

Approved as written

Joint Field Trip between
Affordable Housing Committee,
Town Council, and
Planning Commission

Minutes

August 15, 2022

3:00PM

Cottages on Greene, 40 Greene St, East Greenwich, RI 02818

And

Castle Street Cottages, 15 Castle St, East Greenwich, RI 02818

In attendance: The Affordable Housing Committee: Bob Plain and Joe Cannon; Town Council: Erik Brine and Mary Meagher; Planning Commission: Rosemary Enright and Duncan Pendlebury

Also in attendance: Lisa Bryer, Town Planner; Carrie Kolb, Planning Assistant; Lizzie Houle and Chris Chutz from Church Community Housing Corporation; Don Powers, Union Studios, project architect for Cottages on Greene; Jerry Zarella, Jr., developer Castle Street Cottages

Cottages on Greene:

Powers, project architect for Cottages on Greene, discussed the background of the project. He found the site in 2009 and it was an old auto repair site. The owners of the land had previously planned to build a retail cluster. He worked with them to envision the cottage cluster.

With the housing crash in 2008, it was a great time to create a radically different design. The design that Powers created was 15 units on 0.85 acre of land. Powers and his team did a whole streetscape presentation with 3D models and animation. You can't ask people to image a cottage cluster, you have to demonstrate how it will work and fit in the neighborhood.

The units range in size from 900-1,100 sq ft. There were 15 units, 12 are 2-bedroom and 3 are 2-bedroom plus den. Each unit has a front porch that is 3-4 steps up to give a bit of privacy that would not be there if on the ground level.

There is a linear garden in the middle that is common space and it's the idea of shared space in the courtyard with patio space, lawn and gardens. The landscaping is intentional.

With a project that is both small and dense, stormwater engineering is important. The design was for the water to infiltrate in place. The landscaping contains retaining ponds and spillways. The cost was also one-third of a conventional system. Brine asked who maintains the ponds and spillways. Powers said that the Homeowners Association (HOA) maintains it, and that the developer maintain until a HOA is formed. Towns will require a copy of the HOA docs as a condition of approval.

Cannon asked about parking. Powers said that there were 1.5 parking spaces per unit.

Cannon asked how the units were marketed? Powers said that the units were 10 market rate units and 5 affordable housing. The developers made a profit on both the market rate and affordable units.

The Congress for the New Urbanism awarded the project an Honorable Mention in its 2011 Charter Awards program.

Castle Street Cottages:

Zarella, project developer, gave an overview of the project. The land previously had 15-20 cars and boats on it and dilapidated buildings. The land was zoned for single family. Power got the lot zoned for a cottage cluster because the parking is on one-side of the project and considered a "pocket". The cottage cluster is 9 units in 5 buildings on 0.72 acre lot. The units range from 1,000 to 2,000 sq. ft. The original project has 10 units but was scaled down to 9 units and this size works better.

Zarella said it was important not to chintz on the common area. The common area has an outdoor kitchen, tables, benches and chairs. Zarella put in extra stone work and special attention was paid to the landscaping.

This project is built on slopped land. There are stairs with multiple landings to walk up. At the top of the project there is a rain garden. Excess storm water flows down the parking area and is collected in a rain garden that sits above the street level.

Cannon asked if they got a Comprehensive Permit to build? The answer was yes.

This project won the National Association of Home Builders Design Committee's "Best in American Living" Award in 2019.