

MINUTES OF THE PLANNING AND ZONING POCD SUBCOMMITTEE HELD Tuesday, December 29, 2020 AT 6:00 P.M.

Call to Order was at 6:01 pm.

Roll Call: J. Kader, P. Kearney, J. Quish, J. Griffith, M. Greene

Absent: J. Castignoli, J. Mortimer

Guest experts: **Christopher Bishop**, Chair of Historic District #2, **Michele Kramer**, Vice Chair of the Milford Historic Preservation Commission, also on Historic District #1 Commission, and President of Milford Preservation Trust; **Bill Silver**, Chair of the Milford Historic Preservation Commission; **Arthur Stowe**, city historian

Topic for discussion: Historic Preservation

Chairman Quish asked the guest experts in attendance to discuss the mission of the historic preservation groups they represent, their groups' connections to each other, if any, and their input to improve the Plan of Conservation and Development (POCD) **Mr. Griffith** went "round robin" to each expert for introductions.

- **Mr. Stowe** said he is city historian, and as such he reviews demolitions. He also serves on both historic commissions.
- **Mr. Bishop**, Chair of Historic District #2, South of the Green, said the commission is involved in reviews of smaller projects like window and door replacements, up to larger projects like porch replacements and additions to houses.
- **Ms. Kramer**, Vice Chair of the Milford Historic Preservation Commission, said she also on serves on the first historic district commission, and is president of the Milford Historic Trust.
- **Mr. Silver**, Chair of the Milford Historic Preservation Commission (MHPC), said the MHDC was formed 2017 and is concerned with historic properties that are not in defined historic districts. Examples include those in the Milford Center Design District (MCDD).

Mr. Griffith then described how the Department of Permitting and Land Use (DPLU) interfaces with historic preservation entities. He said specific properties are listed on state register of historic properties and/or appear in the 2 geographically defined historic districts. He said such parcels must be flagged for special consideration when issuing permits, at which time DPLU must route them to historic boards or district commissions. Permits must be consistent with the various historic commission approvals, so DPLU and the POCD interfaces in different ways with each group.

Chairman Quish wondered if streamlining DPLU interaction with the 3 preservation entities could be achieved via a combined interface. **Mr. Griffith** shared the POCD map of the 2 geographically defined historic districts—the first being District 1 (roughly an area around the Duck Pond) and District 2 (South of the Green). Some out-of-district properties were also color-coded on the POCD map leading to more discussion on the difficulty of determining which historic district to contact for permitting. **Mr. Silver** explained that some of the out-of-district properties were part of the River Park Historic District (RPHD) which is a national historic district, as distinct from District 1. **Mr. Griffith** said they were part of the state's historic register. **Ms. Kramer** asked if they were on the state's historic register or part of the state's historic resources survey, while acknowledged that the terms gets confusing. **Mr. Stowe** referred to an inventory of historic places done in 2010 or thereabouts. **Ms. Kramer** said Milford must perform another inventory soon and will seek grants for that project. She saw this inventory as potentially coinciding with the update of the POCD. She said historic resources inventories identify properties of interest, but those properties are not necessarily protected because they do not fall into either historic district. She said some but not all fall under the National River Park district and those would be protected. She said the Milford Preservation Trust (MPT) worked hard for the ordinance because so many historic homes exist outside the protection of the 2 districts. **Mr. Silver** added that the MHPC range goes from GW Bridge in Devon to the synagogue in Woodmont. He said 168 properties are outside the 2 historic districts, but part of the 300 properties that are on the state register. **Mr. Griffith** said he found some apparent anomalies, like the Mary Taylor Library not appearing on the state register. Debate ensued as to whether it was on the National Register and it was confirmed that properties on the National Register are automatically placed on the State Register. **Mr. Stowe** said many of the flagged properties on the old POCD maps may have been drawn from the historic inventory, noting that these are not protected. He confirmed that the map of historic places now on file with DPLU is the proper one to consult when referring permits for historic review. **Ms. Kramer** noted that apparently historic buildings may not appear on a register because some property owners do not wish to participate. She discussed a goal of an overlay of historic information in the POCD. **Mr. Griffith** wants to get a GIS layer of historic places for the online system.

