

CITY OF NORWALK
SPECIAL MEETING OF THE ZONING COMMISSION
May 4, 2016

PRESENT: Adam Blank, Linda Kruk, Nate Sumpter; Rod Johnson, Douglas Stern; Michael O'Reilly; Emily Wilson; Michael Witherspoon; Jill Jacobson (arrived after the roll call)

STAFF: Mike Wrinn; Dori Wilson

OTHERS: Atty. Liz Suchy, Robert Berry; Tim Onderko; Mitchell Wiest; Atty. Bill Hennessy; Doug Adams; Vahid Karimi; Stewart Gordon; MaryAnn Mahan; Rev. Ray Dancy; Atty. John Knuff; Rich Turan; Ed Musante; Mike Mushak; Carla Conway; Georgana Rucker; Diane Lauricella; Patsy Brescia; Mellodye Ragin; Lori Kydes; Ryan Davis; Steve Serasis; Sally Lancaster; John Plante;

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: CONTINUE FROM APRIL 27, 2016 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) 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 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 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

Atty Liz Suchy introduced Robert Berry but before he presented, Mr. Blank said that they would try to end the meeting at 10 p.m. with some flexibility, if necessary.

Mr. Berry gave a brief overview of his presentation at the previous meeting. He showed the rendering from Reed Street. He discussed the pedestrian connections on North Water Street and West Ave., through the grand staircases, the 3 story glass windows at the valet parking; retail stores on the North Water St. level. He showed the commissioners renderings along North Water Street and from I-95 looking west. Those inside would be able to look out of the parking garage. He also showed them a rendering from Oyster Shell Park as well as one at night. He then discussed the public improvements, one of them being the sculpture garden. There will be seasonal programs which will make it a wonderful for community activities. He discussed buffering with trees and other plantings. He also showed the elevations. There was a discussion of the sculpture garden which is 2 levels. There was a discussion of the lighting to help with the continuation of the outdoor areas. There was then a discussion of the loading docks, where they were located and how they entered and exited. There is a separate loading area for the anchor stores. There was then a discussion of the theme of the project as well as the look of the garage including information on other projects that the applicant had done. Some things that they did on those projects would not work here. There was a discussion of having a green façade on the garage but Mr. Berry noted that it could end up dead and not achieve the goals that were to be intended.

Tim Onderko, the civil engineer on the project, continued the presentation with a discussion of the utilities and storm water management report. He noted that he had prepared voluminous reports. He discussed what was presently at the site and what would be changed including storm water systems, as well as utility systems. He said that many of the electric lines that are overhead would be placed underground. He discussed the sewer flow analysis. He said that the applicant was working with state agencies as well especially since this was such a large project (over 5 acres).

Mitchell Wiest, a professional geologist of Roux Associates, continued the presentation, and gave a brief description of his position. The whole site is not subject to the environmental regulations but the applicant has treated it as one. This is more than they had to do so that it could be one report. He described the analysis that his company had done and which is part of the application. He discussed the remediation that would be necessary for the site. There was a discussion of the soils that would be left on the site and why it wasn't taken away. They meet the standards of being allowed to stay on the site.

Atty. Hennessy introduced Doug Adams, who would discuss sustainability, security and truck routes. Mr. Adams said that GGP is an owner of the property, not developers of the property. He then went over how the company was sustainable which included using natural gas, lessening their use of electricity and how they will reduce energy usage which would include solar panels. It is reported in their annual financial statements. He then discussed safety and security. He said there would be a full-time staff on the property to see how to make it better. He also said that although not open 24 hours, it would be open longer than most buildings in Norwalk. It is a high priority for GGP. A package of questions and answers was handed out from past discussions. He then discussed the loading docks. There was a discussion of entry from North Water Street. Mr. Adams then discussed the bike lanes. Atty. Hennessy also noted that he had submitted several disks of information that had been handed over to the Planning Commission.

Vahid Karimi, Vice President of WSP Parsons Brinckerhoff, the traffic consultant hired by the City to conduct a peer review of the traffic report, began his presentation. He explained that his firm was hired by the city to do a peer review of the traffic study submitted by the applicant. They have worked for over 6 weeks with the applicant, Planning & Zoning Department and the Department of Public Works to review and recommend modifications to the traffic report and traffic improvement plan. Stewart Gordon, part of the peer review team continued the presentation. He summarized what they had asked of the applicant including additional traffic signals, additional shoulders along West Ave., a transportation management plan to handle extra people at various times of the year, and a traffic study after the project has been completed, among other things. He noted that the State's Department of Transportation is also reviewing the project. Mr. Karimi continued the presentation regarding a proposed sidewalk on Reed Street which is still in discussion. There was then a discussion about whether their analysis confirmed the applicant's traffic analysis. There was a discussion about traffic signal coordination. The applicant concluded its presentation.

The Chair opened the meeting to the public.

MaryAnn Mahan, 32 Pine Street, apt. 4, thanked the commissioners for their hard work on this matter. She used the site plan to show the commissioners the location of her residence on Pine Street extension. She then pointed to the church and wondered if church goers could park at the mall and would they be charged it. She also wondered if Pine Street could be one way, in the other direction. She wondered if there is commitment from a hotel. She also asked about the Pine St. cemetery and whether they will include a "green wall." She asked about some variances that the applicant would be requesting.

Rev. Dancy, an elder at the Macedonia Church, 31 West Avenue, read a letter that was sent to Chair Blank into the record. The letter was in support of the project.

