

**CITY OF NORWALK  
SPECIAL MEETING OF THE ZONING COMMISSION  
April 27, 2016**

**PRESENT:** Adam Blank, Chair; Emily Wilson; Nate Sumpter; Linda Kruk; Jill Jacobson, Rod Johnson; Mike O'Reilly; Doug Stern; Michael Witherspoon

**STAFF:** Mike Wrinn; Dori Wilson

**OTHERS:** Atty Liz Suchy; Doug Adams; Atty Bill Hennessy; Paul Madden; John Plante; Robert Berry; Scott Rykiel

**I. CALL TO ORDER**

Mr. Blank called the meeting to order at 7 p.m.

**II. ROLL CALL**

Mr. Wrinn called the roll.

**III. PUBLIC HEARINGS**

- a. **#4-15M – Norwalk Land Development, LLC (The SoNo Collection) – 1 Putnam Av/63 West Av – Proposed map change from Reed Putnam Design District (RPDD) Subarea A in part and RPDD Subarea B in part to entirely RPDD Subarea A (2 lots) and**
- b. **#18-15R – Norwalk Land Development, LLC (The SoNo Collection) – Proposed amendments to Section 118-502 Reed-Putnam Design District to permit large scale mixed use retail shopping center developments in Subarea A and related technical amendments and**
- c. **#21-15SP/#26-15CAM – Norwalk Land Development, LLC (The SoNo Collection) – 1 Putnam Avenue/North Water St/Crescent St – North Parcel: 8 story, ±762,000 square foot mixed use retail shopping center development with ±506,705 sf retail, ±31,350 sf restaurant/cafe and public improvements with 2,484 parking spaces in a shared garage and**
- d. **#22-15SP/#27-15CAM – Norwalk Land Development, LLC (The SoNo Collection) – 63 West Ave/North Water St/Pine St Extension – South Parcel: 8 story, ±302,000 square foot mixed use retail shopping center development with ±154,817 sf retail, ±13,017 sf restaurant/cafe and public improvements and a ±13 story, 152 room hotel (±105,427 sf) with 539 parking spaces in a shared garage**

Mr. Blank opened the public hearing by informing the audience that the applicant's presentation would end at approximately 10 p.m., if they were not finished with their presentation and then continue to another public hearing on May 4, 2016. If the applicant did complete their presentation, the public would be allowed to ask questions of the applicant.

Atty Suchy began the presentation by explaining the history of the application which began 2 ½ years prior. She submitted the certified mail, return receipt cards evidencing notice of the public hearing to the abutting neighbors and those across the street. She oriented the commissioners as to the location of the property on an aerial map. She discussed the current zone and explained the proposed map change. She explained the various applications. She then introduced the project team that would speak to the commissioners and the public during the presentation.

Doug Adams continued the presentation. He discussed high quality malls, many of which the applicant owned. He then showed a video as if someone was driving in a car on the streets around the mall as well as on North Water Street which goes through the mall. He explained how they came to decide on building a mall in Norwalk which included its access to transportation, the renewal of the

urban core, etc. Development would be difficult because of it is not one site but he explained that they had done it before in Providence, RI. He said they were lucky to have anchors such as Bloomingdales and Nordstrom sign onto the lease very early in the project's development. He also mentioned that he and Atty Larry Cafero spoke with members of the community about their proposals, took their comments and prepared plans to be shown to them. He said that resulted in better plans and heard about mixed use. That's when they decided to add an hotel, as well as public space. He discussed the Land Disposition Agreement ("LDA") which included several provisions including an easement under West Avenue, real estate taxes to Norwalk, and reduction of the amount of restaurants in the mall to not compete with the ones in the nearby area. He also discussed the amount of jobs created. He also discussed the total revenue that would go to the state including revenues to Norwalk. He also mentioned the changes to the underground entrance as well as the northwest corner.

Atty Hennessy continued the presentation by explaining the text and map change amendments. He also described the how the site was two sites on a map. He described the Reed-Putnam Urban Renewal Plan. It is not to be a multi-phase project but rather a single phase project which the city had requested. The City Council believed that this site had been empty for too long and wanted it to be completed quickly. He then discussed the FAR and setbacks. He also discussed the cap on the amount of retail. The largest component of the mall is the retail. The additional use on the property was the hotel. He then described the public areas which included a sculpture area. He described the issues that the applicant worked through with the Zoning Department staff. One of them was the fact that the building would be built over a roadway. He described the other uses that could be part of the mall including Norwalk Community College. He also explained that the applicant would be requesting a change to the city's parking regulations. He believed that the applicant knew about what works for parking regulations because they had done it in so many other malls. The property is subject to the urban renewal plan and the LDA. He also discussed how they arrived at the proposed amendments and map changes.

Atty Hennessy asked the commissioners to review them in their packets as he discussed them. He also discussed the proposed parking regulations and said that the applicant's proposed standards were large compared to other towns and shopping centers. He also discussed the other text amendments. He also discussed a hoc committee that tried to determine if this mall was right for the site. He then went through other studies that were included in the commissioners' packets. He noted that there is a soft market for office space. He explained how this is a different building from the other mixed use buildings that were being built in the city.

