

Borough of Newtown

Borough Zoning Commission

MINUTES

May 10, 2017 7:00 pm
Lower Meeting Room, Edmond Town Hall
45 Main Street, Newtown, CT

Present: Doug Nelson, David Francis, Brid Craddock, Lucy Sullivan, Claudia Mitchell and Margaret Hull

Also Present: George Benson, Director of Planning, Donald Mitchell, Borough Attorney, and Georgia Contois, Clerk

Absent: Michael Guman and Jean St. Jean

Mr. Nelson opened the meeting at 7:02pm and asked Commissioners to review previous Minutes.

Mr. Francis made a motion to accept the Minutes of December 14, 2016, Ms. Craddock seconded and they were unanimously approved. Ms. Craddock made a motion to accept the minutes of February 8, 2017, Mr. Francis seconded. Unanimously approved. Ms. Sullivan made a motion to accept the minute of March 8, 2017. Mr. Francis seconded. Unanimously approved. Mr. Francis made a motion to accept the minutes of April 12, 2017. Ms. Craddock seconded. Unanimously approved.

Public Participation of Agenda Items:

Mr. Nelson explained to members of the public and the Commissioners the purpose of the meeting. He said that First Selectman, Pat Llodra, has requested the Borough Zoning Commission (BZC) to amend the zoning uses for the Edmond Town Hall (ETH) to allow the building to increase revenue. Ms. Llodra suggested “for profit professional office space”. Mr. Nelson asked ETH Board of Managers member, Margot Hall to explain the current situation of the building. Ms. Hall explained that the ETH currently costs about \$85,000 just for heat and electricity.

Mary Ann Jacobs asked to explain some of the financials, stating she came as a taxpayer- but knew some of the fine details. Ms. Jacobs said that the taxpayers will be compensating about \$150,000 for running costs over the year of 2017. This number has been increasing over the last four years. Maintenance such as the boiler replacement and HVAC cost approximately \$1 Million. She wanted to be able to find a way to keep the integrity and charm of the building while allowing it to generate revenue to alleviate some of the taxpayers’ dollars.

Mr. Mitchell explained to the public and Commissioners the delicate layers of Main Street and Zoning. Mr. Benson also explained the business zones that were created in the borough for properties like the General Store, The Inn, and a handful of other mixed in with residential. The idea of increasing the uses for the ETH was not to create a commercial or retail area, but to rather continue with the harmony of light professional office use.

Mr. Gaston reminded the Commissioners how important the character of Main Street is to Newtown and the entire community. He was wondering why the town and taxpayers wouldn’t budget for the building as they do for other town owned buildings like the Library. He was also concerned about spot zoning or opening an opportunity for commercial expansion on Main Street. Mr. Benson explained that spot zoning has been argued in court many times, and proven to not be valid. He also said that the businesses currently along Main Street are actually zoned B- ½. The uses proposed for the ETH are the same. Mr. Benson used the examples of lawyers and dentists. Mr. Mitchell and Mr. Hall agreed that since the ETH is adjacent to the B ½ Zone it would not be spot zoning. Mr. Hall continued, to explain that the Commission has the authority to change or expand the description of the use for ETH and could practically start from scratch.

Ms. Jacobs spoke again asking the public to think of what they would like, versus what they don’t want to see. She thought that all people in attendance agreed that the feel of Main Street should not be changed and didn’t believe that the ask of the First Selectman would do so.

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Reverend Montgomery of the Trinity Episcopal Church, 36 Main Street, wanted to clarify some of the confusion from The Bee news release. She said that many residents inferred that the church was closing its doors. She read a letter stating that Trinity Church is not going anywhere (see attached). Many members of the public mentioned their support for the Church. Mr. Nelson explained that the news release was to get residents to think about the future and how to preserve the history of Main Street, not to suggest that the Church would be closing.

