

East Hartford Planning & Zoning Commission
Hybrid-Teleconference Meeting
April 17, 2024

A Special Meeting of the **EAST HARTFORD PLANNING AND ZONING COMMISSION** and was held via Microsoft "Teams" at Community Cultural Center 50 Chapman PL Auditorium, East Hartford CT – April 17, 2024.

1. CALL TO ORDER

Chair Ryan called the meeting to order at 7:03 PM.
We have a quorum with 6 voting members

Present:

John Ryan, Chair
Antonio Matta
Henry Pawlowski
Stephen Roczynski
Sidney Soderholm
Wesaneit Tsegai
Jase Ramon Olavarria, Alternate – via Teams

Absent

Peter Marra

Also Present

Carlene Shaw, Town Planner
Steve Hnatuk, Deputy Director of Planning Development
Susan Favate – of BFJ Planning -via teams

SPECIAL MEETING

2. OLD BUSINESS:

A. 2024 Plan of Conservation and Development

- i. Chapter 8: Parks, Open Space, and Recreation
- ii. Chapter 6: Environmental Resources Plan of Conservation and Development Website

Susan Favate presented PowerPoint of the POCD on where we are

- Completed Founders Plaza targeted stakeholder meetings; to schedule additional meeting with Port Eastside development team
- Draft POCD chapters:
 - Introduction and Regional Context – draft complete
 - Demographics – draft complete

2024 APR 22 AM 8:19
TOWN CLERK
EAST HARTFORD

Kelly Soderholm

- Land Use and Zoning – draft complete
- Historic and Cultural Resources – draft complete
- Parks and Open Space – draft complete
- Housing – in progress
- Transportation and Mobility – internal draft complete
- Natural Resources and Environmental Sustainability – draft complete
- Economic Development – in progress
- Community Facilities and Infrastructure – draft complete

Founders Plaza complete, heard from stakeholders. Now will meet with the Port Eastside team. The highlighted areas are now complete. There are two outstanding; Housing and Economic Development.

Quick overview of next slide.

Draft Parks, Open Space, & Recreation Chapter: Outline

- Goals
- Overview of existing parks and open space facilities (including improvements made since 2014 POCD)
- Future open space system (criteria and tools for open space acquisition)
- Issues and opportunities

Draft Parks, Open Space, & Recreation Chapter:

Goals Previous (2014) goals:

- Provide a system of linked public and private open space that offers both passive and active recreation opportunities and that protects environmentally sensitive areas.
- Maximize access to and utilization of parks and recreation facilities for all residents.
- Promote the conservation and preservation of open space and natural resources as part of future development activity.
- Improve and protect the quality of life in the Town by encouraging the improved use, maintenance and rehabilitation of the park and open space system to ensure they are adequate in extent, strategic in location and equitable in distribution in order to meet the unique active and passive needs of the Town's population.

2024 goals:

- Provide a system of linked public and private open space that offers both passive and active recreation opportunities, protects environmentally sensitive areas, and leverages opportunities for sustainability and resiliency initiatives.
- Improve and protect residential quality of life by maintaining and enhancing the park and open space system to provide active and passive recreational amenities that are adequate in extent, strategic in location, and equitable in distribution.
- Pursue strategic investments in the open space system that ensure achievable and consistent long-term management and maintenance of facilities

2024 goals are more streamlined

Susan Favate - there are six recommendations that should be focused on, 3 ways to prioritize.

Draft Parks, Open Space, & Recreation Chapter: Issues and Opportunities

1. Continue to maintain and upgrade facilities to serve the Town's residents

- Implement specific identified improvements to parks, prioritizing improvements that:
 - Ensure that parks can serve multiple purposes
 - Focus on improving outdated amenities, including to provide handicap accessibility and Wi-Fi connection at all parks
 - Consider long-term climate change impacts in park planning (e.g., installation of shade structures at all parks)
 - Explore installing splash pad(s) at one or more pools and consider establishing a modest user fee for residents and increasing non-resident user fees.
 - Evaluate potential locations for an indoor recreational complex (sports bubble), with potential to house meeting space and additional senior amenities.
- Do you really need 5 pools? Doesn't make sense to close any as the town spent the money to upgrade in recent years.
- User fees not most sustainable approach. Free to residents, non-residents pay a low fee. Suggest compare to other towns. Indoor rec center; sports bubble recognized as a need.
- Chair Ryan comments out of 5 pools, 3 have splash pads.
- Com. Soderholm- question for Staff- with a lot of recommendations for POCD, who looks at them after they are adopted? How does this happen, is there a process, does everyone look at this?
- Steve Hnatuk-implementation strategy on going, POCD committee consisting of one person per department that relies on the POCD. As needed, the departments refer to the POCD.
- Com. Soderholm-Sports bubble not too many pros or cons.
- S. Hnatuk – town put out request for a feasibility study; more detailed then what will be in the POCD.
- Com. Tsegai- regarding the parks fees, what would you consider a normal fee?
- S. Favate –would have to research. Suggest maybe \$100 per family a year. Town Council would have to decide.
- Com. Matta- how about splash pads outside of the pools? Hartford does it as a park amenity, not part of the pool.
- S. Favate- speak with staff, is it heavily used?
- Com. Roczynski- wasn't there a fountain at Labor Field years ago? Com. Pawlowski and Com. Tsegai believe there was.

