

**MINUTES OF WORKSHOP
HELD BY THE PLANNING AND ZONING COMMISSION
MAY 20, 2024**

POCD IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY

Ms. Emma Petersen, Principal Comprehensive Planner, reviewed the lengthy process for updating the Plan of Conservation and Development. Her goals were:

1. Connect the Commission with high-level resources in terms of implementing recommendations.
2. Review recommendations that have been identified as having a specific connection with the PZC.

There are a number of steps involved in the actual planning process for updating the Town's Plan of Conservation and Development, which began in the spring of 2022:

- Analysis of local, regional, and state level data.
- A number of points for public engagement, collecting feedback.
- Drafting the plan.
- Updating the plan based on hundreds of public comments.
- Meeting with the PZC throughout the process.
- Effective date July 12, 2023.

Plan Implementation (through 2033)

- Recommendations will require varying timelines.
- Numerous stakeholders involved in implementation.
- Town staff worked with consultant team to create implementation matrix.

Ms. Petersen presented an overview of the implementation matrix, which is intended to provide key high-level implementation to organize and prioritize actions around implementation.

- Comprehensive and Long-Term Planning.
- Manchester NEXT: Plan of Conservation and Development, available on Town website on the Planning & Economic Development Department's page.

Ms. Petersen noted the key points in the matrix are the strategy column and the lead column.

- Page Number: An associated reference within the plan.
- Strategy: Specific wording of each recommendation as presented in the plan.
- Lead: Various stakeholders that have been identified as suggestions for key involvement associated with a specific recommendation.
- Support: Certain entities identified as support.
- Timeframe: Based on various factors.

Implementation Progress

Facilitating Regulation Communications with:

- Planning & Economic Development Dept. Staff

- Other Town Departments
- Boards, Commissions & Committees
- Community Partners/Community Groups

Successful POCD Implementation:

- Requires collaboration with numerous partners.

Action:

The Town is contracting with a consultant to carry out a comprehensive update of the current Zoning Regulations.

Leads:

- Planning & Economic Development
- Planning & Zoning Commission.

Gather information on current actions underway to avoid duplication of efforts:

- Understanding current actions underway is crucial.
- Successful POCD implementation will be the result of collaboration.

In this effort,

- Make sure the PZC has points of communication in Phase 1 and Phase 2.
- Determine the priorities we want the consultant to address. The priorities reflect the recommendations outlined in the POCD.
- Connections between what can be done with the zoning regulations. Not only will that action address that recommendation, it can address multiple recommendations outlined.

Recommendations highlighted in the POCD:

1. Accommodate attainable housing.
2. Encourage desired scale and character.
3. Consolidate and modernize regulations.
4. Encourage mixed-use development.

Review of Recommendations

- Associated with 27 recommendations.
- The Commission may lead action on some, but support others.
- Absence in some chapters does not indicate no involvement; another entity may be suggested to lead those actions.
- Regular Commission activities may be an interpretation of what it means to be the lead on a certain recommendation.

Recommendations

Economics & Employment: Retail & Service Economy

1. Facilitate the development of mixed-used districts and focus areas such as Spencer Street, mid-town, Buckland Hills or Depot Square. The Focus Area outlines high-level concepts

of what development could look like based on the interpretation of multiple recommendations.

2. Maintain the promotion of first floor retail and destination uses on the street level with office and residential uses on upper floors.
3. Consider updating zoning regulations periodically to reflect the changing needs of the retail and service industry.

Economics & Employment: Distribution, Healthcare & Industry

Economics & Employment: Downtown District

1. Continue to encourage and support the development of creative workspaces, shared workspaces and think tanks.
2. Diversify workplaces by allowing more mixed use, maker spaces and live/work buildings.
3. Continue to support temporary outdoor dining options that expand seating capacity while allowing patrons to comfortably socialize post-Covid.

