

**MINUTES OF THE PLANNING AND ZONING POCD SUBCOMMITTEE SPECIAL MEETING HELD
Wednesday, March 24, 2021 AT 6:30 P.M.**

Call to Order was at 6:33 pm.

Roll Call: J. Castignoli, J. Kader, P. Kearney, J. Mortimer, J. Quish/(staff) D. Sulkis, M. Greene

Topic for discussion: Shopping Center Design District (SCD) Corridor Design District

Chairman Quish advised the board that he had learned that public comment by those not invited as guest experts is not permitted in the subcommittee meetings unless the meeting has been advertised as a public hearing. He welcomed any member of the public who wished to dial in to the meetings and listen, however. He also stated that full public hearings would be scheduled on various topics in the future.

Mr. Sulkis then shared the zoning regulations pertaining to the SCD and a map of the area it comprises. He said that essentially, it's the mall, a portion of the privately-owned East Town Road, and the Walmart-anchored shopping plaza to the east of that. He clarified that the road is private approximately up to I-95 overpass where it becomes a city road. **Mr. Quish** and **Ms. Kearney** said they had been doing independent research about the current state of shopping malls. **Mr. Quish** said that retailers are attempting to innovate to attract shoppers by such means as combining apparel sales areas with leisure areas. He said the city isn't responsible for the success of the mall but that the city can work in partnership with mall owners as circumstances change. He encouraged each board member to share ideas for a 5-10-year vision for the mall in Milford and how regulations might be adapted to help the vision become reality.

Mr. Mortimer said he liked many elements of the mall owner proposals heard by the full board in 2020. He said he understood that there is controversy over adding so many apartments, but he thinks that the mall site may be the right area for it. He said he would like to incorporate the Milford historical aesthetic into both structures and leisure spaces. **Ms. Kearney** said she had reread the mall's demographic and business analysis from that same meeting. She said that it was important to remember that the mall has been the city's biggest taxpayer. She asked about how the tax revenues from the mall are structured. **Mr. Sulkis** said they are taxed like any store despite their unusual density and that if stores are vacant, each store's personal property tax drops and this affects the city's tax overall revenue. **Mr. Quish** added that the assessor's valuation drives the real estate tax obligations separately. They discussed the purchase price of the mall and the cost of improvements made and what type of financial pressure would ensue on the mall from those expenses. **Ms. Kearney** wondered whether after the pandemic people will want to resume shopping and entertainment in enclosed spaces. She speculated that the Superior Court might find one of the vacant spaces suitable. As a group, there was concern that a longer-term plan had not been part of the mall's 2020 proposal. **Mr. Quish** noted that shopping behavior has changed due to the rise of online shopping and the way the pandemic has exacerbated the need for it. He said the mall must be reimagined. **Mr. Mortimer** put forth the idea of a hybrid use of the large tract of land with residential portions and open space, recalling a comment by Mr. Kader about partially restoring the salt marsh there. **Mr. Sulkis** said that as the group's thinking crystallizes, it brings an opportunity to reopen a dialog with the mall owners. **Mr. Castignoli** asked what is permitted in the zone and **Mr. Sulkis** reviewed the pertinent regulations. **Mr. Quish** expressed a concern that revenue from the apartments would create reduce the urgency to maintain the mall and again expressed his wish that the plan had been more fully articulated. **Mr. Castignoli** agreed that a full plan was needed. **Mr. Sulkis** noted that many of the special uses listed in the regulations are already active, such as health clubs. He also pointed out that the height requirements allowed 10-story buildings, so the mall could be much taller. **Mr. Mortimer** suggested it could almost be a self-contained village. The distinction between space making and activating a place was discussed, that if the mall could be activated as a destination without adverse impacts to the rest of the city, that could be beneficial. **Mr. Kader** stated that despite frequenting the mall as a young man, he now hates them and that while he generally likes the idea of housing, his biggest concern is that a village in the mall area will compete with downtown. He said he would prefer to see a government building, shared workspace, or an educational space in the area. **Mr. Quish** said the board wants the mall to thrive but not to the detriment of downtown or the rest of Milford. He said that this type of planning is well suited to coordination with the Regulations Subcommittee. The group came to agree that while all stakeholders were important to the conversation, the preliminary discussion would be more productive if the mall and adjacent owners or management were invited guests, with the public participating later in the process. Mr. Quish looked forward to input from the eventual consultant. **Mr. Mortimer** said he thinks Milford center can be protected despite further development of the mall site. **Mr. Castignoli** reminded the group that motorists who drive by the city along I-95 are given an impression of Milford by the mall now and will be by whatever replaces it.

Mr. Quish asked if the consultant RFP was cleared for distribution to the board. Mr. Sulkis said he will try to expedite this.

Approval of Minutes of 3-10-21 was unanimous.

Adjournment was at 7:17, with next meeting is April 14th. **Mr. Kader** said that he may be absent.