

Planning Board Minutes  
February 4, 2015 – 7:00 P.M.  
Town Council Chambers  
125 Main Street  
East Greenwich, RI

Present: Stephen Brusini, Chair; Michael Donegan; Jason Gomez;  
John Ayotte; Daniel Tagliatela; and Brad Turchetta.

Absent: Chris Russo.

Staff Present: Lisa Bourbonnais, Planning Director; and Sarah Jette, Legal  
Counsel.

Mr. Brusini called the Planning Board meeting to order at 7:05 PM and  
introduced the members and staff present.

1. Pre-application by the Saint Elizabeth Home for 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 John Brunero was on hand to represent the applicant. He provided  
some background on the site, noting it had served as a drive-in theater for  
many years before being sold to the St. Elizabeth Community in 1999. By  
2001, the new owners had the property re-zoned to MUPD and had two  
phases of land development approved by the Planning Board. The current  
proposal represents Phase III. The first two phases consist of a 128 bed  
nursing home facility and an 84 bed Assisted Living Center. Originally, Phase  
III was to be a 20,000 square foot office/commercial complex but St.  
Elizabeth's now intends to construct this new model of nursing care instead.  
It will be the first of its kind in Rhode Island. Mr. Brunero explained that the  
Project Engineer and the CEO are on hand to provide details about the  
operation, along with other staff, if necessary. Before introducing them, he

noted for the record that the project as proposed will require no zoning relief, is compliant with all standards required by the Land Development Regulations, and it leaves the 100' buffer to adjacent residential property intact consistent with the conditions imposed as part of the original zone change. He added that the facility will continue to pay a negotiated fee in lieu of taxes as they are a tax exempt non-profit institution.

Matt Trimble, St. Elizabeth's Chief Operating Officer, made a brief presentation. He provided some background on the history of the organization, starting in 1882 and growing to the 10-facility nursing care provider it is today. No new nursing homes have been built in Rhode Island in about 20 years, but in 2010, State legislation designed to incentivize innovations in the nursing care industry opened a new opportunity for St. Elizabeth's. Their 48-bed proposal for expanding care in East Greenwich was the only one accepted and approved by the State of Rhode Island following the 2010 change to State law. The new 48-bed facility will follow the "Green Homes" concept of eldercare that treats aging as an on-going state of growth and which has taken hold in 26 states. There are approximately 150 Green Homes Nursing Care facilities in the US today, with the closest ones being in Chelsea, MA and Albany, NY. The suburban model of the Green Homes facility is a roughly 8,000 square foot, 12-bed structure wherein each resident has a private bedroom and bathroom and common areas include a living and dining rooms and a kitchen. A short video about Green Homes was shown.

The plan is to build 4 Green Homes structures on the north side of the site, extending the existing driveway to serve them. As a skilled nursing facility, all levels of care, including services and technology for memory loss and dementia patients, will be provided on site. In terms of staffing, there will be one Shahbaz (essentially a Certified Nursing Assistant) per "house" per shift with a standard three shift cycle, and there will be one Registered Nurse for every 24 beds.

The Doctors that created the Green Homes model found that the medical needs of the elderly are often secondary to treating boredom, loneliness and helplessness, so the Green Homes alternative was devised with an operational paradigm that emphasizes a meaningful life in a real home. Mr. Trimble and Mr. Steven Horowitz, CEO of St. Elizabeth's, stressed that this

model represents the future of nursing home care in our country and East Greenwich should be pleased to have the facility. Board members generally agreed.

Scott Moorehead of SFM Engineering, the project engineer, addressed the site in some detail. He described site access and the two buildings that already exist and then pointed out the location of the four new structures to be built. The roadway will end in a cul-de-sac in front of the new Green Homes and while it is a private road, it is being built at 24' wide to meet Town standards. Utilities including gas, water, sewer and electrical service are already present and the new structures will be connected. Parking spaces will be added, both at the existing St. Elizabeth's home along with more than adequate parking to serve the new structures. This includes handicapped access parking and storage/delivery areas. An official loading zone is not being shown, however, as all deliveries will be via small truck or van.

The site includes a 100' vegetative buffer between improvements on the existing lot and the residential properties that abut. Mr. Moorehead stated that the buffer will remain, although some re-grading will occur. There is about a 20' elevation differential between the proposed sites of the four new structures and the northwest property lines. In order to level the construction area as required, some clearing and re-grading likely will occur within the demarcated buffer area. The area will be restored and re-vegetated upon completion of construction though. The buffer currently consists of largely deciduous trees but the plan calls for mostly evergreens to be used in the re-vegetating to ensure year-round screening.