Paul Madden, an architect on the project, continued the presentation with a brief overview of his background. He discussed the location of the property and the proposed mall as it would be constructed on it. There would be street level retail as well as parking on every level. There is access into the mall for pedestrians. One way is through a grand staircase, through the parking lot and then north of North Water St. He then discussed vehicular access. There was a discussion as to the location of one of vehicular entrances to the mall. Mr. Madden said that there would be a sign to indicate how to get to the Maritime Aquarium. There would a separate application for signage to connect to South Norwalk through North Water Street and West Avenue. Mr. Blank asked about Crescent St. but Mr. Madden said that another presenter would have an answer about the connectivity. There was a discussion about the trolley, which Mr. Madden said was in a preliminary stage.

There was also a discussion about the parking garage which included the circulation, the cores and electronic signage about available parking spaces. Mr. Sumpter asked about the public spaces but Mr. Madden said that Mr. Barry would be discussing this in detail later in the presentation. He also described the various levels of the parking lot. He discussed the journey in the mall which began with mobile apps, then checking traffic to the mall and making it easy to get to. There was a discussion of the parking garage façade which Mr. Madden said would be presented by another architect.

John Plante, the traffic engineer, on the project, was about to continue the but Mr. Blank

questioned whether the team would be able to finish their presentation in one evening. If not, he suggested that Mr. Plante make his presentation at the continuation of the public hearing. Atty Hennessy said they would be able to complete their presentation so Mr. Plante continued. Mr. Plante said that this was the right location for this project from a traffic perspective. The reason was because it was at the connection of Route 7 and I-95. He noted that the applicant has begun their application with the state. He then discussed how the traffic study was done and that it had been going on for several years. He noted that much of the infrastructure has been completed because of a previously approved application which was never begun.

There was a discussion about the traffic on Saturdays. There was also a discussion about whether the traffic study indicated whether people coming to the mall from around the county would go to other stores in Norwalk like The Container Store. There was a discussion of what the applicant was proposing for vehicles coming into and out of the mall and getting onto I-95. They were proposing new signals at some intersections. There was a discussion about signage to indicate which lanes to use in order to get into the mall. There was also a discussion about the synchronization of lights.

There was a discussion of two private drives for deliveries for the mall as well as the hotel. Mr. Plante indicated that there were still ongoing discussions about this. Currently it is a private drive. There was then a discussion about bike lanes in the city. The applicant is providing bike lanes on their property. There will be a system that will allow for changes in the traffic flow in real time. The city will monitor it. He then discussed the levels of service in the traffic with the proposed improvements. There was a discussion about the opening day and how fully occupied it would be. Mr. Plant indicated it would be about 70%.

Robert Berry, architect on the project, discussed his background and the visions for the project. It had to be embraced by the city. He described open spaces around the mall.

Scott Rykiel, landscape architect, discussed the West Avenue street scape. He showed them a diagram of the mall with the various parts of the public improvements, pedestrian crossing. He showed them the south plaza which could be used for farmer's markets, splash pad, special events, etc. There was a discussion about the fountain as well as how it would be known as public space. He showed the elevation of the stairs and illustrations of the tables and chairs to be used. There will also be different elevations which the public can use. He also discussed where some of the plantings would be. There was a discussion about how people could walk from the mall safely.

Mr. Barry continued the presentation, by discussing the architecture of the mall. There would be ambient lighting flowing onto West Ave. Mr. Blank said he would have liked to have seen more of the ambient light on the I-95 side. Mr. Barry suggested that side might be better suited for marketing opportunities. He then discussed the inside sculpture garden which is a public space. There would be landscaping, seating area, both public and private for cafes that could flank the space. There was a discussion about the noise level in the mall. He showed various renderings with different levels of the mall.

He asked the commissioners to give their questions to the team to be answered when the presentation was continued. Mr. Blank asked about what the roof of the building looked like as well as the improvements to the façade of the parking garage as well as what the view would be from I-95. Mr. Barry indicated that some things might be in the presentation when it was continued the following week. There would be a discussion of the operations and security.

#### **IV. COMMENTS OF ACTING DIRECTOR**

Mr. Wrinn had no comments.

#### **V. COMMENTS OF COMMISSIONERS**

The commissioners had no comments.

**VI. ADJOURN AND CONTINUE PUBLIC HEARING TO WEDNESDAY, MAY 4, 2016**

The public hearing was adjourned to May 4, 2016 in the Community Room, City Hall, 125 East Avenue, Norwalk, CT, at 7 p.m.

**Mr. Blank made a Motion to Adjourn.**

**Ms. Wilson seconded.**

**Adam Blank, Chair; Emily Wilson; Nate Sumpter; Linda Kruk; Jill Jacobson, Rod Johnson; Mike O'Reilly; Doug Stern; Michael Witherspoon voted in favor.**

**No one opposed.**

**No one abstained.**

The meeting was adjourned at 10 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Diana Palmentiero