commissioners have any questions for the Zoning Enforcement Officer.

Erik Hinckley: I can also report, as some of you are aware, we started enforcement action at 260 Stamm Road last week. We took ten vehicles out last week and we took three earlier this week, and I believe we are going to be heading back out at some point next week as well. We also located another twenty to thirty vehicles he has on another property on Stamm Road that he was stashing, so we are working on that one as well.

Chairman Pane: Very good. Thank you Erik? Any questions for the Zoning Officer?

VI. REMARKS BY COMMISSIONERS

None

VII. PUBLIC HEARING

None

VIII. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Commissioner Havens moved to approve the minutes of the July 27, 2022 meeting.

Commissioner Droz: I was not present at that meeting, but the minutes show that I was in attendance.

The motion was seconded by Commissioner Woods. The motion was approved with the stipulation that the minutes would show that Commissioner Droz was not present at that meeting. The motion was approved unanimously with seven voting YEA.

IX. NEW BUSINESS

A. TPZ to comment on the Greater Hartford mobility Study

Commissioner Pane: We have the Greater Hartford Mobility Study, maybe a short report from staff?

Erik Hinckley: Just quickly, I put a hard copy of some general thoughts that we have that the TPZ would like to pass on at some point. Mike has a presentation as well that he has put
together. He drafted up these recommendations, and I reviewed them and I agree, I think these are the high points that the Commission would like to see and after the meeting, if you have other comments we can add them to the memo and then put the memo out to James and he can put it in the Council packet for their review at a future time.

Mike D'Amato: Just to review, I went through, there are like hundreds of recommendations and it is hard to boil them down to make sense if you are looking at just one town or one thing. I went through everything and we pulled out the ones that applied directly to Newington, or were more of a policy statement like support complete streets or mass transit and I just put those into the table that you all have, so that is not everything, but we are trying to get the ball rolling and developing some kind of formalized comment. You can go on individually and make comments on other things as individuals but trying to comment as a Commission, we are trying to come up with some thoughts which maybe you might completely disagree with and that would be great because at least we would have thought one way or another.

I put the staff comments in one column which you will see again explains some of our thoughts, and then the memo which Erik distributed with today's date are, as Erik mentioned are some high points that we think should at least be touched upon. They might not be everything that you want to comment on, and we can add or subtract to that list, but I think it touches upon the key points that the mobility study as a whole is trying to examine. These are just recommendations and comments, there are no hard and fast funding for any of this yet. I think they are looking to see what towns are looking for in the general area to support some of this stuff. I don't know if you have any other comments, and we can certainly include them if you want.

I can go through what I included in the bullets and kind of explain the thought process if you want, or......

Chairman Pane: Okay.

Mike D'Amato: So the first comment, the Commission considers Route 175 a significant priority both for pedestrian safety but also for traffic volumes. The TPZ would strongly prefer to be involved in any discussions or plan considerations for any alterations to this corridor or to adjacent roadways including Route 9, Route 15 that could result in a change to the traffic.

I remember when CRCOG did a study in 2014, they identified the most viable routes for bicycles going east to west as Cedar Street. Well, if you drive Cedar Street you know that is not the case. The point of this comment is, we want to know anything and everything, we don't want you to make any decisions or imply, or take any implied thought that we might have. Other towns have done this. You have probably heard about Middletown and the idea of the lights. They have been very vocal about that, and have rejected two DOT plans that they tried to roll out, so if the Commission is sort of unified or the town, in wanting to know these things, it's a way to get in front of those before they get to the seventy percent drawings that they are looking to support.

