

1. Call to Order

The Chester Planning & Zoning Commission met on Thursday, October 14, 2021 as a hybrid meeting, with virtual participation via ZOOM. Vice Chair Patricia Bisacky called the meeting to order at 7:13 P.M. (Start of the meeting was delayed for members who had not yet arrived.)

2. Roll Call and Seating of Alternates:

Commission members attending in person at Town Hall and seated were Patricia Bisacky, Seth Fidel, Elaine Fitzgibbons, Steve Merola, Bettie Perreault, and Peter Zanardi; with Henry Krempel via ZOOM. Present in person was Michael Joplin; present via ZOOM was Zoning Compliance Officer John Guszkowski, First Selectman Lauren Gister, Virginia Carmony and Elizabeth Reinhart of the Valley Courier. All members were seated;

3. Audience of Citizens:

Michael Joplin spoke regarding the present Section 117 – Medical Marijuana Dispensary and Production Facilities. (The matter was related to the scheduled public hearing.)

Virginia Carmony, Chair of the Board of Finance, after thanking Commission members for their service, stated that anything that will promote economic growth for Chester should be supported, including regulations related to medical marijuana. (The matter was related to the scheduled public hearing.)

4. Public Hearing: Application for Amendment of Chester Zoning Regulations, New Section 160D – Temporary Moratorium on Recreational Cannabis Establishments. Applicant: Chester Planning & Zoning Commission.

Following the reading of the published Legal Notice, ZCO Guszkowski explained the process of and for a moratorium. The fact that the matter had been the subject of extensive and broad-ranging discussion during the previous Commission meeting was noted. With no further input from members, members were polled to ensure that no further input was offered.

Joplin spoke as an owner of the Key Bank building, 6 Water Street, stating it had been purchased with the intent that it be used as a marijuana dispensary. Owners proposed that all profits be dedicated to the Town of Chester through the Chester Leadership Fund, which is affiliated with the Community Foundation. The request was that consideration be given to this as a way to raise money for the Town.

Ms. Carmony made note that the proposal for 6 Water Street was for recreational use of marijuana, not medical, which is currently regulated under Section 117 of the Zoning Regulations. She noted that the Town Grand List has diminished by \$5 million, that costs will continue to increase, and that the Commission should “exercise due diligence” in its consideration of the matter, and consider economics during its review process.

Commission members noted, among other items, that costs related to safety, traffic, the economic viability of the commercial center of the Town may be greater than anticipated, that Commission members need a sound understanding of all the issues involved, utilizing all possible sources of information and recognition of the various legal forces involved. Other agencies and those who have had experience with the matter will be consulted during the review period. The issue is complicated and the Commission should take adequate time to study it carefully. The issue should not be allowed to become an emotional one.

On motion by Peter Zanardi, seconded by Seth Fidel, the public hearing was closed at 7:37 P.M.

5. Old Business: Application for Amendment of Chester Zoning Regulations, New Section 160D – Temporary Moratorium on Recreational Cannabis Establishments. Applicant: Chester Planning & Zoning Commission.

Commission members had no additional information or comments to offer. The process during which the Commission will review the matter, with note of the approaching holiday season and the need to identify, contact and schedule meetings with others, was reviewed. It was pointed out that the goals of the 2019 Plan of Conservation and Development (POCD) should be a part of the review process.

On motion by Seth Fidel, seconded by Elaine Fitzgibbons, the adoption of the proposed addition of Section 160D to the Chester Zoning regulations was unanimously approved with an effective date of November 1, 2021.

6. New Business: There was none.
7. Other – Guests or Members: Nothing further was brought up at this time.
8. Report of Officers and Subcommittee:
 - a. Zoning Compliance Officer Guskowski reviewed activities over the past month, noting relatively slow activity. Research of Commission records and consultation with legal counsel was done in connection with past actions in connection with short-term rental regulations; the Regulations were subsequently updated to better reflect actions taken. The revised Regulations were posted to the Town’s website. The Town is undertaking the upgrade of communication capabilities for the Community Room, which will make future meetings more accessible. Removal of a residential trailer on Liberty Street was reviewed, with note of the Town’s need to place liens on the property in connection with the significant costs incurred. The First Selectman is in the process of interviewing a potential employee for the Land Use Office, Assessor’s office and possibly other support positions.
 - b. The state legislative session has ended for this season but “there is still a lot of chatter”. There may be a Special Session before the end of the year in connection with allocation of COVID funding. A group has been appointed to continue addressing the affordable/attainable housing issues, which should begin holding meetings in the new year.

9. Bills for Payment: Hartford Courant statement in the amount of \$217.45 in connection with the August 12, 2021 Public Hearing and decision was unanimously approved **on Motion by Peter Zanardi, seconded by Seth Fidel.**

10. Communications, Receipt of New Petitions, New Applications received after posting of Agenda:

Application for A Text Amendment or Map Change submitted by Charles and JoAnne Park, 31-33 Straits Road, Parcel 14-310 for consideration for a map change from an R-2 Zone to an R-1 Zone.

On Motion by Seth Fidel, seconded by Steve Merola the Commission scheduled a Public Hearing on the Application for Thursday, November 4, 2021 at 7:00 P.M. Motion passed unanimously.

11. Approval of Minutes: August 12, 2021 Regular Meeting

On Motion by Elaine Fitzgibbons, seconded by Peter Zanardi, the minutes of the September 9, 2021 meeting were approved.

12. Pending Litigation: There is no pending litigation.

13. Adjournment

There being no further business to come before the Commission, on motion by Elaine Fitzgibbons, seconded by Peter Zanardi, the meeting adjourned at 7:56 P.M.,

Respectfully submitted,

Bettie Perreault, Secretary