

**HISTORIC DISTRICT &
HISTORIC PROPERTY
COMMISSION**

Allison Sanders, Chair
Matthew Kehoe, Vice Chair
Gilbert Weatherly

Alternates
Lori Fusco
Peter Gaboriault
Marianne Gustafson



**TOWN HALL
238 Danbury Road
Wilton, Connecticut 06897**

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TOWN OF WILTON
2018 MAY 16 P 2:07
BY: *LC*

Special Meeting MINUTES

May 10, 2018

Comstock Community Center Room 14 7:00 pm

- I. Call to order at 7:04 pm
 - a. Attendance – Sanders, Weatherly and alternates Fusco and Gaboriault were seated.
 - b. Minutes – Motion to approve and seconded, no discussion, vote unanimous to approve.

II. Election of Clerk

Motion to nominate Gilbert Weatherly, seconded, no discussion and vote to elect unanimous.

III. Weatherly distributed lists for review and verification.

IV. Proposed Revision of Demolition Delay Ordinance

Motion to divide submittal of the revision into two separate submissions is seconded, discussed

and approved unanimously. Content of the Memorandum is as follows:

TO: POCD Task Force

FROM: Allison Sanders, Chair, Historic District and Historic Properties Commission

RE: Comments on Route 7 Development from HDC

DATE: May 10, 2018

There has been a fair amount of discussion about how to envision Route 7 developing in the next decade.

There should be significant weight given to consideration about how it LOOKS as we continue discussion. Numerous speakers have mentioned Wilton's character and charm as one of its most as distinguishing features. Simply put, that means that people like the way it looks. They like looking at attractive buildings, set at a distance from the road and at a scale that is not overwhelming. They like looking at an interesting variety of

architectural styles, from antique to contemporary. They respond to the mature trees and stone walls so typical of the Connecticut landscape.

As one drives Rt 7 from Norwalk north into Wilton, note specifically how it changes when crossing into Wilton: on Rt 7 in Norwalk, buildings are densely spaced. Many are poorly designed and unattractive, offering little in the way of looking “regional”, meaning they could just as easily have been built in Atlanta or Des Moines or Los Angeles.

Landscaping and large trees are lacking. Parking lots come right up to the road, and often have no plantings, making them unappealing, and creating conditions for runoff. An exception is the planting running along Rt 7 in front of the Merritt 7 buildings, which has a row of large maples, alternating between red maples and those with green leaves: these plantings help mitigate the large scale of the buildings.

Once past the “eyesore” section of Rt 7 into Wilton, including the sorry collection of buildings opposite the Gateway shopping complex, the look of the road changes.

Buildings tend to be set back from the road, and many owners have made a significant and effective efforts with their landscaping, including flowering trees, grass, and spring bulbs. There are undeveloped stretches with stands of trees.

Most importantly, there are a number of antique buildings, fast-disappearing remnants of Wilton’s past. These are notable as they are among the remaining examples of our historic local (vernacular) architecture, along the road, and contribute to the “character” residents prefer.

What does it look like when historic buildings house flourishing businesses? The Wilton Historical Society maintains three campuses along Route 7, containing a total of 18 historic structures that have been saved from demolition. Lambert Corner, at the intersection of Rt 7 and Rt 33 is the largest with 9 buildings, and includes Lambert House, featured on the town seal. These sites are landmarks on the busy roadway, providing the character that people appreciate. Most of the structures have been moved to save them from demolition, giving them new life through “adaptive use” renovation. They serve a variety of retail, office and residential rentals. However, the Society has very little land remaining on which to relocate more buildings, and insufficient funds to either buy more property or do much more new preservation work.

At the moment, there are an alarming number of historic buildings on Rt 7 that are currently for sale or have recently been sold, and there is concern about what will happen to them. Zoning regulations as they now exist give an owner little incentive to renovate the building or incorporate them into an expanded development rather than to tear them down. Nor is there any control over the appearance of the replacement structures. From the HDC’s view, this is a significant problem which needs to be addressed. These buildings should be given some protection, or they will be lost, and the Town will lose, too.

If Wilton is serious about wanting to preserve “historic character” along Rt 7, then it behooves the Town to put in place regulations to keep it that way. How about some kind of incentive to keep a historic building rather than demolishing it? The adaptive use section of the code (29-5.C.5), (also known as “Marilyn’s Rule”) is there for those who have decided to pursue adaptive reuse - but there is no requirement for an owner to keep any part of an existing building, or even to consider if there is a way to incorporate it into a new design. Regulations to provide this protection should be implemented.

For Rt 7, Planning and Zoning should incorporate guidelines that control site coverage, setbacks, and landscape elements. The town should establish a design review committee to review proposed plans and elevations with "character" in mind for Rt 7 properties. Reviewed elements could include: architectural style, types of materials used, roof pitch, and landscaping. Some newer buildings that reference local architectural styles and character are the medical complex at the intersection with Sharp Hill Road, and the Ring's End store. The HDC should be involved in this process where older buildings exist.

A minimum amount of landscaping should be required. There could be an emphasis on stone walls, native plantings, (particularly sugar maples and dogwood) -- a list could be prepared by the Conservation Commission noting plants not allowed on the property, such as invasives like Japanese barberry, Euonymous (burning bush) and Norway maples. This would support Wilton's "Tree City" identification and improve our environment. Imagine how it would look in the spring with more flowering dogwood and in the fall with additional sugar maples, adding character and beauty to our town. The town could embrace and perhaps support planting campaigns of these attractive native trees as part of efforts to brand the town.

V. POCD Discussion

Draft Memorandum by Sanders to the POCD task force is reviewed. Motion to approve, seconded and vote to approve is unanimous.

VI. Adjournment at 8:45 pm