As a community, the second one, with multiple Fastrack stations, the TPZ is in support of any assistance that could be made or permitted to high density, mixed use transit orientated development. That was a specific statement made as one of the alternatives to support for mid
to high density so we’re not making the statement that you are in support of only mid to high density. That is the alternative proposed, and again, it is just any regional support that they are going to provide to a developer or to a town for technical expertise, market analysis, whatever that looks like, we’re suggesting that we would be in support of anything they would roll out. The third comment, as a town that sees just one percent of it’s working population make use of public transportation and with over thirty percent of those traveling to places other than the City of Hartford, the TPZ would encourage increased availability to transit options to other major employment centers. So based on pre-Covid data, Newington residents are going to Farmington, going to West Hartford, to Berlin, to East Hartford, those are probably the major ones that we pulled out, local and Hartford. Obviously UConn Health, UConn Farmington, that is a major employment center and East Hartford with Pratt, so anything that allows people to make use of that is currently one percent of those working use public transit, would reduce traffic on Cedar Street, would reduce traffic on the Berlin Turnpike, it’s sort of a snowball effect. While a specific route has not been presented, the Commission supports regional efforts to establish greenway corridors to connect communities to provide recreational opportunities. One of the things that they have presented, sort of a preliminary that gets us from here to Wethersfield cove. They don’t talk about locations or parcel acquisitions, that is obviously complicated, but that is seen now as an amenity to recreation, active recreation. Biking or walking or anything that connects communities which you can’t really get to very easily to me seems like something that the Commission would support.

The last, the Commission is in strong support of any initiatives or roadway improvements that contribute traffic congestion and increasing safety, convenience and useability for bicycle users, so a couple of things that we have here, complete streets, pedestrian amenities whether it be protected crosswalks or whatever, I wanted to be clear again, we’re in favor of these things but the key is reducing traffic congestion so we don’t want to double the time it takes to drive east to west on Cedar in the name of very low use pedestrian amenity because that it going to create more safety issues.

This is sort of just like setting the table. You can take them all off the list, we can add, just to get things started.

Chairman Pane: Very good. I think you hit on some great things here, and I think one of the most important things you said at the beginning that no matter what happens I think that the people at this table and the Council want an opportunity to sit at the table with them when they make these decisions so we can have input. So that we’re doing the right thing for the Town. Any comments from the Commissioners?

Commissioner Woods: Reading through it, it kind of seems like the state is asking us to take the lead. Not necessarily will they fund what we want to do, but they want us to be behind the project and then if there is enough support and they feel the feasibility of it is capable on their end, then they might move forward, that’s kind of what I’m seeing reading through all of this because there are too many options here. Obviously this all can’t happen, and if it did happen, it’s not going to achieve the goals that they are looking to do. Pedestrian traffic on Cedar Street, but I suppose it can be done, it can be done safely, but the cost, there is land that would have to be taken from homeowners and I’m not against any of this, but it kind of sounds like, to me, and
I'm only speaking for myself, we really need to find a project, get behind it, maybe not one, maybe two or three, and try to sell it to the State and if we have three or four and we get one or two, maybe that is the direction we move, but we need to work in conjunction with the Council and any other land use boards.

Chairman Pane: Excellent point. I think we are presently working on getting some grants for sidewalks for the Newington Junction area, I'm not sure, but that area of Newington Junction is missing sidewalks from West Hartford to Newington and some of the people on that end of West Hartford might want to use the junction bus-wise, so I think making that Junction, Newington Junction more pedestrian friendly would be something that we should go after, and I'm not sure if we have attempted to do that now or not.

Commissioner Woods: To Michael, do we know, is AR Properties, was that the Cedar Street station, are they moving forward do you know?

Erik Hinckley: I'm not aware of anything for locations of the train stations or funding from the State.

Commissioner Woods: So we do have an approved site plan for the site, but it has not gotten....

Erik Hinckley: I don’t even know if there is an approved site plan.

Chairman Pane: What are you talking about? Cedar Street?

Commissioner Woods: Not Dakota, at the Cedar Street.

Erik Hinckley: Oh, okay, the town hasn't closed on the property with the developer yet, he is finalizing some mylars that you approved so that is moving forward, yes and he has I believe, because of the clean up and whatever the State is twisting his arm, I think he has ten percent of affordable units for ten years or something like that.

Commissioner Woods: And the hotel is still moving forward as far as you know?

Erik Hinckley: They applied for building permits and the plans are in review, but that has been like four months and it is kind of stagnant.

