

Approved 12/1/15

CITY OF ROCKLAND
PLANNING BOARD
Minutes of Meeting
November 10, 2015

Board Present: Chair E. Laustsen, W. Bodine, C. Jordan, A. Knickelbein, and P. vanVuuren

Board Absent: None

Staff Present: Code Officer J. Root and Secretary D. Sealey

The Chair called the meeting to order at 5:25 P.M. and reviewed the agenda.

Public Comment: Michael Marsh, 201 Thomaston St., was concerned about an additional curb cut on Thomaston St. He said the new cut would be right at the crest of the hill, making it risky because vehicles barreled along that stretch of road. There was also the noise of starting engines, gear shifting, and acceleration. Mr. Marsh said the Industrial Park had originally had 2 entrances, 1 on Broadway and 1 on Moran Dr., and he didn't think Fisher's expansion should be cause for a 3rd entrance.

Lewis Metcalf, 211 Thomaston St., said he had lived there for 40 years and had been on the City Council when Fisher moved to Thomaston St. While Mr. Metcalf applauded the plow company's expansion, he was concerned about the increased traffic on the street. He said traffic had increased considerably and people tended to speed; when they hit the hill going toward Rockland they accelerated. Mr. Metcalf said coming out of the new entrance when there were snowbanks would be dangerous. He asked why vehicles couldn't continue to come out Gordon Dr. Mr. Metcalf said at the time of the original approval in 1998 MDOT had thought they should not exit onto Thomaston St., but rather go through the Industrial Park.

Ron Huber, 148 Broadway, introduced himself as the Executive Director of the Friends of Penobscot Bay. He requested the PB do a study of the health of the ecological inventory in regards to the project. CEO Root said the decision to do that would need to come from the City Council. He added that with over an acre of development DEP required a storm water study.

The CEO noted that Fisher was not located in the Industrial Park.

Communications: None

New Business:

Fisher Engineering / Douglas Dynamics – 160 & 162 Thomaston St. - Site Plan Review Application for Expansion of Existing Plant Parking Area - Map 62, Block A, Lots 3 & 4: Engineer Will Gartley, Andy Clement of Fisher Engineering, and Randy Dunton of Gorrill Palmer represented the applicant. Mr. Gartley said Fisher had a purchase and sales agreement for two parcels on Thomaston St. onto which they wished to extend their parking area due to the need for outdoor storage, as well as an increase in the number of employees.

Mr. Gartley said that Fisher's property was surrounded by steep terrain and wetlands. These new parcels would allow 176 parking spaces to be connected to the current parking area with no wetland impact. Currently Gordon Dr. was the only egress and traffic there was slow. He said the Thomaston St. exit would be for employees only.

All drainage would be to an underground soil filter to control storm water quality and quantity; there would be 18" of filter material. Mr. Gartley said this would not increase drainage volume as 90% of all new impervious runoff would be collected.

Mr. Gartley said the plan was heavy on landscaping on the perimeter in lieu of installing an internal island. Chair Laustsen said it looked as though the original landscaping had died or been removed near the retention basin. Mr. Clement responded that Fisher had replaced the vegetation several times because it was eaten by deer.

Mr. Gartley said lighting would be LEDs on 20' poles. Chair Laustsen said poles could not be more than 14' including the base, due to residential uses nearby. Mr. Gartley said the LEDs would result in zero lumens at the setback and the closest light would be 130' away from the closest house and most of the planting would be in that area. He said the single-directed LED's would have 7,520 lumens per light.

Randy Dunton had done a traffic assessment of the new driveway onto Thomaston St. Part of this study was a traffic count on Gordon Dr. that identified the number of Fisher employees using it and considered how many could be moved onto Thomaston St. The plant employed two shifts, neither of which was at peak commuter time. He said 138 vehicles left and 4 entered from 2:45 P.M. to 3:45 P.M.

He had also performed a sensitivity analysis (how many vehicles turn right or left) and looked at all possibilities. The capacity analysis for all scenarios showed a service Level A for all at the intersection of the proposed driveway and Thomaston St.

Mr. Dunton had then performed a turn lane analysis for all 3 scenarios and found the traffic was not close to warranting either a right or left turn lane. He said sight lines were clear in both directions. The speed limit was 30mph, at which MDOT required a 250' sight line and this site resulted in over 300' in both directions at 30 mph. In fact, the sight distance would be good at 40 mph. Mr. Dunton said he had looked at crash data for 2012-2014 and there had been no high-crash locations in the vicinity. Mr. Dunton concluded by saying nothing had raised any issues for him.

Chair Laustsen said the 138 vehicles reflected the current workforce. Since Fisher wanted to add 176 parking spaces, it seemed logical they would use those spaces. Mr. Clement explained that since there was an overlap of shifts they needed enough spaces to accommodate all the vehicles. Mr. Laustsen said the bulk of employees left within 15 minutes of each other. Mr. Clement said management left at 4:30 P.M.

Ms. Knickelbein said there would be 225 employees arriving for the 5 A.M. shift and asked how that would impact neighbors if they all came in via Thomaston St. Mr. Dunton said this would also result in a Level A. Mr. Gartley said the parking lot was a 1-way loop and plantings could be added to shield the neighbors who would be looking into the lot.

