

East Greenwich Planning Board Minutes
Wednesday, June 17, 2020
Virtual
7:00 PM

Present: Jason Gomez, Chair; Nate Ginsburg, Vice Chair; Eric Jautaikis; Ben Lupovitz; Kevin Murphy, Chris Pels

Absent:

Staff: Lisa Bourbonnais, Town Planner; Aaron Lindo, Planning Technician; Andrew Teitz, Solicitor

1. Call to Order

Mr. Gomez called the meeting to order at 7:03.

2. Roll Call

3. Review of Amendments to the Land Development and Subdivision Review Regulations (LDSR's)

– The Town of East Greenwich has not conducted a review of its fee schedule for the review of land development and subdivision applications since 2010. Current fees do not capture the costs associated with such reviews. An update of those fees is thus now proposed. Specifically, such update will involve revisions to Section 35 of the LDSR's. Within the Town Code, this section can be found at: “§ A263-35 Administration: administrative fees.” The proposed new fee schedule is attached to this agenda. The Board is asked to review and comment on the draft amendments and authorize staff to advertise the required public hearing on the new fee schedule.

Ms. Bourbonnais gave an introduction to the item and commented that the Town is asking the Board to authorize an advertisement for a public hearing to amend the fee schedule. A memo had been provided to explain the proposed changes. The current fee schedule is old and outdated and most of the surrounding areas have moved to “per unit” (versus “per acre”) for impact fees. There has been an uptick in combined reviews but those are not accommodated in the current fee schedule. The Town is anticipating some larger projects and would like to capitalize on it.

When the fee schedule was originally developed, the town was experiencing a regular development trend. During that time, a “per acre” calculation made a lot of sense. Recently, there has been a lot more infill as well as more dense developments. The current COVID crisis has decreased the economy and the revisions to the fee schedule are not to punish single family homeowners. Adhering to the adoption process, the Town could have a new fee schedule by mid-August.

The Town looked into revision the fee schedule a couple of years ago but did not end up making the revisions. The change is better suited if it is supported by the Town Council, even though it is the

Planning Board's purview and will have a public hearing in front of the Planning Board. Other surrounding towns have different fee schedules. East Greenwich is average by comparison. Most communities have moved to a "per unit" fee for major land developments. A lot of communities have a basic fee schedule and then have overlay fees for specifics.

Mr. Ginsburg commented that reviewing the plans involves a lot of work and asked if the fees cover the cost of review. Ms. Bourbonnais replied that it depends. Some communities have different fees to capture specific things like engineering review. Much of it depends on the level of public interest. It is a hard thing to predict but the fees mostly capture just the time that staff spends on projects. Some communities have grappled with the time spent on projects. The town absorbs some of the uncertainty.

Mr. Lupovitz asked how much fees were generated in the last year. Ms. Bourbonnais replied that this past year generated about \$12,000 in fees. The last 5 years have been unpredictable with some years being higher and some lower than the average. 10 years ago, the current fee schedule was competitive with surrounding communities. In contrast to 10 years ago, there is now a better process with a formal Technical Review Committee. More professional time is involved now and there is higher quality feedback at earlier stages. The TRC is comprised of 11 staff members who all contribute.

Mr. Gomez asked what the fees would be if project fees from the last year were recalculated. Ms. Bourbonnais replied that she did an analysis on a few projects. The standard subdivision review fees for the Highland Woods project, with 25 new single family homes, was \$1,425 and with the increase would be \$1,500. The Imperial project was \$365 in fees but would be \$950 with the new fee schedule at Master Plan.

The Planning Department would like to have the Board authorize the Planning Director to advertise for a public hearing in July. Mr. Murphy commented that he was fine with the proposal and added that it is well reasoned.

Mr. Ginsburg questioned raising the fees in the middle of an economic crash. Ms. Bourbonnais replied that there were some concerns but the fee schedule is out of date and the Town is overdue for a correction. The fees would not change for anything that affects home owners. The standard subdivision fees would stay the same. Mr. Lupovitz commented that the fees generated last year was likely miniscule compared to the value of the developments and supported increasing the fees on a regular basis.

Mr. Lupovitz made a motion to proceed with the advertisement which was seconded by Mr. Murphy.

Discussing the motion, Mr. Jautakis commented about the justification of the fee increase regarding green space that would be subtracted from the total land area. Ms. Bourbonnais replied that it is

something that needs to be discussed. The ordinance is specific to include green space. The comp plan talks about finding ways to incentivize the conservation of land. If the Board proceeds with the draft, open space would be exempt.

Regarding the impact to developments already in the development process, the impacts will be felt once the new fee schedule has been adopted. One public hearing is required. This is different from an ordinance before the Town Council which has 3 readings; an introduction, public comment, and then adoption. The Planning Board is required to have 1 public hearing.

The motion was unanimously passed after a vote was taken.

4. Minutes – The Board is asked to review and approve minutes of the 5/20/20 and 6/3/20 meetings.

Mr. Murphy had comments and sent them to Mr. Lindo to revise.

Motion to approve made by Mr. Ginsburg, seconded by Mr. Pels and unanimously approved.

A motion to adjourn was made by Mr. Lupovitz. Meeting adjourned at 7:45 PM

Minutes respectfully submitted by Aaron Lindo, Planning Technician.