

Planning Board Minutes
April 15, 2015– 7:00 P.M.
Town Council Chambers

Members Present: Steve Brusini, Chair; Mike Donegan, Vice Chair, Chris Russo, Dan Tagliatela, Brad Turchetta, Jason Gomez, David Eaton.

Members Absent: John Ayotte.

Staff Present: Lisa Bourbonnais, Planning Director; Sarah Jette, Legal Counsel; Thomas Coyle, Town Manager.

Mr. Brusini called the meeting to order at 7:01 P.M. and introduced the board members and staff present.

1. Master Plan application with a Public Informational Meeting for the Saint Elizabeth Home proposing an expansion of their nursing home facility at Post Road and Grandview Road. The project constitutes a Major Land Development and will be built at 1 St. Elizabeth Way, being Map 45 AP 11 Lot 105 on 21.2 acres in an MUPD zoning district. The project will involve construction of four new structures housing 48 new nursing facility beds. The project will be served by existing road ways and by public water and sewer and will meet the dimensional standards of the zoning code.

Attorney Peter Nolan was on hand to represent the applicant. He began by describing the proposed facility noting the project represents a new and innovative approach to nursing care called the “Green Homes” model. The proposed 4 structures will resemble single family homes and will be single-story, roughly 7,000 to 7,500 square feet buildings in lieu of a larger institutional, hospital-like structure.

Matthew Trimble, General Manager of St. Elizabeth’s, was sworn in as the first witness and he started off by stating this would be the first project of its kind in the state of RI. This new approach can address issues of loneliness and helplessness among elderly nursing home residents. The proposed structures will each have a common living room and kitchen surrounded by private bedrooms, each with their own bathrooms. The configuration allows residents to have more control over their lives and interactions. Mr. Trimble added that his team has visited Green Homes

projects in other states and were impressed with both the design and function of the physical facilities and with the satisfaction and engagement level of the residents therein.

Questioning by board members began with Mr. Donegan asking Mr. Tremble if he had reached out to nearby residents with information about the construction project. Mr. Trimble stated that he had conducted a meeting with abutters showing a model of the proposed project at which 8 residents were in attendance and all seemed to support the project.

“Green Homes” uses a staffing model that calls for Shahbazim which are CNA’s with additional training for a variety of other jobs. There is also a Registered Nurse for every 24 residents always on duty. Mr. Brusini wanted to know if other “Green Homes” were integrated into an existing nursing home facility. Mr. Trimble stated that in most cases there is an existing legacy building like the one here in East Greenwich, but in some cases the legacy facility and the new project, while in close proximity to each other within a community, do not share the same site.

Scott Moorehead, the engineer for the project was sworn in and described the layout of the property. He explained that a cul-de-sac at the end of St Elizabeth’s Way will be installed with the 4 new buildings around it. They will utilize the public water and sewer and gas that is currently on site. They will require excavation to level the property out and maintain handicap accessibility with at-grade entrances. This will require excavating about 10 feet on the western side of the property and filling about 6 feet on the eastern side. The buildings will then site below the hill line which decreases the view of them from existing abutter houses. Mr. Moorehead then explained that the drainage pattern continuing as it is with piping toward Post Road and the water draining down to the catch basin at the bottom of the hill there.

Mr. Moorehead went on to address the traffic pattern. He stated that there are no peak hours where heavy traffic would disrupt traffic patterns however they are willing to conduct a traffic study if need be. Mr. Turchetta questioned if the parking was sufficient for the facility’s needs, to which the representatives replied they do conform to the zoning codes for the use and the only potential for traffic conflicts they see would be at shift change when the number of employees on site overlaps. They stated that there has been a problem with parallel parking along the roadway in the past and people are using that parking simply for convenience and proximity and not because

of any real shortage of spaces. They are in the process of incorporating additional parking spaces scattered around the property and will install perpendicular curbing and eliminate level grassed areas if needed to avoid any circulation conflicts from parallel parking in unmarked spaces.

Mr. Donegan wanted to know how many additional employees and trucks would be in and out of the property on a regular basis. Mr. Moorehead stated that the truck traffic will not be substantially more since they will coordinate their trips with services for the “Green Homes” with those already active at the legacy building. The new houses will only add 14 more staff members per day.

The applicant has a timeframe of about 1 year to complete the project and will build all four buildings at once to minimize construction disturbances and impacts on the abutting neighborhood. Mr. Turchetta addressed the need for emergency access routes to the property and Mr. Moorehead replied that the technical review committee and public safety departments will ensure those needs are met. The Fire Department has indicated they don’t need any vehicular access to the rear of the building but a ladder truck will need to be able to maneuver through the cul de sac bulb.

