

**GROTON PLANNING BOARD
JANUARY 18, 2001
MINUTES**

Chairman Curtis called the meeting to order at 7:30 PM in the Town Hall

Members present: Curtis, Barringer, Clements, Degen, Lewis and Perkins

Member absent: Eliot

SITE PLAN REVIEW – UNION CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH

The Board continued its review of the site plan submitted by the Union Congregational Church to construct two new parking lots to serve the existing church facility. The Board received a letter dated January 5, 2001 from Town Counsel Judith Cutler stating that a variance is required if the cars are going to back into the public way. (*See Zoning By-law §218-23C(5)*)

William Shute, representing the church, withdrew the plan and application. The motion was made by Lewis to accept the withdrawal without prejudice. The motion was seconded and passed unanimously.

FIRE CISTERNS

The Board discussed the installation of the fire cistern at the Woodland Park subdivision. The Fire Chief has concerns about connecting cisterns to drainage systems and would prefer a tight tank. The Board will ask the Fire Chief and John Schmid of Judith Nitsch Engineering, Inc. (JNEI) to attend a Planning Board meeting to discuss revisions to the Subdivision Regulations in regard to fire cisterns.

WEST THRONE SUBDIVISION

The Planning Board will request that John Schmid inspect the West Throne subdivision to check on the drainage system problems. The Board will take any necessary follow-up action after it receives the JNEI report.

CABLE TELEVISION

The Board discussed the requests of residents that the Planning Board meetings be broadcast live on cable television. The Board has requested that the Cable Committee install the cameras and other infrastructure in the second floor meeting room for cable coverage. The first floor meeting room is not large enough to accommodate the number of people who attend public hearings. Chairman Curtis said if the Cable Committee does not have the funds to install the infrastructure in the second floor meeting room then the Board may want to consider putting a line item in the budget to pay someone to tape the meetings for re-broadcast.

SITE PLAN REVIEW – FLORENCE ROCHE MODULAR CLASSROOMS

The Board considered the site plan submitted by the Groton Dunstable Regional School District to construct two modular classrooms at the Florence Roche Elementary School. William Murray of David Ross Associates and Charles Ramsey, GDRSD Director of Facilities and Grounds, were present.

Chairman Curtis read the comments from the Board of Health, the Conservation Commission, and the Sewer Commissioners.

Mr. Murray presented the plan to add two modular classrooms to the existing facility. However, no new staff or classrooms will be added to the school. The new modular classrooms will allow better use of existing space in the school. There will be no new bathrooms, no new lighting, and no new parking.

Member Lewis expressed concern about the close proximity of the building to the access road. He asked if the Fire Chief had looked at the plan. The Board will send a follow up memo to request comments from the Fire Chief.

Chairman Curtis asked how close the building will be. Mr. Murray said it will be up right to the curb. Chairman Curtis said emergency vehicle access, traffic circulation, and parents dropping children off are all safety concerns. Mr. Murray said he will see if the building can be moved back to provide more clearance.

Member Lewis asked about lighting. Mr. Murray said the only lighting will be security lighting that will shine downward.

Member Lewis asked about drainage. Mr. Murray said there will be no impact because the classrooms will be installed over an area that is already paved.

Member Perkins asked about the sewer capacity as stated in the comments from the Sewer Commission. Mr. Murray said the size of the pipes can handle the sewage and the waste water treatment plant in Pepperell can handle the flow. Sewer Commissioner Harlan Fitch said the sewer capacity issue cannot be resolved in a short time frame because the Sewer Commission will not meet until two weeks.

Member Degen said the Board must hear from the Police Chief and Fire Chief about the close proximity of the building to the access road before voting on the plan. The Board must be sure the road is adequate to handle school bus traffic.

Member Barringer asked if the modulars will be used for classrooms. Mr. Ramsey said, “yes” but this will free up other spaces such as storage areas that are being used for classrooms now.

Chairman Curtis noted that a second bicycle rack is needed at the school. Mr. Ramsey said one would be installed.

The motion was made by Degen to continue the review on January 24, 2001 at 7:30 PM. The motion was seconded and passed unanimously.

PUBLIC HEARING – STILL MEADOW, NASHUA ROAD

In accordance with the provisions of Chapter 40A, Sections 9 and 11, the Groton Planning Board held a public hearing to consider the application submitted by the Groton Land Foundation to utilize the provisions of Groton Zoning By-law Section 218-26 Open Space Residential Development and Section 218-26.1 Major Residential Development to create fifteen dwelling units on six (6) lots as shown on the plan entitled, “Still Meadow – Schematic Development Plan, Land in Groton, Mass.; Prepared for the Groton Land Foundation” prepared by Pine & Swallow Associates, dated January 2, 2001. The proposed development is located on land owned by the Alice MacDonald Revocable Trust, Assessors Lot D-24-0 (new Map 227, Parcel 110) on the easterly side of Nashua Road.