Chairman Quish said he would like to create a better map in the next POCD that shows National/State/Milford (by district and MHPC) sites as well as sites with historic value on the state list, but no designation. **Ms. Kearney** noted that the old POCD talked about creating new historic districts when appropriate and asked if this had happened. **Ms. Kramer** discussed a long effort to create a village district in the Gulf Street area and in Woodmont, both of which failed. **Mr. Silver** said the MHPC had oversight over individual structures throughout the city that have state and federal recognition, making it the third and only new body since the last POCD. **Ms. Kramer** talked about another mission which involves outreach encouraging homeowners to list their properties on

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historic registers. She said there was an attempt to get the Villa Rosa community to list but this effort failed. **Mr. Silver** clarified that while no deed restrictions are placed on listed properties, registration runs with the property for subsequent owners. He said the state offers incentives such as tax rebates, credits, and eligibility for grants. **Chairman Quish** asked if the historians could create links for information about incentives via the POCD. He underscored his desire to have the POCD an accessible resource via social media. **Ms. Kearney** asked how comprehensive the list of historical properties is, which generated discussion about how to decide criteria for a historic designation, whether it is 50 years or 75 years or by architectural features or integrity. **Mr. Silver** said that inclusion in a community or context is also important. There was discussion of an attempt to persuade residents of Laurel Beach to become a village district. **Chairman Quish** commented that educating residents about real outcomes of adopting such a designation, rather than anticipated or rumored negatives, can be a challenge. **Ms. Kramer** said numerous outreach meetings were attempted but failed to connect with residents. **Mr. Griffith** discussed the nomination of Villa Rosa and the exemptions available and the implications. **Mr. Silver** described the dissemination of misinformation that derailed this effort. **Chairman Quish** asked if it would be advantageous to move all the historic commissions into one entity. **Ms. Kramer** said it might be unwieldy. She read from the 2001 POCD which suggested the creation of an overlay district that protected all the existing districts and the entire River Park district. She said if that had been done, the development of Prospect Street would have been avoided.

Mr. Griffith clarified that DPLU has little trouble dealing with demolitions or either of the geographically defined districts; it is the "spot" registered sites that are more difficult. **Chairman Quish** asked about growing District 1 to include Gulf Street and Governor's Avenue; **Ms. Kramer** described the process required as a series of meetings and a written response from 2/3rd of residents. She described a set of other alternatives if public support was insufficient. She said that by statute MHPC has the same enforcement capabilities as the districts. **Mr. Stowe** asked about the level of awareness residents of historic properties under MHPC. It was agreed that DPLU has awareness, but the residents may not. He also said it is common that the owner is not the resident. **Ms. Kramer** said Milford is overdue for an inventory and that grant money is available to conduct one.

Ms. Kramer asked about the possibility of redrawing the MCDD. She said Prospect Street had an egregious amount of infill. She said a walkable Transit-Oriented-District was desirable, but that the scale of infill in the downtown area and its impact on historic districts is compromised if historic properties become islands in a sea of development.

Chairman Quish asked each participant to share ideas on anything the POCD can do to support historic preservation. **Mr. Bishop** said he did not see an advantage to joining one of the established districts because protection conferred by the MHPC designation is sufficient. He said he suspected the state has resources about historic properties online now. He expressed concern that individual participation for preservation is difficult to obtain. **Ms. Kramer** said the website might be made simpler to understand. **Mr. Bishop** says he is comfortable that his district is operating well. **Mr. Stowe** said he thinks Milford is trailblazing in having 2 districts and often hears as much at conferences. He said the 2 districts are a nucleus with MHPC forming an umbrella. He agreed that it is difficult to get 2/3rds participation and buy-in. He likes local neighborhood districts because people do not feel that things are imposed. **Mr. Silver** said MHPC will send links for historic preservation resources to Mr. Sulkis and Mr. Griffith. He discussed potential court challenges by developers and the "Seeker Law" that allowed the formation of MHPC. He stressed that the POCD should not limit its purview to historically registered buildings but should preserve contextual settings. He said the historic building may be preserved but the scale and context of those buildings on the street should be preserved as well. He said the MCDD regulations did not go far enough to protect context regulations and felt development should merit a public hearing. **Mr. Griffith** discussed the idea of overlay districting, such that if an overlay exists, a higher design standard would apply, such as increased landscaping or when utilities are redone, they must be buried. He noted that the recently approved 135 Broad Street plan was less impactful than it might have been due to a developer and architect with sensitivity because there is no way to regulate design. **Chairman Quish** commented on other lost historical items such as the trolley that once ran to New Haven from Naugatuck Avenue, leading to a discussion of a study done on 4 shoreline towns during the trolley era. Discussion then moved again to infill with new construction's bulk and height changing neighborhood scale and density. **Mr. Kader** asked if the fact of a house's location in a historic district increases its value; the group said it was unsure. He also noted that some houses that have been greatly altered; he wondered about incenting owners to restore them to their original state. **Ms. Kramer** commented that such a house would need to have some architectural significance to justify that project. **Mr. Bishop** said it is one thing for a commission to recommend a certain window, but another to insist on a full historical restoration. **Ms. Kramer** remarked that while grants are beneficial, the conditions they impose can also be burdensome. **Ms. Kearney** asked if owners even typically know whether their houses are of historical significance. **Mr. Silver** said there is no indication of historic status required on deeds and imagined that most buyers do not know.

Chairman Quish expressed the group's appreciation and was open to another meeting on historic preservation.

Approval of Minutes of 12-16-20 was unanimous.

Adjournment was at 7:26.