



TOWN OF BERLIN
POCD IMPLEMENTATION COMMITTEE
SPECIAL MEETING MINUTES
November 30, 2023

ATTENDANCE:

Joan Veley-Planning and Zoning Commission, Guy Hoffman-Conservation Commission, Lucas Van Zandt-Parks and Recreation Commission, Bruce Laroche-Water Control Commission, Peter Nieman-Inland Wetlands and Watercourses Commission, Leonard Tubbs-Zoning Board of Appeals, John Diakun-Historic District Commission, and Sandra Coppola-Town Council.

Absent: Edward Egazarian- Economic Development.

Staff: Maureen Giusti- Town Planner, and Jim Mahoney- Economic Development Coordinator (zoom).

Guest: Steve Biella (zoom).

CALL TO ORDER:

Town Planner Maureen Giusti called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE:

ELECTION OF OFFICERS:

Mr. Hoffman requested that the Committee introduce themselves.

Mrs. Giusti requested nominations for the election of officers.

Sandra Coppola nominated Joan Veley as Chair. Hearing no other nominations, Mrs. Coppola made a motion to elect Joan Veley as Chair, seconded by Lucas Van Zandt. The motion was unanimously approved.

Joan Veley nominated Sandra Coppola as Vice-Chair. Hearing no other nominations, Mrs. Veley made a motion to elect Sandra Coppola as Vice-Chair, seconded by John Diakun. The motion was unanimously approved.

John Diakun nominated Bruce Laroche as Secretary. Hearing no other nominations, Mr. Diakun made a motion to elect Bruce Laroche as Secretary, seconded by Sandra Coppola. The motion was unanimously approved.

REVIEW OF POCD AND AFFORDABLE HOUSING PLAN, IMPLEMENTATION PLANS:

Mrs. Giusti had previously distributed the Plan of Conservation and Development Plan to the newly appointed Committee members and explained the over-all working document. This Plan meets Connecticut General Statutes which require that a municipal plan of conservation and development be updated every ten years. It is also consistent with both the State Plan of Conservation and Development and the Capitol Region Council of Government's Regional Plan of Conservation and Development.

Extensive input was sought from Town residents, businesses and stakeholders, elected officials, and Town staff in development of the Plan. That outreach included multiple conversations with stakeholders

via interviews, thematic meetings, a public workshop, and an online survey. In total, the Town received input from over two hundred stakeholders. The data was compiled by Consultants: FHI Studio with RKG Associates, Inc. and New England GeoSystems.

The Plan identifies a broad ‘vision’ for Berlin to work towards. This ‘vision’ is supported by six goals (identified by six sections: Environmental Resources, Housing, Economic Development, Transportation, Facilities & Services, and Cultural Resources), with a set of strategies and actions to be implemented within the ten-year time period. Although this POCD Implementation Committee is formed from key Boards and Commissions to meet quarterly, the Planning and Zoning Commission is ultimately responsible for overseeing the Plan implementation.

In addition, the Town adopted an Affordable Housing Plan in May of 2022, and the recommendations of the Affordable Housing Plan (AHP) are incorporated into the Plan of Conservation and Development both directly and by reference.

In considering amendments to the AHP, it is appropriate to evaluate the status of the Town’s progress in creating affordable housing units. One goal of the AHP is that the Town more than 10% of its housing stock be affordable. The most recent, 2022, State of Connecticut affordable housing appeals list indicated that Berlin had 8.8 percent of its housing stock considered affordable (based on the number of housing units estimated by the 2010 decennial census). This percentage is down from a high of 9.31 percent in 2019. The primary reasons for the decline in affordable housing units between 2019 and 2022 are that the number of CHFA financed units fell from 138 to 108 and the number of governmentally assisted units declined from 54 to 48 units. The Town has little or no control over the number of CHFA financed units and the number of governmentally assisted units. Nearby Towns Rocky Hill, Wethersfield, Cromwell, and Newington also had significantly fewer CHFA units in 2022 than in 2019. This may be related to the very tight housing market during the pandemic and low market interest rates at the time.

Additional Berlin affordable units were completed, and more are under construction or were approved after the compilation of the 2022 affordable housing appeals list. Affordable units do not get counted until a certificate of occupancy is obtained for the unit. The largest project now under construction is Deming Ridge. Deming Ridge will add 88 qualified units to the Town’s affordable units count and certificates of occupancy have been granted for the first two buildings. We expect certificates of occupancy to be issued for all buildings in the Deming Ridge project by early 2024. Another project with affordable units that is under construction is 319 Main Street East Berlin. This project will add a small number of affordable units. Projects including affordable units that are approved but are not under construction include, 404 Berlin Turnpike (200 units, 40 affordable) and the Knights of Columbus project (50 affordable units). Applications for three additional projects that will have affordable units are now either pending before the Planning & Zoning Commission or are under appeal.

DISCUSSION OF PRIORITY IMPLEMENTATION ITEMS:

Mrs. Giusti led a discussion with the Committee listening to concerns and wishes from each of the Commissions represented and what they felt were their strong points and interests going forward.

Mr. Mahoney, Economic Development, shared information from the Advisory Committee and discussed recently awarded grants and how the POCD document plays a critical role in obtaining grants at the State level.

Mrs. Giusti requested that the Committee Members become acquainted with the POCD document before the next meeting and be prepared to further discuss the implementation of the vision for the Town of Berlin.

SCHEDULE OF MEETINGS FOR 2024:

Mrs. Giusti distributed a chart with proposed meeting dates for the Committee. After discussion, the following motion was made:

John Diakun made a motion to hold meetings on the fourth Thursday, quarterly, at 6:00 p.m., on [January 25, 2024, April 25, 2024, June 27, 2024 and October 24, 2024], seconded by Bruce Laroche. The motion was unanimously approved.

ADJOURNMENT:

Mrs. Giusti announced that the next meeting will be January 25, 2024 at 6:00 p.m.

John Diakun made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 7:30 p.m., seconded by Peter Nieman. The motion was unanimously approved.

Lecia Paonessa
Recording Secretary

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