Commissioner Woods: With the cost of building materials, if anyone is dragging their feet right now you fully understand that. Again, my opinion, and Mr. Chairman, it is conveniently concentrated, Cedar Street station, there is the most development there. We know that Cedar Street itself is a nightmare, maybe we work really hard with the State to try to find a solution to make it safer and slower if at all possible.
Michael D'Amato: Something that I think dovetails all of these comments which I think the Commission should think about making a stronger statement on because to your point, a list of one hundred alternatives is a plan to make nothing happen. So two things here which can have significant impacts and will also be significant time and hearing expense which are on the alternative list which I didn't provide comment because I don't pretend to know how the Commission feels, is the evaluation or investigation of a Newington rail station for the Harford line, and what they call the Newington east-west connection which is a connection between Fenn Road and Alumni which is basically that fly over. Those are two things that are very large transformative type projects which I didn't comment on. If the Commission feels strongly either way, we should make it clear so that hopefully more eggs go into those baskets.

Commissioner Gill: That is the one that I have earmarked here, it seems very important and could be, if it was funded, it would make an impact, but I would still want them to look into increasing that to Willard Avenue instead of just to Alumni Road. Also, at the same time, where do we sit with the intersection of Maple Hill and Alumni and Cedar?

Erik Hinckley: That intersection, the Town Engineer through some grants, has applied for grants for sidewalks and streets and one of his grants, he has included relocating that intersection making it like it was supposed to be twenty years ago or whatever. At this point I don't know if it has been approved, and they were coming up with alternatives, they were working with the State on an alternative for a right in, right out only on Alumni and Cedar, either putting in some kind of traffic device or something. Again, I don't know where they are in the process of that. The last discussion I heard was waiting to see what happens with the grant and potential funding because even if we get the grant, it's a big chunk of change and it's probably a few years out.

Commissioner Gill: The rotary that was talked about at Fenn and Route 9, that area there, is that looking to tie into this?

Mike D'Amato: The proposal that they have is not specific, it's a blue line on Google map that shows approximately where it would go. They haven't really leaned into the type of infrastructure or engineering. I don't know how it would line up, but it would seem to me if you came across Alumni you are probably further north, and where Ella Grasso comes down comes out closer to Holly.

Erik Hinckley: The intention, the old, old plot plan which has been kicked around is before you make the bend on Alumni is to just extend it straight through to Fenn or hook it up somehow with Ella Grasso. Now we have, Mr. Hayes has developed property in that area so it is kind of, who knows how it is going to work, if they even, environmentally it is all wetlands in there, and that is going to have to go through the State level first.

Commissioner Havens: They are going to be putting tunnels in Hartford......
Commissioner Gill: Was there ever any looking at putting the train station in that area, near Alumni?

Erik Hinckley: I'm not aware of that.

Commissioner Droz: Just a quick question, maybe a clarification, I'm not really sure. I know Commissioner Woods mentioned funding and that type of thing, and feeling things out, and in regards to funding, looking on the first page of the what we have been given, “as far as for the study, please note that these alternatives are not yet defined projects with funding and sponsors. Many of these alternatives will be advanced by entities other than Connecticut DOT including by yourselves and CRCOG. Please provide your feedback understanding that some of these projects within your city or town may ultimately be advanced by you.” Am I reading it wrong, or does it really sound like we are talking about a lot of stuff that we might end up paying for?

Erik Hinckley: Their part is going to be if some of it went though CRCOG, there would be some relief, some grant money there, potential grant money, but it sounds like the state is like hey, here are all these great projects, now what do you like, okay, ready to pay?

Mike D'Amato: For example a recent grant opportunity that was kind of being discussed internally was the safe streets for all, which was released a number of months ago. One of the things it requires is an action plan. It would require the town to identify what you want to do, what are the priorities, and the cost, and they would kick in whatever it was, ninety percent which is a significant match, but a lot of these things now with the federal money and the infrastructure and all the things you are hearing about, they want to see if the town has a plan before you build consensus, they are committed to the project, and they are not just trying to get another entity to do it, so by identifying the priorities, I believe that would score higher for the funding if we decide we want it but we can’t fund, this is tens of millions of dollars of improvements that we don’t have a huge mechanism for that to happen, regionally or at the state level.