Ms. Banks, a resident of West Street, had no opposition to professional offices, and didn't want to close off discussing retail. She thought limited boutiques could be a nice addition. Ms. Marino, a Middlebury Resident, spoke about the vibrancy of Newtown and her desire to see a Cultural Arts center or hub to increase traffic and business in the town. She urged the Commission to move quickly and encourage small business owners. Mr. Chaudhary agreed that the character of Newtown needs to stay intact, and wanted to encourage cultural arts and small businesses.

Mr. Gaston thought that allowing small businesses to enter a space at ETH would create vacancies in existing office spaces or potentially cause property owners to sell where their business used to be located. Mr. Nelson clarified that these areas would be leased at market value, and reminded the public that the space is outdated in technology including outlets and internet/telephone hookups. Mr. Benson added that the minimal amount of space available in the ETH would not impact the rest of the Borough rentals.

A handful of the suggestions for potential uses from the public were:
What about Ridgefield Playhouse... Could we do something similar?
Let's create a small retail space like you would see in Westport.
What about a coffee shop, or café?
It would be perfect for a small startup.

Ms. Hull mentioned that the Ridgefield Playhouse also houses a small newspaper. Mr. Nelson again explained that the purpose of the meeting was to gather information of wants and "no-way's" from the people that make up the community. Ms. Jacobs said her feeling on the discussion was that as long as the character stayed intact. Discussion on traffic led Ms. Craddock to express concern over the parking lot which is not lit well at night.

Mr. Nelson closed the discussion by stating that the Commission had a good idea of what the people wanted, and definitely didn't want. The Commission would create a proposal which would end up in a public hearing. Mr. Nelson also informed Commission members that Jean St. Jean, Borough Zoning Enforcement Officer would be retiring on June 30th. The Commission discussed possibilities regarding her replacement. They briefly discussed a Landmark Building proposal for Main Street which would allow them to create specific signage regulations and design guidelines for some of the historic buildings. This will also be discussed more at another meeting.

Ms. Craddock made a motion to adjourn. Ms. Sullivan seconded and the meeting of May 10th, 2017 was adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,
Georgia Contois, Clerk

TRINITY EPISCOPAL CHURCH

36 Main Street, Newtown, CT 06470-2106

May 10, 2017

To the Newtown Borough Zoning Commission,

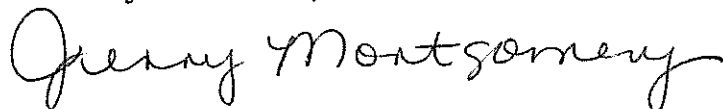
On behalf of Trinity Episcopal Church, thank you for giving us the opportunity to participate in this conversation regarding the future of Main Street. As *The Bee* reported on your press release, Trinity Church is indeed a treasured iconic institution in Newtown.

As the new Priest-in-Charge at Trinity, I want to reassure you all that closing our parish is not on anyone's agenda. In fact, just the opposite is true. Our most recent planning process to ensure a vibrant future for Trinity Church began in 2014. Since that time there have been many conversations within our congregation and with community leaders which have helped us realize more fully our identity and core mission.

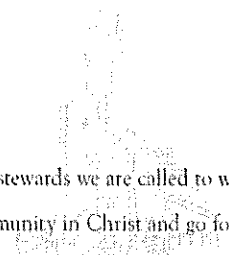
As Trinity Church we are committed to being present to our Newtown community in meaningful ways through service, inclusion, openness and collaboration. We are also committed to making necessary changes within our church to ensure long-term viability, living within our means, cultivating partnerships, trying new things, and actively engaging with others in our larger community.

Rest assured, the red doors of Trinity Church on Main Street are open to all and will remain open to all. We welcome your ideas on how we can help strengthen Newtown. From our earliest church building dating back to 1732 and the current church building built in 1870, Trinity Church has maintained a viable, vibrant presence in Newtown. With God's help we will continue being Trinity Church by the flagpole for many generations to come.

Faithfully submitted,



The Rev. Dr. Jennifer G. Montgomery



Together as faithful stewards we are called to worship God joyfully,
build a caring and faithful community in Christ and go forth in love to share the Gospel.

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Rec'd BZC
May 10, '17