Mr. Tagliatella expressed concern about a “dump” or old landfill that appears to be visible from aerial views. Mr. Moorehead responded saying there is an area where neighbors have dumped brush and leaves as well as an area where they moved rocks during the construction of the initial St Elizabeth’s building. He assured the board that there is no sign of any hazardous materials and that there was a Phase 1 Environmental Review performed for the initial development that revealed no historical indication of dumping.

Mr. Tagliatella then addressed the size of the cul de sac. Mr. Moorehead noted the radius would be 50 feet which is 10 feet more than local zoning requires, with a 20 foot wide roadway and berms in lieu of perpendicular curbing. Mrs. Bourbonnais concurred that this would generally be sufficient. Mr. Moorehead stated the ladder truck has already been on site many times with no access problems and he doesn’t foresee any issues with on-site circulation.

Mr. Brusini was curious about lighting and generator placement and any negative effects from glare or noise on surrounding neighbors. The applicants stated they would have much smaller and quieter generators than at the main facility and low,

bollard-style lighting in lieu of tall light poles, supplemented by building lights mounted above entry ways. They then explained that no machinery will be roof-mounted and it will all be screened by landscaping. The lighting and landscaping are being designed to minimally affect the neighbors.

Mr. Brusini asked about traffic calming implementation which was discussed by the TRC. Mr. Moorehead responded that there is no need, due to the curves in the road. He explained that vehicles cannot comfortably go faster than 30 miles per hour.

Mr. Brusini asked about current encroachments that exist on the property to which Mr. Moorehead replied there is a wire fence around a neighbor's yard that was put up to keep out deer but the neighbor has agreed to take it down if it posed a problem for the developers. Mr. Brusini then mentioned a retaining wall in the back of the property and wanted to know if that would have an impact on any abutter's property. Mr. Moorehead responded that they will be installing a wall that will be about 4 feet high in order to keep the grade and as much existing vegetation intact as possible in place of using more expansive erosion controls.

The group moved on to address water pressure and the applicant said there is more than ample water pressure and it has already been looked at by KCWA who agreed. Mr. Gomez wanted to know if there was ample room for snow removal and storage on the property and Mr. Moorehead pointed out several locations appropriate for snow storage.

Mr. Simonetti, Project Architect, was sworn in. He described how the project takes a 7,500 square foot building and makes it feel like as intimate as possible for residents. Bedrooms will be about 180 square feet with a private 60 to 70 square foot bathroom and private shower. The new buildings are designed to resemble surrounding buildings and match their character. Each home will share a courtyard with another unit. Mr. Simonetti put design emphasis on the front of the buildings to boost curb appeal.

Mr. Erik Vangnesse was sworn in as an unlicensed Landscape Architect who works alongside Mr. James Almonti who is licensed and who will stamp the final plans. Mr. Vangnesse explained that trees will be planted all the way down the driveway and in parking areas in accordance with East Greenwich's street tree bylaw and zoning statutes. They will also have 16 foot tall LED street lights installed in compliance with local "dark sky" regulations. There will also be a bio-retention basin that will comply

with DEM regulations. Plantings will include a combination of shrubs, evergreen and deciduous trees to mix up the landscaping. The applicant will have to remove 9 trees to install this facility but the same number of site trees as existing will be retained overall by either transplanting these 9 trees elsewhere or planting new trees to take their place. As far as the 100 foot buffer goes, Mr. Vangnesse explained that they want the buffer to look natural so they will install a combination of clusters of evergreen and deciduous trees to make it more organically evolved looking than a solid evergreen wall.

At this point, the Chair called for a 5 minute recess to allow the public to review the plans up close before opening the meeting up for public comments.

Upon, re-convening, Jonathan Finkle of 76 Misty Oak brought up a problem he had with light pollution that he currently experiences from his house. He wanted to know if they could plant a denser buffer that would block more of the light. The representatives of the applicant said they were trying to make it look as natural as possible without creating a “wall” of new trees but if that is what it takes to satisfy the neighbors, then they will consider the option. Mr. Finkle then mentioned that he saw some rocks on the property and wanted to know if there will be any serious and noisy excavation or blasting that would be required. The representatives claimed they have not run into any areas while doing soil sampling that would require any extensive excavation and stated the noisiest machinery would probably be the safety alarms on the trucks when they are backing up. Mr Finkle then brought up the height of the structures and Mr. Trimble explained the roof peaks will be 25 feet above the first finished floor elevation. Regarding drainage, Mr. Moorhead assured Mr. Finkle that the slopes essentially divert toward *Felicia's Coffee* and appropriate erosion controls will be installed during construction.