Commissioner Trister: So it’s really looking to narrow down a focus for what we are looking for, talk it up, and then......

Erik Hinckley: Yes, there will be competition with other towns for some of this funding as well, so even if we identify three great projects, like Commissioner Woods pointed out, we may only get one.

Commissioner Gill: Page 60, operational improvements to Route 175, what is multi-modeled facility?

Mike D'Amato: It just includes all users, so it’s handicapped accessible, pedestrian, bicycle, it’s not just a sidewalk for pedestrians, it is making sure that they are wide enough to accommodate a wheel chair, where they have bicycles facilities where people who are riding their bike to an
Newington TPZ Commission

August 10, 2022
Page 8

area have a place to park it. It includes anyone coming to the site. It includes anyone coming to the site.

Erik Hinckley: And interacting with vehicular traffic as well to make sure they are safe, different modes of transportation.

Commissioner Gill: The freight rail, was there anything in the Newington area with that?

Erik Hinckley: I'm not sure honestly.

Commissioner Trister: I thought I had read that most of the tracks were beefed up to be able to take rail traffic, freight rail traffic, but it was the bridges that were the hold up and actually weren't any near us as far as the, it mentioned in there a couple of bridges that had weaknesses as far as taking freight.

Commissioner Gill: So as far as a new rail station, is that where we are zeroing in on Cedar Street or......

Chairman Pane: We haven't chosen anything. The reason we haven't talked about it is because there is no funding for it. Not to interrupt you, but we have approved a massive improvement on the Fenn and Cedar Street TOD area and I think Commissioner Woods is correct. If we can make that safer, more pedestrian friendly and improve that, and then also possibly come up with our TOD regulations for the Newington Junction and maybe we will be able to energize something over in that area too.

Erik Hinckley: On Myra Cohen Way there is still one parcel available, on the other side of the car wash. It's very small, I don't know what potentially could be there, but there is a parcel available.

Commissioner Woods: There was going to be a gas station there and then they abandoned it.

Erik Hinckley: There was going to be a Stop and Shop gas station and they pulled out.

Chairman Pane: Any other Commissioner comments?

Commissioner Woods: There are some great ideas on here, but the Newington east-west connection which I think is fantastic, that was voted on ten, twelve years ago, and DOT flatly threw it out, so it really surprises me to see that back on the table. I think it is one good solution to help relieve traffic on Cedar Street and Willard Avenue. It does build traffic on Fenn Road, very little and very few residential homes on Fenn Road where there weren't ten, twelve years ago, maybe fifteen years, I lose track of time. Again, I think we need to sit down with somebody from DOT instead of spinning our wheels on something that they are not going to even think about funding or pushing forward, I think we need to get a little more direction, is it the rail station? If the town could get behind a rail station, at either Newington Junction or Cedar Street
would they support it. I think we need to get some sort of commitment because the list is too long, just for this one town. I think we are just going to be chasing our tails.

Erik Hinckley: We can certainly say, hey we would like to meet with DOT, and could have that in here as a comment, or we could it make it the first comment and then just bump everything else down one and kind of go like that. That way, it goes to the Council, they see what you guys want and you could build a consensus.

Commissioners Woods: I'm not saying that is us that starts off, who are the appropriate people to sit down with DOT to try to start that dialogue but at least give us an idea to channel it in. We're still, we need to get it down, we need to have some sort of impression where we can move forward. We have both of our bus stops that have not been fully developed and it's, we're working on one, a lot of work on one, and we're starting on the second, so it's not like we're not doing anything, but if you, if we knew that a rail station was coming to Newington Junction all of a sudden you could go out to developers with that to sell.

Erik Hinckley: You could get an overlay district and everything else for that area, and obviously that is a big nut.

Commissioner Woods: We do have a bus stop so obviously that is a big plus, but you throw a rail station there and again, if one percent of our population, and I believe that is probably a true statement, but we need to start thinking bigger. If this rail station came in, now you are attracting people who might be working in New York, down state, so we are going to attract a whole different group.

