

## WEST WINDSOR PLANNING COMMISSION

Draft Minutes

September 30, 2014

Present: Barbara Truex, Elvin Kaplan, Mark Isenberg, Arthur Steinberg, Al Keiller, Glenn Seward, Tom Kennedy (SWCRPC), Dan Purjes (MFW Associates), John Saydek (Teruko Design), Martha Harrison

1. Call to Order - Planning Commission Chair Barbara Truex called the meeting to order at 11:00 AM.
2. Changes or Additions – None
3. Public Comment – None
4. Discuss development plans with resort property owner – Dan Purjes introduced himself and gave a brief history of his involvement with the Ascutney Mountain Resort and his attempts to get the ski area up and running again. Ultimately, Dan said, the costs associated with re-opening the ski area were estimated to be in excess of \$10 million and it was determined that re-opening would not be economically feasible. Dan said there is one chairlift left which he would be happy to turn over to the town. Dan said MFW Associates is hoping to sign an option agreement with the Trust for Public Land (TPL) in the next week or two, which will give TPL the right to purchase the “mountain parcel” (approx. 469 acres) for an agreed upon price. Dan said it will probably take TPL a year or more to raise the money to purchase the property, at which point they will deed it over to the town. In the meantime, Dan said, he will essentially “lease” the land to the town for public use. Dan said MFW is also considering deeding to the town for \$1 the base lodge, the maintenance garage, and the water system. Dan said MFW would be left with about 175 acres including the MLF area, a number of lots in the Skyhawk Village area, and the former treatment plant land at the intersection of Route 44 and Ski Tow Road. Dan said the only hope he has for recouping some of his investment is to subdivide the developable portions of the land retained by MFW. Dan had a preliminary development plan for the Mile Long Field area to share with the Planning Commission and asked for their guidance. John said initially MFW needs to subdivide the mountain parcel so it can be conveyed to the town. John had a sketch of the 24-lot subdivision/PUD proposed for the Mile Long Field area and said there could be another +/-24-lot subdivision in the former treatment plant area but there are no sketches for that yet. Martha said the first step would be to come up with a Master Plan for the property, in consultation with the PC and the DRB, that addresses the criteria in Section 5.4-1 of the Zoning Regulations. Martha added that the minimum lot size in the Resort/Conservation district is 30 acres with a density bonus available for development that contributes to the economic viability of the ski area. Without a ski area, Martha said, the PC and the DRB will have to determine whether the density bonus applies to development that offers a different recreational benefit. Barbara noted that resort development has to take into account the existing natural resources in the area. Al asked if the PC, the DRB, and the developer have to come to consensus on the Master Plan. Martha said yes although, with the last Master Plan (now expired), Snowdance and the Town went through mediation in order to come to an agreement. Tom Kennedy said the purpose of the Master Plan is to make sure the applicant and the town are on the same page. Tom suggested getting the Master Plan approved locally before going through Act 250. There was discussion about the need for a PUD in the Mile Long Field area due to the request for a reduction in the minimum lot size, which is 30 acres for development that is not related to the ski area. John suggested that the hiking/biking trail could take the place of the ski area. Martha agreed that the applicant could discuss that with the PC and the DRB. There was discussion about whether the Master Plan has to be in place before the “mountain parcel” can be subdivided and conveyed to the town. Dan said the option period is for two years and three months, so there is plenty of time to subdivide the mountain parcel. Barbara noted that the PC and DRB will need to involve the public in the master planning process. Barbara asked if Mile Long Field will be left open and will have easements to allow biking. Dan noted that the proposed house sites are on the perimeter of the field. Barbara asked if the land and the proposed lots have been evaluated for “buildability.” John said yes and noted that the plans take into account the presence of wet areas, streams

and prime agricultural soils. Barbara asked about MFW's plans for wastewater treatment. Dan said they have to get estimates on the cost of extending the sewer line. Al asked about roads. Dan said they would be gravel roads. Al asked about restrictions on the proposed lots with regard to house site, tree cutting, etc. John said there would be a building envelope but there would probably be restrictions on cutting on the rest of the property as well. Dan agreed. Glenn noted that there are covenants in place for the existing resort development and asked if they would extend to the new development. Dan said he sees no reason not to extend the covenants. There was discussion about the lull in higher end home construction in West Windsor's recent history. Barbara asked Dan if he has considered a subdivision with fewer, larger parcels. Dan said yes; that would be his preference but he thinks he should go through the subdivision process to get a higher price for the property. Elvin asked if the Master Plan has to be approved by the town. Glenn said no; it has to be approved by the PC and the DRB. Al asked Tom Kennedy about barriers to this type of development. Tom said there may have to be mitigation for disturbed agricultural soils or something like that. Tom said one issue is the reference to the ski area, which no longer exists. Dan noted that he has no intention to develop one acre lots in the Mile Long Field area, even if public water and sewer are available, and would be willing to record that as a deed restriction. Al asked if trail easements would be a detriment. Dan said at the time that the development is finalized and permitted, MFW will deed certain trails in the MLF area to the town to provide connectivity from the town forest to Ascutney State Park. Regarding the trails through the field itself, MFW will continue to license those for use by the town but will not deed them over because MFW does not want deed restrictions to deter a prospective buyer. Barbara noted that connectivity within the trail system is important to the town economically. Dan agreed that the trail system will enhance the value of the property. All agreed that the trail system will be for non-motorized use. There was discussion about which trails would ultimately be protected with permanent easements. Glenn said there are eleven trails that would be protected. Dan agreed. Barbara said it doesn't sound like the proposed development would significantly affect connectivity. John agreed. Elvin asked if Jim Lyall has been involved in determining which trails need to be protected. Glenn said yes and added that some of the beginner/intermediate trails that are lost on Mile Long Field could be replaced with similar trails near the old base lodge. Barbara asked about the roads involved. John said the project would involve Coaching Lane and Mountainside Drive. John asked about the next step. Barbara noted the upcoming vote on the acquisition. Glenn suggested starting on a Master Plan. Tom Kennedy said Act 250 will want to know if the plans include any multi-family housing or affordable housing. Martha said the Agency of Transportation may have concerns about the intersection of Route 44 and Coaching Lane. Glenn agreed and said the state has recently done survey work in anticipation of reconfiguring that intersection. Glenn said the intersection is bad and, if there's going to be additional traffic there, it will need to be fixed. Tom suggested that John and Dan contact Jason Rasmussen and Katherine Otto at the SWCRPC office for help with transportation issues. John said he and Dan will figure out what makes sense for the resort entrance area and fold that into a Master Plan for the mountain parcel and Mile Long Field. Al asked if the Master Plan could still go forward if the town votes down the acquisition of the mountain parcel. Glenn said yes, although the scope of development could increase under those circumstances. Barbara suggested waiting until after the vote to get into the details. Barbara said acquisition of the mountain parcel is consistent with the economic, recreation and conservation goals in the Town Plan. Dan noted that he, Glenn and John met with the former General Manager of Burke a few months ago and the mountain bike trails in Burke are now providing almost as much economic benefit in the summer as the ski area is providing in the winter. Al noted that Barbara has written a letter of support for the acquisition on behalf of the Planning Commission.

5. Other Business - None
6. Adjourn – **Elvin moved to adjourn at 12:25 AM. Mark seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.**

Respectfully submitted,

Martha Harrison