

Planning Board Meeting Minutes
Benjamin Eddy Bldg., 60 South Killingly Road
Wednesday August 18, 2021

A. Call to Order

Mike Carpenter called the meeting to order.

B. Roll Call

Planning Board Members: Michael Carpenter; Hilary Downes Fortune;
David Paolissi; George Sackal
Excused: Chair, Anthony Renzi; Vice Chair, Warren
Ducharme; and Secretary, Helen Hardy

Staff present: Michael Antonellis, Planner; and Joanna Achille, Solicitor

Public present: Scott Spear, Lynne Rider, Paul Oueidat, David Paolino,
Ron Cervasio

C. Approval of Minutes

July 21, 2021

Hilary Downes-Fortune moved, George Sackal seconded, to approve the minutes of
July 21, 2021.

Motion passed 4 – 0.

D. Recommendation to Town Council; Zoning Map Change Petition;

Petitioner Paul Oueidat, John Paul Properties LLC; Plat 17 Lot 85B, 189 Hartford Pike.

Atty. Scott Spear of Bush & Cavanaugh represented Mr. Oueidat. Mr. Spear explained that the property is a little over two acres on the corner of 101 and 94 where there is a little store. The owner would like to augment his business as a car repair business. He would also like to put out some cars for sale. Both of those uses are prohibited in the current zone, so in order to do that he needs to go over to the MI zone. He is in the commercial zone now. Mr. Spear said he could not find anything in the Table of Uses that would be a problem in the future on that site. The house would not be used as a house anymore but be used for the business. Mr. Spear said they are looking for a recommendation.

George Sackal said that there is a big concern about blight and a lot of it is connected to used autos. He asked how they would control blight. Mr. Oueidat said he has always maintained a clean property and has never had any complaints. If he is to maintain the tanks and the canopy, he needs to be able to afford it, and with additional income, he can lower the gas price and be able to compete. Lynne Rider said that leaking oil and screening has always been a problem; she asked how many cars there would be. Atty. Spear said that to give them a comfort level, he could prepare a site plan to show how the cars would be placed, the screening, and locate where the dumpster could be. That could become the baseline for when the Town Council looks at it. The entrance would be on 94 and the exit on 101. Mr. Oueidat said his neighbors were in favor. In order to qualify as a car sales business, you have to have another building besides the gas station, a 2400 square foot other building, which I have. He said he might be approved for 30 cars. He would be flipping cars, not buying junk cars and letting them sit there for 30 years. He says his customers want him to do more.

Ron Cervasio said that the business has changed five time. The site plan is the key to control, but turning this down is a loss. The issue with our businesses is their look, these buildings were built in the 30s and 40s and 50s and nothing has changed.

Hilary Downes-Fortune said it would be good to have a sketch. The parcel is small and there is not a lot of room for screening.

Joanna Achille, Solicitor, clarified the zoning about what can be done. The property is Neighborhood Commercial now. General Auto Repair is allowed on Neighborhood Commercial with a special use permit. It is the auto sales that is prohibited. If changed to MI, then both would be permitted. Mr. Carey asked about GBM (General Business Mixed Use). Ms. Achille said that for GBM, both would be permitted with a Special Use Permit.

Mike Carpenter said Mr. Oueidat has made his intentions clear. To be successful in presenting to the Town Council, he should go to Zoning for a Special Use Permit rather than a Zoning change. Joanna Achille said there is a way to approve the Zone Change specific to one use. If not completed, then could be abandoned.

Mike Antonellis noted that he was not eligible for grandfathering the repair use.

Lynne Rider said this could be a standard for what Route 6 could look like. If you don't want people screaming, you would have to present it as the antithesis of Route 6. Appearance is everything.

Mike Carpenter said the initial effort in money and time to work with Scott and Mike on this specific site plan that helps to sell your intent to determine what specific zoning changes you require. We want to have a clear understanding before we go to the council. To clear understanding of how you intend to improve the property, make it more attractive, and serve the community. He suggested a visual and a photograph.

Joanna Achille suggested that are two ways to proceed. One is to request that the change be from NC to GBM, and then proceed with a Special Use Permit. Option two would be to change to MI, and have it limited to those particular uses and with those specifications.

Hilary Downes-Fortune moved, George Sackal seconded, to continue this matter to the September 15th meeting.

Motion passed 4 – 0.

- E. Blight reports from Michael Carpenter, Warren Ducharme, and George Sackal:
General discussion on blight, remediation, and potential dangers associated with blighted properties

Mike Antonellis said the package contained pictures of the property with the Assessor's description of the property and notes.

Mike Carpenter said there were numerous discrepancies regarding the properties in the database. The properties identified along Route 6 starting at the Eco-Depot and heading west. We've identified three things: the plat maps, GBM overlays, and added a name and street address.

Mr. Carpenter said this should be more about redevelopment than blight. There should be incentives and deadlines. Those identifiers will determine if that property has redevelopment potential. Some properties may not be eligible for redevelopment. The intent is to move beyond the penalty stage. RI law gives us the authority to violate these properties. These properties are a danger to the health, welfare, and safety of the community. Some of these properties have been as long as 30 years.

Ron Cervasio said that Anthony Renzi asked him to pass on some information to them.

Mr. Carey said Ron took the initiative to send a letter to the council about these properties and visited these sites. Mr. Cervasio said you are saying that there are some that have potential and some that don't. He noted there are options for some to purchase property from others, so every property has potential. The issue is the zoning. Extend the zoning 2000 feet off Route 6. If there's a swamp, go around it. Bring in the fire marshal in from the State and the Zoning Official in because you will never get a politician to offend a voter. All retails run on demographics except for boutiques such as Adam Dacko's gun shop. We need to build ninety buildings the size of Adam Dacko's shop to raise \$250,000 in revenue. Think of something you bought in 1990. How much would it cost 30 years later? How could the town be running the business it ran in 1990 with a \$10 million budget at \$50 million. If the town should be running with all the same things, taxes should only double. How come it went up double and a half in 18 years? The big problem in this community is money.

George Sackal say that zoning should be protecting the people. It is very hodge-podge.

Mike Carpenter said that blight can be labeled "opportunity". It can be an important first step. David Paolino said that Mike Antonellis needed to be granted authority for Zoning to begin. There was a lot to go through, but the money is there now.

Mike Carpenter suggested going through property by property, and will be recommended to the council. Discussion followed regarding various properties, violations procedures, and legal actions. There was also a recommendation regarding municipal court

Mike Carpenter recommended moving items F & G to the next meeting.

Motion passed 4 – 0.

- F. Comprehensive Plan Working Group – Housing
G. Route 6, AKA Danielson Pike, Proposed Zone Changes
H. Adjournment

Respectfully submitted,

Michael Antonellis, Planner