Erik Hinckley: Potentially a station at Newington Junction would also revitalize the Day Street area. It's industrial, manufacturing, warehousing and whatever it is, and whatever future potential is there.

Commissioner Woods: It could go from light industrial now to more like high tech.

Erik Hinckley: If it is a rail stop it would be easy to hop off the train and go to work.

Chairman Pane: I agree with you Commissioner Woods, I have no problem adding something like that to this Greater Hartford Mobility Study. Anyone have any objections? Is there anyone else who has any thing.

Commissioner Havens: I wouldn't want these comments to be misconstrued by people of the town, that it seems like we are pushing the Newington Junction as a train station as opposed to Cedar Street as a train station. These are all things that are being discussed. We are looking at the big picture, we're not making decisions on location right now.

Erik Hinckley: We can put that in there, that we are not recommending any location. It's kind of a hot topic right now.
Commissioner Woods: That is a really good point, but back to my point, if the State has absolutely no plans to put one at Newington Junction, okay fine, but then the town decides do you want Cedar Street or none, and we get to decide.

Commissioner Havens: I agree with that, I totally agree with that, but I just don’t want anyone to think we are favoring one over the other.

Mike D’Amato: I’m trying to take notes so that we can get this information for the Council. So for the east-west connection, would you agree that sort of the group sentiment was that the idea in theory is a good concept one, it would relieve traffic and provide all those things that you discussed, but it basically requires, it is impractical because it requires significant engineering and there are a large number of environmental constraints and obviously costs associated, so while the Commission is supportive of the idea, it’s too early, the project is too early to endorse this alternative because we don’t have a DOT supportive plan. Then reaffirm that we would like to be part of any conversation.

For the rail station, part of what we talked about is that we can’t continue to support or even consider mass transit when we don’t have the low level pedestrian facilities to even get people to and from. You can’t have a train station with no way to get there. If a station were to be created essentially what we are talking about is what they envisioned for other places where you have basically a cross platform facility where they can get on and off and so I think maybe what the thought here should be is that the town is supportive of a study to determine the viability of a train station and the location. The alternative presented by the study doesn’t identify where. It just says in Newington, so maybe the town needs to support this study so they can decide that it is not a good idea, or that it belongs in Newington Junction because people can go from bus to train. I don’t want to put words in your mouth, I’m just trying to figure out where everybody stands.

Commissioner Gill: What is the time frame on this? When do we have to have something to this Mobility Study group?

Erik Hinckley: I believe what we are looking for here, we’re looking to get comments that we can get to the Council for their meeting next week so they can move forward with whatever, the Council can have their own input, their own thoughts, but I’m sure they are going to review your recommendations and maybe they will strike out, but then maybe, hey, these three we really like, so we are narrowing the focus. I don’t know what the true deadline is per se.

Chairman Pane: I think Newington Junction, whether there is a train station there or not, it would be, I think we would all be in agreement that we want to improve the pedestrian, bicyclist and parking for the existing busway that we have, so whether down the road a train stop comes there, or doesn’t really matter because we want to improve the busway and the area that we have.
Erik Hinckley: Yes, improve the viability, the walkability everything else about it, because you are still having buses stop there.

Mike D’Amato: The other two things that I mentioned, are they something we should include or no?

Chairman Pane: They can be included.

Mike D’Amato: And we aren’t saying that things should go any one place, we will make that very, very clear for everyone.

Commissioner Claffey: I kind of agree with the whole discussion, I think it’s been a great discussion. I agree with what Chairman Pane had just said, I think maybe we need to focus on that pedestrian aspect. The State has come in recently and put all the new lights in and the new crosswalks over, and up and down our community, and someone said earlier in the meeting, the Willard to Fenn Road, there are parts where you cannot connect pedestrian, bikeway or anything between the two of those, so I would say, let’s see if there is somehow, with that east-west, like Commission Woods had said, it’s a journey that we are going to have to undertake, but I think we should push that more so it coincides with, you can come down Cedar on your bike, or walk, but then you get to Willard, and after Willard you take your life in your hands to get down to Fenn Road. That’s really where I think we have to spend some time and let the Council know that we want to make that more user friendly for the residents and also the passer-bys. That’s really all I have after looking at all of these options. I think the, my last point, I think on the rail, it sounds over the years we have beaten this rail station to death, and let’s get into the room with the right people who say you do this, you get closer to rail. Those are my comments, that’s all I have. I think it was a great presentation, thank you Mike D’Amato for that.