Chairman Curtis called the public hearing to order. Clerk Lewis read the notice published in the January 5 and 12, 2001 issues of *The Groton Herald*. Applicants Robert Pine, June Johnson, Aleta Manugian, and Dan Wolfe of the Groton Land Foundation, landowner Dorothy Bancroft, and many abutters were present.

Mr. Pine presented the plan to create a cluster development of fifteen units on six lots on 43 acres located off Nashua Road and Northwoods Road. The Groton Land Foundation’s plan will preserve as much open space as possible under the proposed development plan. The open space will abut conservation land in the adjacent Northwoods and Meadow Brook subdivisions. The site contains two large open fields, three streams, and estimated habitat for the blanding turtle and spotted turtle. The plan will protect the features that are important to protection including the riparian corridors and wildlife habitat. In the rear of the site, there are remnants from an old “still” which is why the project is called “Still Meadow”. The Basic Number of Lots plan will be revised to address the comments from the Board’s engineer. The existing house and barn will be sold on a separate lot. The plan will include one affordable unit as required in the inclusionary zoning provisions of the by-law. Four single-family lots, with 40,000 sq ft each, will be created with frontage on Northwoods Road. Ten single-family units will be clustered on a common driveway. Each single-family condominium unit will have an “exclusive use” area. The common driveway will be constructed to the Shared Driveway Regulation standards. A common sewage disposal system will be used, but each unit will have its own well.

Chairman Curtis read the comments from the Conservation Commission, the Board of Health, and the Water Department. The Board also received a report dated January 17, 2001 from its consulting engineer, John Schmid of Judith Nitsch Engineering, Inc. (JNEI)

Mr. Pine responded that no work will be done within the 100 ft buffer zone from wetlands, and a permanent conservation restriction will be placed on the 33 acres of open space. He added that the Groton Conservation Trust is also considering a proposal from horse owners who would purchase the existing house and barn.

Member Lewis expressed concern that the lot at the corner be a true corner lot. Mr. Pine responded that the 50 ft strip along Nashua Road will help protect the pond and preserve more open space.

Member Lewis asked if there is a trail system on the land. Mr. Pine said, "yes," it will connect with existing trails on adjoining conservation properties. The trails within the cluster development will be private, but all other trails will be open to the public.

Member Lewis asked where people will park. Mr. Pine said he does not anticipate many people driving to the site to use the trails. Most of the use will be by area residents. However, a pull off parking can be created if the Planning Board wishes.

Member Perkins asked if the access to the cluster development will be a road or a common driveway. Mr. Pine said it will be a shared driveway, not a road.

Member Perkins asked about the Water Department's request to install water mains. Mr. Pine said they will discuss the matter with the Water Department.

Member Perkins asked about the fire cistern. Mr. Pine said there is a dry hydrant in the pond in the Northwoods subdivision. Chairman Curtis said the Board will check with the Fire Chief to be sure the dry hydrant is adequate.

Member Degen asked how much open space will be preserved. Mr. Pine said more than thirty acres. Member Degen asked about erosion control measures. Mr. Pine said an erosion control plan and application will be submitted to the Earth Removal Advisory Committee. Member Degen asked about the limit of clearing. Mr. Pine said it will be shown on the plan.

Member Degen asked why the access to the units will be on a shared driveway instead of a road. Mr. Pine said there are 50 ft setback requirements from a road and none from a driveway. The proposed plan is to keep houses clustered close together.

Member Clements asked about the length of the separate driveways. Mr. Pine said about 200 ft. Member Clements asked if delivery trucks will be able to manage the driveways. Mr. Pine said most trucks will be able to turn around with the exception of large moving vans that will have to back out. The driveways will be designed so homeowners will have enough room to turn around.

Member Clements said the JNEI report refers to a 200 ft separation between driveways. Mr. Pine said he did not agree with JNEI's interpretation of the by-law because the plan shows one shared driveway serving all ten units. Planning Administrator Michelle Collette said she spoke with John Schmid about this and he said it is up to the Board to interpret the by-law in response to this question.

Member Lewis noted that the Open Space Residential Development provisions were modeled after Blanchard Farms in Westford which was designed to keep houses and roads less visible from the public way.

Member Barringer asked what the grade of the driveway will be. Mr. Pine said from 4 to 8%.

Abutter David Gordon questioned the Basic Number of Lots plan. Mr. Pine said the plan will be revised in accordance with the January 17, 2001 report from JNEI. Mr. Gordon asked if a new conventional plan will be submitted. Mr. Pine said, "yes."