Atty. John Knuff; the attorney representing Belpointe/Waypointe, discussed a letter that he had submitted to the commissioners. Although his client, Paxton Kinol supports the project, there are still concerns especially about traffic. He noted some items that he hoped would be a part of the condition of approval. He was concerned about trucks being in front of his client's projects and asked for another turning lane as a part of the conditions.

Rich Turan, CEO of APEX, 800 Connecticut Avenue, spoke in support of the application.

Ed Musante, President of the Chamber of Commerce, spoke in support of the application.

Mike Mushak, 50 Elmwood, spoke for the Golden Hill Association. He also read the statement from the Mayor's Bike/Walk Task Force into the record. They support the project although they would have liked to have seen bike lanes on West Avenue. He also spoke as a private citizen and did agree that Crescent St. should be 2 ways.

Carla Conway, a resident of Norwalk and worked for Norwalk Housing Authority for 15 years, spoke in support of the application.

Georgana Rucker, 25 Chestnut and Henry St., spoke in support of the application.

Diane Lauricella discussed the sustainability portion of GGP's application. She also discussed the truck traffic on Butler St. and also thought Crescent St. should be 2 way. She asked the applicant to have a green roof which could save money on heating and cooling. She discussed other ways the applicant could be sustainable.

Patsy Brescia spoke in support of the application. She gave a brief history of the property which went back about 50 years. She believed it would change the image of Norwalk for the better. She spoke in support of the need for sidewalks on Reed Street.

Melodye Ragin, spoke in support of the application. She and her husband are mentors for the youth. They are excited for what is going on. It would give more visibility for the small businesses in the area.

Lori Kydes spoke in support of the application. She did have a concern about the petroleum that might be left in the soil from Connecticut Limo which had tanks on the property many years ago.

Dr. Brian Davis, President & CEO of the Maritime Aquarium, spoke in support of the application. He said that he had spoken with GGP about the possibility of the connectivity between the 2 buildings. There are cross-promotional ideas between the two.

Steve Serasis, 24 High St. and a Norwalk councilman spoke in support of the project while voicing concern about the connectivity to other areas including Washington St. He thanked the commissioners for their time.

Sally Lancaster spoke in support of the application. She said it would set a precedent in the mall industry. She did have a concern about Crescent St. and wondered why it would not be a 2 way street. She thought it could help mitigate traffic on West. Avenue.

Mr. Blank asked if there was any one else wishing to speak; since no one responded the Chair closed the public portion of the public hearing at this time. There was a discussion about whether to keep the public hearing open for rebuttal at a later date. Atty. Hennessey asked for some time to speak with his client. Mr. Blank called for a 5 min. recess at 9:44 p.m. They returned from recess at 9:50 p.m.

Ms. Kruk read referrals the Planning Commission into the record.

Atty. Hennessey began the rebuttal by handing in copies of reports that were previously submitted to the Redevelopment Agency and the peer review team about the traffic.

He then handed out a packet of letters in support from business owners, residents and other interested parties. He discussed the environmental issues but then turned the presentation over to Mr. Wiest to continue. He explained that he had to sign-off on the project before it was completed. He discussed the samples and how they were tested and measured. They were compared to conservative standards. There was a discussion about previous remediations. Mr. Wiest said that the site had a range of remediations done to it.

In response to one of the comments from an earlier speaker, Mr. Adams said that they were in discussions with hotel operators. They had committed to the city to have a hotel partner as part of the project and to name the operator within 20 months.

Atty. Hennessey said that there would be job training for 5 years which could start in the spring of 2017. Many Norwalk residents would be eligible for the course to learn more about working in retail. GGP does encourage stores to hire Norwalk residents. The closer people work to the mall means

they get to work on time, higher attendance rates, etc. There was a discussion about whether the hotel could be converted to another use if they could not find a hotel operator, such as apartments, etc. The city wanted a single phase project so GGP would have to start the hotel but come back to the city if they want to change the hotel into another use.

In response to one of the comments from an earlier speaker, Mr. Adams spoke about the parking for the church which is in support of the project. He indicated that the church members would be charged a fee to park which he described as reasonable.

John Plante spoke about the trip generation numbers which was based upon the project being fully operational. Mr. Blank asked for another traffic study once the mall was completed which he said would be done. There was a discussion about the connectivity that some of the speakers had concerns about in their comments. Mr. Plante discussed bike connectivity as well as sidewalk connectivity. He also discussed the letter submitted by Atty. Knuff for his client, Waypointe, by addressing some of the points in the letter, including trucks making deliveries.

Mr. Blank said that the public hearing would be continued for Rebuttal ONLY to Wednesday, May 18, 2016 at 7:00 pm in the Common Council Chambers on third floor of City Hall.

Atty. Hennessy explained that many connectivity reports have been done on this site. These studies have been done by people who have knowledge of the easements and ownership issues which exist at this location. He noted that it was a complicated issue.

IV. COMMENTS OF ACTING DIRECTOR

Mr. Wrinn noted that he would see the commissioners for the Plan Review Committee on May 12 the following week and then for the Zoning Commission meeting on May 18.

V. COMMENTS OF COMMISSIONERS

There were no comments from the commissioners.

VI. ADJOURN AND CONTINUE PUBLIC HEARING TO WEDNESDAY, MAY 25, 2016 IF NEEDED

The public hearing was adjourned to May 18, 2016 in the Common Council Chambers, City Hall, 125 East Avenue, Norwalk, CT, at 7:00 p.m.

Mr. Blank made a Motion to Adjourn.

Ms. Wilson seconded.

Adam Blank, 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 10:25 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Diana Palmentiero