Housing: Housing Stock

1. Consider increasing public awareness and adopting guidelines or incentives for suburban retrofitting through form-based regulations that allow for a mix of uses, diverse housing types and pedestrian-oriented rights-of-way.
2. Suburban retrofitting is encouraged, creating an opportunity for new housing options.
3. Create, enforce, and periodically evaluate standards for residential design, building, property maintenance, landscape design and planting to improve housing conditions.
4. Amend standards as necessary.

A discussion was held between Mr. Farina, Ms. Petersen, and Mr. Anderson about the phrase “periodically evaluate.” (Mr. Farina’s mic was not turned on.) Ms. Petersen stated that there should be an opportunity for flexibility in the 10-year period. Ms. Pilla explained that the statement “Create, enforce, and periodically evaluate...” is to ensure we do not just create it and forget it.

Mr. Schoeneberger interjected that, if there is a good idea, we should not wait five years. It could be implemented tomorrow.

(There was further conversation between members without mics on.)

Ms. Petersen commented that the shorter timelines for some instances may be influenced by current ongoing actions with the Town. Changes could certainly be made to make this more useful.

Housing: Changing Preferences

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.

Ms. Pilla said that this is an example where there might not be one individual task to accomplish this, but rather this might be one of those recommendations the Commission wants to keep in mind when hearing applications. A conversation ensued between Ms. Pilla and Mr. Farina regarding his comments regarding the sidewalk plan.

2. Ensure an adequate supply of both rental and for-sale housing to keep up with projected demand.

Housing: Attainability

1. Update zoning regulations to better accommodate attainable housing by reducing lot size requirements, reducing setbacks, reducing and/or eliminating parking requirements. This will be addressed during the zoning regulations update.
2. Prioritize policies and programs that encourage higher density pedestrian-oriented neighborhoods with a range of housing choices.
3. Create additional opportunities to produce missing middle housing types or more compact housing types compatible in scale with single-family housing such as cottage style development or townhomes.
4. Consider lowering parking requirements for proposed attainable housing to make these projects more viable.
5. Ensure that low-income and attainable housing are interspersed with market-rate housing to create mixed-income communities that include options for disabled persons, elderly persons and those experiencing homelessness.
6. Find ways to streamline the development review process.

Housing: Public Services & Infrastructure

1. Increase revenue potential with the Town's Conservation and Growth map presented in the Land Use and Community Character chapter to help fund future infrastructure investments.
2. Identify underutilized parcels for adaptive reuse to increase tax revenue for the Town.
3. Evaluate best management practices to reduce stormwater runoff from private developments including, but not limited to, rain gardens, conservation landscape, reducing impervious surface areas, underground storage areas for large-scale rain events or onsite swales for short-term stormwater retention.
4. Implement one or more ideas for stormwater management as a condition of private development in the Town's Subdivision Rules and/or Engineering Design Standards.
5. Produce a Resiliency and Adaptation Plan focused on adapting to and reacting to climate change. The Public Works Department has received funding from DEEP to pursue an adaptive stormwater and climate adaptation plan.
6. Aquifer Protection Agency – Promote water conservation and reuse principles in future investments.
7. Aquifer Protection Agency – Modify existing codes and regulations to protect drinking water supply.

Housing: Transportation

1. Promote widespread transit options.

2. Support the development of fast, convenient, and affordable transit along major commuter corridors as well as neighborhood centers.
3. Requiring new development and substantial redevelopment projects to provide transit easements and baseline infrastructure (bus stops) will encourage transit usage.
4. Consider future implementation of transit technology such as traffic signal prioritization, queue jumps, and bus only lanes where appropriate.
5. Advocate for better access to CTfastrak given the Hartford to UConn corridor and the demographic profile and densities within town.