Abutter Richard Bagley said he thought the purpose of the Groton Conservation Trust is to preserve land. He asked

how the Trust is financing this project. Chairman Curtis said this question is not germane to the public hearing proceedings.

Mr. Pine said he would like to respond anyway. He stated that the Groton Conservation Trust is a “not for profit” conservation organization and it meets all the legal requirements as an organization as a whole. They can only predict market conditions and anticipate breaking even with this project. The proposed development is appropriate for the conservation goals of the organization. This is not a money-making project – the Trust’s goal is to protect the land.

Chairman Curtis added that the Board must determine the special permit criteria in the Zoning By-Law are met prior to granting a special permit. Mr. Pine said the letter to the Planning Board submitted with the application addresses these criteria.

Abutter Laura Lefebvre submitted a letter dated January 19, 2001 summarizing her concerns. She said 16 homes were constructed in the Northwoods subdivision with 13 acres of conservation land. It is a beautiful area today. She requested that the Trust leave a buffer of trees along Northwoods Road to protect the neighborhood and the pond. She requested that there be no disturbance within 200 ft of the pond.

Abutter Stella Rae said the pond is a very scenic area used by the residents year round. If the proposed development is constructed, the scenic beauty will disappear and there will be adverse impact on the wildlife that frequent the area. She noted that hundreds of turtles go from the pond in the Northwoods subdivision to the wooded area every year.

Mr. Pine said the Trust would prefer not to develop this land but it cannot afford to leave it all open. The Trust looked at a number of different alternatives and consulted with many experts. Wildlife biologist Brian Butler studied the area and found the primary habitat area for the turtles is along the three streams which will be protected by the proposed plan. Constructing a new subdivision road in this area would damage the ecology significantly.

Abutter John Lefebvre noted that there are three lots on Northwoods on the cluster plan and only two lots on Northwoods Road on the conventional plan. Three lots in this heavily wooded area will destroy the tree line along Northwoods Road.

Abutter Diane Perlman said there are traffic issues on Northwoods Road. She asked where people will park when they use the open land. She asked why the Trust cannot construct fewer dwelling units if it is not concerned about making money.

Abutter Richard Bagley asked what the form of ownership will be with the single-family condominiums. What form of homeowners association will there be and how will it determine the quality of life for the residents. June Johnson responded that all these issues will be clearly addressed in the condominium association documents.

Planning Administrator Michelle Collette said the eleven-unit Shepley Hills development is a similar single-family condominium developed by the Trust in the late 1980’s.

Mrs. Pulford asked if the Planning Board considers impact on the Town’s tax revenues and schools. Chairman Curtis responded, “no,” in fact the by-law encourages inclusion and diversity of housing types. Mr. Pine added that the Trust has done more to reduce development in Groton than any other organization. The net fiscal impact on the Town is positive.

Member Perkins noted that a typical developer would build on the entire site, right up to the edge of wetlands. The Board prefers the type of development proposed by the Trust because it protects the open land. She stated that the Board will give full consideration to the concerns expressed by the abutters.

John Pulford asked how much of the 43 acres is wet. Mr. Pine said there are about ten acres of wetlands throughout the site. The wetlands cannot be built on, but they can be part of the individual lots under conventional development. Mr. Pulford submitted a letter to the Board dated January 12, 2001 summarizing his concerns.

Harlan Fitch said some developments create problems for other departments especially if there is disturbance near the wetland areas. He commended the Trust for avoiding impact on the wetlands with the proposed plan.

Mr. Fitch asked about the easement to the north of Northwoods Road. Mr. Pine said this was a grading easement for construction of the subdivision road.

Abutter Chris Bagley said the people in the Northwoods subdivision use the open land, walk through the woods, and enjoy the pond. A smaller development on the MacDonald land would be more beneficial to wildlife and the children who live in the area. Traffic is heavy on Nashua Road and people use Northwoods Road as a shortcut. The residents do not want to see extra traffic.

Abutter John Walraith asked why Northwoods Road can be used as frontage for the proposed lots when Section 218-26 Open Space Residential Development says lots cannot front on “existing streets”. Mr. Pine said the definition of an “existing street” in the by-law says a street in existence prior to May 1, 1980.

Mrs. Rae said the proposed plan may look better to members of the Board, but it will really impact the Northwoods neighborhood. She said they are not opposed to houses being built and asked that the Board consider the concerns of the neighborhood.

The Board scheduled a site walk for Saturday, January 27, 2001 at 1:00 PM.

The Board voted unanimously to continue the public hearing on February 22, 2001 at 7:30 PM.

Meeting adjourned at 10:45 PM

Respectfully submitted,

Michelle Collette
Planning Administrator