Draft Land Use & Zoning Chapter: Issues and Opportunities

2. Explore all available funding options for new and enhanced recreational amenities

- Pursue funding streams beyond operating budget and five-year capital plan:
- CDBG funding
- Resiliency and historic preservation grants
- User fees (pools and golf course)
- Public-private partnerships (e.g., for indoor sports facility)

Susan Favate reviews options for funding.

-Com. Soderholm –what is CDBG

Susan Favate-Community Development Block Grant

-S. Hnatuk – examples would be sidewalk improvement; community organization

Susan Favate- are Golf fees competitive? Residents' one fee and non-residents charged more

Draft Land Use & Zoning Chapter: Issues and Opportunities

3. Improve visibility and connections to existing parks and greenways

- Implement policy requiring sidewalks within half-mile radius of parks.
- Within parks, add wayfinding signage, bike racks/paths.
- Use street-ends and utility easements to create connection points to parks.
- Continue to link parks with greenway connections
- Work with Goodwin University and other private owners along waterfront and adjacent to existing greenways to expand connections.
- Work with CROG, regional partners to complete gaps in the East Coast Greenway.
- Implement improvements along key north-south corridors to link the Charter Oak Greenway and Hockanum River Linear Park trail.

Park signage improvements

Draft Land Use & Zoning Chapter: Issues and Opportunities

4. Continue to explore options for underused Town-owned open space

- Explore transferring space to land trust or other nonprofit organization.
- For isolated undeveloped Town-owned properties with little environmental value or potential for recreational use, consider:
 - Locating other public facilities on those sites, or
 - Selling the property for development of new housing types.

Susan Favate-underused town owned open space

-Com. Soderholm-are there land trusts active in East Hartford?

-Susan Favate-yes along the border-Manchester Land Trust

-Com. Soderholm-second paragraph in chapter 8 should read informal

Natural Resources & Environmental Sustainability Chapter: Outline

- Goals
- Overview of natural resources:
- Rivers and floodplains
- Watersheds
- Soils
- Groundwater and aquifer protection
- Brownfields
- Sustainability and resiliency
- Issues and opportunities

Susan Favate-brownfields are important; big change to POCD. Added sustainability and resiliency

Natural Resources & Environmental Sustainability Chapter:

Goals Previous (2014) goal:

- Promote the conservation and preservation of natural resources as part of future development activity.

2024 goals:

- Promote the conservation and preservation of natural resources to enhance the Town's ability to mitigate and adapt to climate change, including its capacity to recover from emergencies and natural disasters.

- Support environmental sustainability initiatives that improve waste and energy systems, enhance the tree canopy, protect natural resources, and strengthen connections to open space and recreational amenities.

Susan Favate-2014 just had one goal, 2024 has 2; both are new goals.

Natural Resources & Environmental Sustainability Chapter: Issues and Opportunities

1. Work with FEMA to bolster flood preparedness in East Hartford
 - Take steps to enroll in the National Flood Insurance Program's (NFIP) Community Rating System (CRS) program.
 - Work with FEMA to update FIRM maps.
2. Consider strategies for protecting East Hartford's groundwater and waterways
 - Implement groundwater protections like those required by the Connecticut Aquifer Protection Area program.
 - Provide educational programming for residents and businesses to reduced polluted runoff.

Susan Favate-recommends to continue to work with FEMA and update maps, explains MFIP and CRS.

Com. Soderholm-are there departments that handle this or does it fall to MDC.

Flood response and communication to the public falls to the Town Engineer, Planning & Development; and Town Planner to administer regulations. No designated person or coordinator. Good recommendation to include in the POCD.

-Com. Matta-comments-noticed at Goodwin University flooding more this year, have had to close down walking trails. How to have Goodwin work with the Town; partner with them.

-Susan Favate-engineering looking at solutions.

-Com. Matta-working to improve, make trails accessible in all of East Hartford; trails are paved makes easier for clean up after flooding.

-Chair Ryan-the Army Corp of Engineers have a part?