Land Use and Community Character

1. Establish and implement street design standards that incorporate recommended elements not already covered in the Town's public improvement standards.
2. Review the current zoning regulations to ensure that Zoning permits the desired scale and character of development.
3. Look for barriers to their use by developers while maintaining a high standard for human scale design.
4. Consider a comprehensive update of the current zoning regulations.
5. Reduce or remove parking requirements in some or all existing zoning districts.
6. Amendments or revisions to the existing zoning regulations should allow mixed-use development.
7. Develop design standards for architecture focusing on the materials, scale, orientation, and fenestration, particularly on facades visible from public spaces and streets.

Ms. Petersen stressed that her intention in this workshop is as a first conversation in a series of conversations about implementation. We have provided some high-level detail that can be used for initial prioritization but without Town staff working with relevant commissions and stakeholders, there is further information needed to make a plan for implementation.

Mr. Farina (nearly inaudible - mic off) inquired about prioritizing land acquisition, questioning whether information has been communicated. Ms. Petersen responded that, for that particular recommendation, the one-to-three-year timeframe was applied because of the knowledge that the Land Acquisition and Historic Property Investment Committee is active, and the Board of Directors had voted to create the Temporary Trail Committee to utilize ARPA funds and to prioritize land acquisition needs for trail network extensions. There had been communication about processes in place to communicate between those two groups.

Mr. Anderson stated that commission is involved in prioritization conversations.

Mr. Stebe referred to regulations regarding EVs. He felt the PZC could play a role in that area as well. Ms. Petersen concurred and stated that the more the Commissioners are familiar with the content of the plan, the more valuable it becomes.

(Further inaudible conversation.)

Ms. Petersen referred to Manchester 2020, the previous POCD, and a 25-page report on the website about implementation progress of that specific plan. There were much fewer specific goals than this plan with a similar format to this matrix.

Mr. Anderson explained the prior document and how important it is to get information to the public.

Mr. Prause suggested changing the timeline in suburban retrofitting. (Nearly inaudible.) He asked whether the PZC could help to create better incentives.

Ms. Pilla noted that the most immediate thing the Commission could do is to keep these in mind when reviewing regulations. Form-based or design-oriented regulations can be a start. More extensive thought would go into how that can be incentivized, how to increase awareness, and how to accomplish it.

Mr. Anderson stated that involves encouraging flexibility of use in various zones. People may want to transition some of the larger big-box buildings uses. If it is in the regulations ahead of time and there is an inquiry, we could say that it can be done and provide the process.

Mr. Prause noted that this is specific to housing and consideration should be given to changing the classification of the RA.

Mr. Anderson noted that the Masonic Lodge project is in a zoning district where it can be done as of right. He gave examples of the mills, hotels, schools, and the armory. There are many districts where it would not work. We need to make sure there is a way forward for those uses in various zones.

Ms. Pilla considered zones that are single-family housing.

Mr. Prause stated that we should tackle that next year and now is the time to talk about it. He suggested research into it.

Ms. Pilla suggested not capping the number of years because it should be followed by how to incentivize it.

Ms. Petersen thought that would be a constructive exercise for the Commission as we get ready to start the zoning regulations update. She suggested reviewing the regulations and looking for opportunities of things to address with the Steering Committee and additional input from the Commission.

Mr. Prause mentioned lot size, regulations (inaudible) ...missing middle housing ... It all ties into things we need to get prepared for discussions. There are two that talk about stormwater guidelines. There are new stormwater practices that we should look at.

Mr. Prause also encouraged pushing up the timeline on parking.

Ms. Pilla agreed but stated that the reason it was set at 4-6 years is because it is anticipated there will be considerable pushback from the public. We could hypothetically propose it as part of the zoning regulation amendment. Staff would like to see that happen ASAP, but it is anticipated there will be more pushback on that than on some of the other potential zoning regulation amendments.

Mr. Anderson pointed out that parking is in the timeline on the zoning regs.

Mr. Prause suspected that, when trying to align the goals here, those are likely to be recommendations of items for discussion.

Mr. Farina commented that, since we are going through our regulations, now is the time to do it.

Ms. Petersen noted that flexibility in the implementation process can be helpful in the future.

The workshop was closed at 10:20 P.M.