

**TOWN OF MANCHESTER  
MINUTES OF PUBLIC HEARING  
HELD BY THE PLANNING AND ZONING COMMISSION/  
INLAND WETLANDS AND WATERCOURSES AGENCY  
MARCH 18, 2024**

**MEMBERS PRESENT:**

In Person: Eric Prause, Chairman  
Patrick Kennedy, Vice Chairman  
Michael Stebe, Secretary  
Teresa Ike  
Chris Schoeneberger  
Daniela Luna  
Michael Farina

**ALTERNATE MEMBER SITTING FOR  
APPROVAL OF MINUTES ONLY:**

In Person: Maliha Ahsan

**ALTERNATES PRESENT**

In Person: Bonnie Potocki

**ABSENT:**

Zachary Schurin

**ALSO PRESENT:**

In Person: Megan Pilla, Principal Development Planner  
Gary Anderson, Director of Planning & Economic  
Development  
Electronically: Nancy Martel, Recording Secretary

The Chairman opened the Public Hearing at 7:00 P.M. The Secretary read the legal notice when the call was made.

TOWN OF MANCHESTER PLANNING & ZONING COMMISSION (continued from March 4, 2024) – Proposed regulation amendment at Art. II, Sec. I (General Requirements for Residential Zones) to allow the conversion of former school buildings to multi-family residential. – Zoning Regulation Amendment (REG-0001-2024)

Ms. Pilla recapped the proposed new section to allow for the conversion of former school buildings to multi-family residential by special exception. It is similar to, though not exactly the same as, special exceptions that allow similar conversions of historic mills and hotels and motels. This would be applicable to all residential zones because that is where nearly all existing school buildings are located and where schools are permitted.

Ms. Pilla responded to questions:

1. *How was Bennet housing approved?* In 1982, housing for the elderly and handicapped was a special exception use in residential zones. It was later removed from the zoning regulations and replaced with the EHD zone.
2. *Minimum floor area requirements in the draft proposal.* That has been removed. In doing research, she sought examples of other municipalities' minimum floor areas of dwelling units, which she could not find. She contacted the Connecticut Planning Listserve as well as the Town Attorney's office and learned that it is not allowed to have minimum dwelling unit floor areas in zoning regulations anymore, which was part of Public Act 21-29 in 2021: Zoning regulations shall not: (7) Establish for any dwelling unit a minimum floor area that is greater than the minimum floor area set forth in the applicable building, housing or other code.
3. *Financial Guarantee.* Art. IV, Sec. 22 of Manchester's zoning regulations, added after the mill conversion regulations were created, does outline all financial guarantee requirements in accordance with state law and they are applicable to all projects. She added a brief reference to the proposed section to ensure it is noted.

4. *Affordable Housing.*

- Option 1 – No requirement. Most consistent with the rest of the zoning regulations.
- Option 2 – Incentivizes by allowing construction of new buildings or building additions if 15% of units in the development are dedicated affordable units. (Includes height and density criteria for new buildings and additions.)
- Option 3 – Same requirement as historic mill conversions, 10% of all must be dedicated as affordable units.

If the Commission moved tonight to approve the draft as written, it would be Option 1 with no affordable housing requirement.

5. *Consistency with POCD Recommendations.*

- “Educational Facilities” Recommendation #3 – Complete the Repurposed Schools project and move forward.
- “Housing – Changing Preferences” Recommendation #1 – Strengthen neighborhoods and expand housing choices through an increased mix of uses, diversified housing choices, and the concentration of more housing within mixed-use areas such as Downtown.
- “Housing Attainability” Recommendation #2 – Prioritize policies and programs that encourage higher density pedestrian-oriented neighborhoods with a range of housing choices.

Between Option 2 and Option 3, staff prefers Option 2 because Option 3 with the mill conversion did not achieve the intent they sought in terms of affordable units. Incentivizing, rather than requiring, allows more flexibility and opens the door to more development proposals and a wider range of possibilities, and potentially more interest from developers.