The developers have already dug some test holes and at a depth of 13 feet, they have not hit any ledge. This should please the residential abutters as it is unlikely any blasting will be necessary. The grade change also works to the neighbors' benefit as the single story Cape-style structures are designed with a low enough profile to essentially sit below the viewshed of existing homes. Mr. Horowitz interjected that by the time the applicants return to the Board for a Master Plan hearing, they will have already conducted a public meeting with the neighbors to present their plans and address any issues. The Board was appreciative of this and noted a common concern they hear from abutters pertains to actual construction time lines and the inconvenience of

dust, noise, truck traffic and other nuisances while physical work is being done. Mr. Moorehead noted that the project is not being phased; all four buildings will go up essentially at once, which should make the neighbors happy by not prolonging the impacts.

Board members had a number of questions. The first of these pertained to traffic and circulation. It was noted the original St. Elizabeth's project required a traffic study which should be updated in a basic way. At a minimum, added staff should be accounted for. The applicant noted there would be 14 more people per shift at the most. The TRC's review of the project identified concerns with traffic overall but also with on-site circulation in particular. The applicants noted there would be traffic calming measures on site to keep speeds down and there will be sidewalks throughout the site providing ADA access to all buildings. The cul-de-sac has a narrow bulb but because the buildings are low-profile, no ladder truck turn radius needs to be provided. All buildings will have fire suppression sprinklers. Snow storage areas are being provided but if amounts are extreme, the facility has a protocol for hauling it off-site when necessary.

The Board briefly discussed public services noting that "will serve" letters from the Sewer Department and the Kent County Water Authority have been provided. Regarding heating and cooling the new structures, there will be no roof-mounted mechanicals to add height or visual impact. All HVAC equipment will be ground-mounted at the side of each structure which should help keep noise down as well. Because the project is essentially classed as "commercial," (more like a hospital than housing units) no deed-restricted affordable units are required. There was a brief discussion of the Comprehensive Plan's affordable housing component which identified sites like this, i.e. high density zones including the MUPD District which are serviced by public sewers, as being appropriate for affordable unit development. While the Plan notes that possibility for the subject site, there is no mandate to do affordable housing here and no state-approved unit count associated with it.

As the discussion wrapped up, Mr. Brunero affirmed that it was his opinion that the proposed development will not have any adverse impact on property values in the surrounding area. In fact, he asserted the proposal is

compatible with existing site development in a way that is useful and productive and even preferable to the original development concept that called for a commercial building in this location. Individual Board members chimed in briefly with their thoughts on the project which were overwhelmingly positive. Board members were happy to see the applicant being proactive with regard to abutter interests and concerns and definitely felt the proposal will benefit and enhance the Town and provide a better outcome than the alternative.

2. Continuance of the referral to the Planning Board of an Administrative Subdivision by applicants Joseph and Michele Madden for 7 Ashbrook Run, being Map 73, Plat 9, Lots 248 and 277. The applicants desire to re-draw the lot line between the two parcels (yielding no increase in the number of lots) resulting in a lot configuration wherein one of the lots does not meet the Minimum Buildable Area standard set forth in the Subdivision Regulations. Final decision expected to come at a later date.

The applicants had requested a continuance to the March 18, 2015 agenda and the Board agreed by consensus to do so.

3. Discussion: Status of potential upcoming zoning revisions. Mrs. Bourbonnais briefly discussed the proposed medical marijuana zoning ordinance and noted it was taking more time to draft than expected. There seem to be competing provisions within State law that complicate Towns' abilities to regulate marijuana and it appears that State law has changed since the Department of Health last published their rules for the medical marijuana program which makes that guidance document an unreliable source. Mrs. Bourbonnais will use the Solicitors' office and resources to try to complete the project.
4. Minutes: Motion by Mr. Donegan, second by Mr. Ayotte to approve the minutes of the January 21, 2015 meeting with one correction to page 5. Motion unanimously supported.
5. Planning Board Member Comments: For items not on the agenda and not relating to specific applications. None.

With all business concluded, there was a motion by Mr. Donegan, second by Mr. Turchetta to adjourn at 8:30 PM. VOTE: 6 – 0 – 0 in favor.

Minutes respectfully submitted by Lisa Bourbonnais, Planning Director.

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