Mr. Laustsen thought the traffic would be a 15-minute peak rather than a peak hour. Ms. Knickelbein asked if there had been any consideration of having the Thomaston St. driveway used for emergency vehicles only. Mr. Gartley responded that there was already a huge internal backup, which would only be increased.

Mr. Dunton said there would be no safety issues even if they all left within 15 minutes because the problem would be internal. CEO Root asked if the bottleneck was in leaving rather than entering, why couldn't Thomaston St. be an exit only? Ms. Knickelbein said people had homes there and this would drastically affect the Drinkwater property. Mr. Laustsen said it seemed logical to have a left turn lane. Mr. Dunton responded that there was not enough opposing traffic to warrant a turn lane; he said a turn lane increased speed and impervious surface, so would not be put in if not needed.

Mr. Bodine ascertained that there were currently 145 parking spaces and plans for an additional 176. Mr. Clement said Fisher's storage area was used for inventory. He said the company had 60-75 salaried employees, with 205 hourly employees in 2008, 255 in 2010, 285 in 2011, and 325 in 2015. None of the new parking area would be laydown space.

Mr. Bodine was also concerned about light escaping into the residential areas and asked if there was no need for even a blinking light. Mr. Dunton replied that a blinking light was usually an after-the-fact light. There was further discussion and explanation of this. Mr. Jordan said another entry would allow the Fire Dept. to come in at a different angle.

Mr. Root was told there would be no deliveries from Thomaston St. He apologized for being too busy to take around the Dept. Head Comment sheet.

The Chair opened the public hearing at 6:38 P.M.

Ron Huber, 148 Broadway, said The Friends of Penobscot Bay were concerned about more pavement and more storm water going into the bay. He thought Fisher's plans seemed to be able to handle the storm water with the filtration system. Mr. Huber also had concerns about plows dumping snow near the driveway and limiting visibility.

Lillian Metcalf, 211 Thomaston St., said Fisher was right across from her house and had been a great neighbor. Their lighting did not affect her, though that from Wal-Mart and Tractor Supply did. Mrs. Metcalf said morning traffic did not worry her as much as traffic leaving at 3:30 P.M. She said the average speed on Thomaston St. was 50 mph and people coming up the hill would not see vehicles exiting. She had trouble getting out of her driveway now and said 70% of people did not stop at the sign on Moran Dr. now. Mrs. Metcalf said the neighbors had fought an exit onto Thomaston St. when Fisher moved there.

Lewis Metcalf said he knew the traffic on the road. He wanted Fisher to move forward, but explained how he thought traffic would change.

Vivian Newman, South Thomaston, said the Friends of the Weskeag Marsh were concerned the wildlife management area inhabitants would not be taken into account. She asked if increased runoff from traffic had been considered and said plantings and pervious surface should be required.

The Chair closed the public hearing at 6:52 P.M.

CEO Root said Fisher was redistributing traffic rather than increasing it. Mr. Dunton added that 2 exits would improve traffic, keeping it moving along, and would decrease traffic at the Broadway intersection.

Ms. Knickelbein mentioned a letter from Inland Fisheries and Wildlife which said the new driveway could be an impact and recommended follow-up. Mr. Gartley said the wildlife management area was on the other side of the property from the lights and there would be very little clearing there, so it would be screened. Mr. Root felt screening on the residential side was crucial. He said the bigger the better, with good-sized trees. Mr. Gartley said Fisher would do as good a job as it had with its last site plan, putting vegetation along Thomaston St. and near the office.

Chair Laustsen said the PB had the authority to require another traffic study, which he thought should be done due to concerns about residences and how they would be impacted. He said in 1998 MDOT had pushed Fisher to remove 2 entrances to Thomaston St. and Mr. Laustsen still preferred there be none. Mr. Clement said the current setup was not good for emergency vehicles and this driveway would make the site easier to evacuate. Mr. Jordan noted that the building was sprinklered and suggested asking the Fire Chief for his opinion. The CEO said he would, but asked if they could compromise and limit the number of people using the driveway. Mr. Clement said he could not promise to be able to implement that. Mr. Root asked if Fisher would offer screening on adjacent properties if requested and Mr. Clement answered affirmatively.

Ms. Knickelbein repeated her concerns for the neighbors. There was a lengthy discussion of possible alternatives.

Mr. Clement said Fisher would be closing on the properties on November 25 and hoped to start construction in December. Mr. Bodine asked if there would be enough space at the new entrance to pile

snow so there wouldn't be a sight line problem. Mr. Clement said there would since the company would not risk its employee's safety.

Mr. Jordan said the concerns came down to lighting and noise. Mr. Laustsen said Chapter 19-304 said it should be landscaped for 20' on all sides. He wanted a second traffic study but other members did not. Mr. Jordan wanted to talk with the Police and Public Services departments about mitigating traffic.

The Board reviewed the Elements. The new lots would be combined with the existing one. There would be underground electricity to the parking area lights, of which he wanted to know the number. Ms. Knickelbein wanted landscaping on the west side of the driveway.

ACTION: Ms. Knickelbein made a motion to accept the application as complete, with the condition that the Dept. Head Comment Sheet be submitted.
Carried 4-0-0

A site walk was scheduled for Tuesday November 17 at 3:30 P.M.

Adjournment:

ACTION: Mr. Jordan made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 7:43 P.M...
Carried 4-0-0

Respectfully submitted,

Deborah Sealey