-Susan Favate-yes they have jurisdiction with levees, not trails

-Com. Soderholm-reduction of populated runoff, zoning regulations, standard 10 year

-Chair Ryan- goes to Inland Wetland; they sweat out the details. Keep the runoff of land, still have to meet section 7-10 of the zoning regulations

-Com. Soderholm-typically don't make it worse than it is

-S. Hnatuk-We do not have storm water requirements for residential

Natural Resources & Environmental Sustainability Chapter: Issues and Opportunities

3. Promote green building practices to ensure sustainable growth
 - Consider implementing high-performance building standards for municipal buildings.
 - Work with developers of major projects to ensure implementation of sustainable building practices (e.g., permeable surfaces, alternative energy, use of sustainable materials).
 - Consider implementation of a "green homes" program to assist residents in financing for energy conservation upgrades.
4. Continue to support the transition to electric vehicles and sustainable fuels
 - Transition to electric vehicles and biofuels as municipal fleets are replaced.
 - Implement additional municipal EV charging stations, especially along commercial corridors.
5. Secure grant funding for the implementation of sustainable policies in East Hartford
 - Renew Sustainable CT certification.

- Continue to work with developers to take advantage of brownfield remediation funding.
- Com. Matta- EV charging stations, a lot of early grants stated free are now backing away from that. Goodwin looking to convert to a modest fee. Do we want to look at a fee? Look at enforcing a time limit?
- Chair Ryan- Are Eversource and United Illuminating researching the availability of grid support; the drain usage on the grid
- Com. Soderholm-need fast charging stations near highway. Walmart will have charging stations
- Com. Roczynski-have we spoken to businesses in regards to EV charges being installed town wide, once up and running to locate them. Suggest putting on the website.
- S. Hnatuk-where should the stations be; public vs town fleet.
- Discussion held on charging rate, residents a lower rate, higher rate for out of town
- Com. Soderholm- Biofuel is this still considered sustainable?
- Susan Favate-good point, not really, be happy to take it out.
- Com. Soderholm-Hydrogen Fuel could be a good replacement.

Resident Reginald Thibault – 42 Chester ST asks when he can comment. No public comments on agenda, not sure when he should speak. Chair Ryan states it is fine to do so now.

Mr. Thibault went to Mayor Leclerc back when she was Mayor and ask for help with the overgrowth at 53 Chester, open space owned by the town. There was dangerous overgrowth. Town did clean it up, I have been mowing and maintaining since as no follow-up was ever done. I volunteered to keep it up. Gary McKeon Park Department has supplied some fill. I am asking you to turn the land into a park. Or just mow the entire property.

-Chair Ryan- that is under the jurisdiction of the Council to make it a park, not the Planning and Zoning.

-Mr. Thibault – can you make a recommendation to them? I don't know what the requirements are in the deed to have it either open space or a park? Asking the town to just mow the whole thing.

-Com. Roczynski- suggests to have a discussion at our next regular agenda meeting. Reach out to Gary McKeon, Parks Department

-S. Hnatuk- comments

1. EV charging stand-alone area unattended

2. Consider a moratorium on gas stations; we don't allow an unattended gas station

-Chair Ryan- Unattended; they are going to drain the grid, our system is old, and we need to monitor them

-Com. Roczynski-believe that Eversource is looking into this, don't think they can upgrade the grid to fast enough to accommodate all the EV chargers we have now

-Chair Ryan- there's going to be a downside, we need to monitor our EV chargers

-Com. Matta –mentioned the stand alone chargers, couple thoughts on that, very highly visible, if a remote location where do I go when it's charging.

-Susan Favate-Could write standards, there's a lot you could control

-Chair Ryan-We need to have some guidelines and a moratorium on gas stations is a good idea.

-S. Hnatuk- there are ties between transportation and tree canopy; residency. Town doesn't have a long-term plan between tree canopy and transportation. Create some kind of study regarding roadways and tree canopy. Town should come up with some sort of tree inventory.

-Com. Matta- comments- raised good points

-Chair Ryan-doesn't East Hartford have a tree warden?
-S. Hnatuk-spoke with Gary McKeon, significant portion of town that needs trees.
-Com. Roczynski-Eversource comes around and trims trees
-Susan Favate- tree management plans and types of trees needed
-Chair Ryan- USGS in town can give information
-Susan Favate-thanks everybody. I'll coordinate with Steve and Carlene on edits and will be getting additional comments from town staff. Meeting with you next month will finalize what chapters we will be covering.

-Chair Ryan- any closing comments?

ADJOURNMENT

Chair Ryan entertains a motion to adjourn.

Motion by Com. Roczynski to adjourn meeting, seconded by Com. Matta.

All in favor. Opposed – none Abstention – none Motion approved, vote 7-0

Meeting adjourned at 8:45PM.

Next meeting is May 8th, 2024 at 7:00 pm

Next Special meeting is May 15th, 2024 at 7:00 PM

Location Community Cultural Center Auditorium

Respectfully submitted,

Sana Hart, Clerk