Chairman Pane: Very good. Thank you Commissioner Claffey. Any other comments? Thank you very much Mike and Erik.

Erik Hinckley: Mike will draft a couple of these comments into this memo and we’ll get it out so Council will have it available at their next meeting

OLD BUSINESS

None

X. PETITIONS FOR PUBLIC HEARING SCHEDULING

A. Petition 34-22: Special Permit (Section 6.2.5) for an additional free standing sign on a corner lot at 3120-3180 Berlin Turnpike, Applicant, National Sign Corp., Owner, Newington VF, LLC, Contact Darcy Roy.
Erik Hinckley: This is for the new Chase Bank that is going in where the Webster Bank was at the Deming Street. They want to put up their own freestanding sign, there is one currently on the site, but because it is a corner lot by special permit they are allowed to have another one. So that is what they will be applying for.

XI. TOWN PLANNER REPORT

Erik Hinckley: Mike is working on the previously discussed tent sale, special permit thing so we can get that special permit out of it, and just administratively handle on a small scale, with larger scale ones still coming to you as a site plan I think.

Mike D'Amato: Yes, it’s two tiered so that the smaller stuff doesn’t need to come to the Commission, but for significant events, restaurants on the turnpike and others really need an entire overview. At this point, trying to create a criteria that they need to meet. We don't want to use a special permit for things were we really don't have to, because they stay with the land, and we would rather have them issue it, and have it expire so we can bring them back every time, and we have to create criteria to say it meets it or it doesn't.

XII. COMMUNICATIONS

None

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

Gail Budrejko: Just wanted to make some comments even though it is on the agenda.

Chairman Pane: You can address anything that you want.

Gail Budrejko: The rail availability is going to be coming to the Town Council, and I have heard the presentation here, so it's not that we are going to be looking at what your recommended or not, my interpretation was that they really didn't know the impact on towns, so they have to scramble to have these comments rather than having individual comments, making it more of a collaborative type. I'm not sure whether the Town of Newington needs to have approval because from what I understand they are finalizing this from DOT at the end of the year, and once DOT reviews and evaluates, if they want to go forward, and then they will go back to the town, so this is not final.

I really think one thing that we need to be cognizant of as a community and I don’t see that necessarily here, and I think Newington has been very careful of the impact on wetlands and open space. Other communities have experienced flash flooding and drainage and the storms that we are getting now are not abnormalities, we’re going to be getting more and more and knock on wood Newington still has efficient drainage, but the more that we start impacting the wetlands and building and taking away, creating more impervious surfaces the more we will
impact them. Developers are not paying attention to that, so some of these projects, like possibly the train station or the overpass, are all going to encroach on Fenn Road. We have to be careful because that will impact the wetlands. We really can't disturb them that much more because we are right on the cusp right now. So, that needs to be something to be considered as well as impacting the greenway space.

Another thing that was interesting is that some of the higher density projects that developers are developing within Connecticut, on the east coast are creating what they call heat (inaudible) and the more high density, concrete construction for development where people take away trees and whatever, it creates a heat (inaudible) so we are at a cusp where there is a danger where if we don’t take these environmental constraints or impacts into consideration we could be in trouble.

Chairman Pane: Great points Gail, thank you.

XIV. REMARKS BY COMMISSIONERS

None

XV. CLOSING REMARKS BY THE CHAIRMAN

Chairman Pane: I want to thank everybody, I think we had a very good meeting. Thanks to the staff.

XVI. ADJOURN

Commissioner Havens moved to adjourn the meeting. The meeting was adjourned at 7:43 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Norine Addis,
Recording Secretary