The second abutter to speak was Mr. Steve Johnson of 46 Misty Oak who asked about the required 100' natural buffer, noting that it will receive at least a temporary encroachment during construction. Mr. Moorehead explained plans to re-vegetate the area once the necessary re-grading has been done. Mr. Johnson hoped at the next level of review, to be able to see the number, species and caliper width of the proposed new plantings to ensure health and continued vitality of the buffer.

The final public speaker was Michael Zaino who has served as a volunteer for St. Elizabeth Home for more than a dozen years and he spoke in favor of the project.

Mr. Brusini called for a motion to close the public hearing when Mr. Turchetta made a final remark about the types of trees being installed. He wanted to know if the neighbors would gain visibility of the project in the winter once the deciduous trees lose their leaves for the season. Mr. Vangnesse explained that he planned to use both deciduous and evergreen trees to create a natural feeling but he has no problem loading up the buffer and the entire slope up the hill to the west with evergreens to make everybody happy.

The Chair asked that the Exhibits be marked as follows: The Application and Plan Set was marked as Applicant's Exhibit #1, the Staff Report was marked as #2, and the DPW memo was marked as #3. A motion was made by Mr. Tagliatella, and seconded by Mr. Gomez to close the public hearing, adopt the findings in the staff report, and to approve the application with the following conditions:

1. Approval is based on plans entitled "Schematic Design Concept for the Green House Project" dated December 14, 2014 with subsequent grading, utility and Landscape plans appended. The collective set was marked as Exhibit #1 at the April 15, 2015 Hearing, prepared by SWBR Architects.
2. No building permit for new construction can be secured until: (a) storm water management and drainage designs are reviewed and approved by the Department of Public Works; and (b) any necessary local permits like a Soil Erosion and Sediment Control Permit shall be obtained from the EGDPW prior to construction or site.
3. The East Greenwich Planning Board shall retain purview over the development plan in the form of Preliminary and Final Plan Reviews and Approvals and all checklist requirements contained in the Town's Land Development and Subdivision Regulations shall be met.
4. The project shall be serviced by public water and that design shall be reviewed by the Kent County Water Authority. The length of the cul-de-sac may require looping the water line.

5. Any parking lots created or reconfigured in conjunction with the project shall meet the landscaping requirements set forth in the off-street parking provisions of the Zoning Code.
6. A temporary construction easement will be required during project build-out. Easement language shall be provided to the Town Solicitor for review and approval prior to final plan approval. Such language shall call for affected areas to be restored to their natural state upon completion and no residential structures shall be allowed to encroach. Exceptions within the buffer will include construction of a boulder retaining wall to support the grade change on the west side of the parcel and installation of a detention basin and grass access-way on the north side of the property.

Vote: 7–0–0 in favor of the motion. The plan was approved.

2. The Town of East Greenwich was informed by the Town of West Greenwich about a Preliminary Plan public hearing for Cedar Ridge, a 127-unit residential development located on the southeast side of New London Turnpike at the town line.

The board agreed that East Greenwich should have a representative attend the West Greenwich Planning board hearing and report back on the proceedings. Mrs. Bourbonnais provided some background on the evolution of the project, noting the residential zoning at the subject site mirrors the density and land use type that was envisioned in the East Greenwich Comprehensive Plan for adjacent land in our Town. She added that the project is complex and appears to require a four-way sewer service agreement between West Greenwich, West Warwick, Coventry and the State DOT as the sewer line will run across the I-95 right of way under the highway.

3. Review of the Minutes from March 18th 2015

Mr. Brusini opened up the floor for comments on the minutes of March 18th 2015. There being none, Mr. Eaton made a motion to approve, seconded by Mr. Turchetta and unanimously supported.

4. Other: Mr. Brusini offered some thoughts about procedures for public hearings noting that, in his view, following the letter of the regulations is always of paramount importance, but equal consideration must be given to all members of the public. If the Board is to err procedurally at all, it should be in deference to the public, allowing the greatest possible degree of citizen participation in the process. The members agreed. On a similar note, some Board members noted their recent attendance at a procedural workshop related to land-use decision-making. It was agreed that the workshops are valuable and everyone was encouraged to attend at some point. Staff agreed to forward reminders about such opportunities to all members as the information becomes available.

Mr. Gomez made motion to adjourn at 9:15 PM, seconded by Mr. Donegan, and unanimously supported.

Minutes respectfully submitted by Lisa Bourbonnais, Planning Director.

For further information, please refer to the recording available in the Planning Department.