Mr. Farina asked for clarification about the state guidelines for affordable housing in a community and where Manchester stands. He noted that Manchester has done a great job providing affordable housing.

Mr. Anderson reported that there is an Affordable Housing Appeals List. The municipalities in the state are required to have at least 10% of their units dedicated as affordable. Manchester is on the good side of that, in the 14% range. The Planning Department has issues with the way those are measured, but all towns are measured by the same criteria.

Mr. Stebe observed that Manchester had to report its listing and ratings recently, and Mr. Anderson confirmed that it is every year.

Ms. Potocki stated that she reviewed the Transforming Manchester document put together by the consultant on the schools. Page 27, which pertains to Nathan Hale School, reported the desires of the neighborhood: housing, school, incorporating mixed use, and perhaps community space. She suggested that Commission members consider the effort made to have a consultant review the survey. Regarding the historic character of the building, it is a historic façade, but the inside will need substantial rehab.

Mr. Anderson pointed out that this proposal is just the work to change the zoning regulations to allow this type of use.

Mr. Prause thanked the staff for the affordable housing options. Having a requirement may be difficult and developers may shy away. The second option with an incentive would allow expansion of the density or the height and he asked whether staff believe it to be in any way detrimental to have this clause in the regulations.

Mr. Anderson did not see it as a negative. One of the Commission's priorities over the next year or two will be redoing the zoning regulations. In his opinion, that is something to be looked at holistically instead of adding it to a rehab use within the regulations. While he did not see the harm in adding it, perhaps there are other places to add it and think more about incentivizing affordable housing throughout town.

Mr. Prause added that the two incentives it looks at are: increasing the building height to three floors, and potentially adding more buildings to increase density on the site. Looking at all the potential schools, there are not any that are already three stories high, and he is unsure how feasible it would be to add a third story. However, a developer could add more structures that are three story.

Ms. Pilla agreed, clarifying that it does not have to be a third story; it could be an addition of any kind. This is a special exception regulation, and each proposal would be reviewed and approved on a case-by-case basis.

Mr. Prause speculated whether there would be enough area to have the correct amount of open space and parking for there to be another building, or if it could never be invoked based on the three potential buildings.

Ms. Pilla stated that it could potentially be feasible at the sites based on the size, setbacks and other dimensional standards that would be required.

Mr. Schoeneberger, referring to Option 2, stated that is illustrative and there could be other types of incentives.

Ms. Pilla reported that, for the Option 2 wording, any building addition or any new building could trigger that requirement for affordable housing. She acknowledged that it could be worded however the Commission wanted it to be.

Mr. Stebe recognized that there is already a plan for a more holistic review of the zoning regulations, and adding an affordable housing clause would be pushing this out for another meeting. In his opinion, going with what was written without an affordable housing section is the appropriate step, with the notion that the overhaul of the regulations adds a section on affordable housing.

Ms. Potocki referred to Sec. 12, Recreational Areas, noting that minimum floor areas are not allowed. She asked whether that would be in conflict. She additionally asked about Public Act 21-29.

Ms. Pilla stated that has nothing to do with minimum floor areas of the dwelling units; that references the gross floor area of the entire building. Public Act 21-29 refers to minimum floor area of dwelling units.

Ms. Pilla reported the response to the referral to CRCOG. They found no conflict with the original proposal and regional plans and applauded the effort to increase diversified housing options by allowing conversions.

There were no members of the public to speak on the application.

**MOTION:** Mr. Kennedy moved to close the public hearing. Ms. Ike seconded the motion and all members voted in favor.

The public hearing was closed at 7:30 P.M.

I certify these minutes were adopted on the following date:

April 1, 2024

Date

Eric Prause, Chairman

**NOTICE: A DIGITAL RECORDING OF THIS PUBLIC HEARING CAN BE HEARD  
IN THE PLANNING DEPARTMENT.**