

**HISTORIC DISTRICT &
HISTORIC PROPERTY
COMMISSION**

Allison Sanders, Chair
Gil Weatherly, Clerk
Lori Fusco
Marianne Gustafson

Alternates
Pam Brown
Peter Gaboriault



TOWN HALL
238 Danbury Road
Wilton, Connecticut 06897

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**Special Meeting Minutes
July 6, 2018
Town Hall Annex room A 11:30 am**

- I. Call to order at 11:39 am
 - a. Attendance: Commissioners Sanders, Weatherly, Gustafson and Alternate Brown were seated.
 - b. Minutes: Chair tabled the discussion of the July 3 minutes until the next meeting.
- II. POCD – Review draft survey questions re Preservation; review map: Chair presented the draft and minor changes were suggested to be forwarded to Milone & MacBroom.
- III. 300 Danbury Road – Review statement re zoning proposals: Chair presented a draft statement. Minor changes were discussed and made to the draft. The final statement is included herein.

TO: Planning and Zoning Commission
FROM Historic District and Historic Properties Commission
DATE: July 6, 2018
RE: CHZ#18370 Wilton Heights LLC and #18371 Regulation Change for Wilton Center District

To help guide us through complex issues, it can be instructive to look back at history. P&Z is currently contemplating a requested zone change and a substantial number of adjustments to the zoning regulations for the Wilton Center District, which includes Wilton's central shopping area, at the request of a developer, for a property on Rt. 7. The HDC urges P&Z to think back to recent history, and reflect on the last time an important zone change was requested by a developer, and what ensued.

P&Z's process for the AROD zone review revealed that the system is flawed, and that P&Z lacked input from other boards and commissions that would definitely have added diverse perspectives to their deliberative process. In that particular case, it was obvious that historic

properties, a designated scenic road and conservation issues were all part of the mix. Yet the P&Z did not seek input or commentary from HDC or Conservation: these requirements are not in P & Z regulations or even guidelines. Relying primarily on the developer to provide information about the project and its impacts and implications is bound to result in a presentation that shows off the best results possible – for the developer. This is entirely proper, and the right of the applicant. Trouble arises when entities with other viewpoints outside of the expertise of P&Z are overlooked or excluded.

This “silo” effect can and should be changed. The HDC strongly suggests that any zone change proposals that come before P&Z should also be reviewed by the HDC. In the same way that a demolition permit request for any structure over 50 years of age and over 500 square feet comes before the HDC for review, so should any zone change proposal take historic structures and landscapes into account, as much as other factors that are routinely considered by P&Z.

Language to this effect should be added to the zoning regulation’s review criteria as soon as possible.

In that light, please take the following into consideration:

The proposal to combine properties south of 300 Danbury Road and change their zone from residential to Wilton Center District will immediately impact the scale of structures allowed on the site. Additionally, development will be much more intense if P&Z also approves the many changes to the regs requested by the developer.

It is extremely important to think very clearly about such changes and their implications. Just as one example - do we really want Wilton Center to allow the height and reduced setbacks which are so central to the developer’s vision for Wilton Heights? Route 7 to the south and to the north not far from the project has structures, some of which are historic, and many that feature mature trees, stone walls, setbacks with landscaping, and which reference local architectural styles and typical density.

And what of the historic structures on the site? Slated for demolition, of course. To protect our ever-shrinking number of historic structures, developers should be required to incorporate those structures into their plan or make a significant effort to relocate them. If that fails, architectural and landscape designs should be compatible with, and/or reference near-by buildings for style, scale, materials and design. See “A” below for information about the historic structures at 300 Danbury Road.

The “silo” effect afflicts other boards as well. Zoning Board of Appeals (ZBA) also functions without the benefit of other town Commissions’ input. In the Town’s process, a development proposal may first go to ZBA, and thereby foreclose design options which would otherwise be explored at P&Z. A recent distressing example of this sequence is the result of a zoning variance granted to the developer of 213 Danbury Road that ensures that the c. 1875 historic building will be torn down to take full advantage of the conforming site area. The resultant plan, now before the P&Z, leaves virtually no room to nudge the developer to improve the look of the new structure. A “pro-preservation” approach could have offered the developer incentives to maintain the existing structure while fulfilling the space requirements of the proposed development – a “win-win” for the owner and the town.

In order to improve the process by which the Town grows, there are two changes that can be made immediately. First, the HDC strongly suggests that they be included in the review of all current P & Z applications which include structures over 50 years of age and over 500 square feet. Second, insert language in the current regulations which empowers both P&Z and the HDC to consider historic assets in their deliberations.

Allison Gray Sanders
Chair, Historic District and Historic Properties Commission

A.

Information about Comstock House and the corncrib at 300 Danbury Road

The existing Crossways/300 Danbury Road parcel contains two historic structures. The Comstock House c. 1791 and c. 1835 (large yellow structure) is listed on Wilton's Historic Resources Inventory: Phase 1, 1989, which states "The handsome, Greek Revival house that forms the nucleus of the Crossways complex incorporates an earlier dwelling that may well have been build by Elijah Betts II in 1791. . . . The focal point of the small commercial development is [Comstock House] an 1830s, 5-bay, central chimney dwelling that incorporates an earlier house. Despite the many additions to the sides and rear of the dwelling, the original mass and some of the detailing of the handsome, Greek Revival house are readily discernible. Of particular merit is the superbly detailed central entrance bay with a tri-partiate frontispiece and geometric sidelights . . . In the interior some of the original woodwork survives as does the original skewed chimney stack." (Complete Historic Inventory record is attached).

The small corncrib, which has housed a variety of businesses, dates from c.1835, and was moved to the site from Nod Hill Road in the 1940s.

IV. Adjournment: 12:34 pm