

**CITY OF NORWALK  
PLANNING COMMITTEE OF THE COMMON COUNCIL  
REGULAR MEETING  
FEBRUARY 4, 2016**

**ATTENDANCE:** John Kydes, Chair; John Igneri, Thomas Livingston, Douglas Hempstead, Shannon O'Toole-Giandurco, Faye Bowman

**ABSENT:** Travis Simms

**STAFF:** Timothy Sheehan, Redevelopment Agency; Tami Strauss, Community Development Planning Director; Susan Sweitzer, Senior Development Project Manager

**OTHERS:** Mayor Harry Rilling, Council Member Bruce Kimmel, Atty. Larry Cafero; Mr. Doug Adams, Mr. Paul Madden, GGP; Mr. Steve Cecil, The Cecil Group; Atty. Eric D. Bernheim, Halloran & Sage, LLP; Ms. Emily Keys Innis, Cecil Group

**CALL TO ORDER.**

Mr. Kydes called the meeting to order at 7:05 p.m.

**ROLL CALL.**

Mr. Kydes called the roll. A quorum was present.

**PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

No one wished to address the Committee at this time.

**I. APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

**A. December 3, 2015 Regular Meeting**

**\*\* MR. LIVINGSTON MOVED THE MINUTES OF THE DECEMBER 3, 2015 REGULAR MEETING.**

**\*\* THE MOTION TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE DECEMBER 3, 2015 REGULAR MEETING AS SUBMITTED PASSED WITH FIVE IN FAVOR (KYDES, IGNERI, LIVINGSTON, HEMPSTEAD AND O'TOOLE-GIANDURCO) AND ONE ABSTENTION (BOWMAN).**

## **B. January 7, 2016 Regular Meeting**

The following correction was noted:

Page 4, under #21 - **Rowayton Senior Housing Corporation – Hilltop Homes Windows**, paragraph 1, line 1: please change “Mr. Bob White” to “Mr. Bob Eydt”.

**\*\* MR. HEMPSTEAD MOVED THE MINUTES OF THE JANUARY 7, 2016 REGULAR MEETING AS CORRECTED.**

**\*\* THE MOTION TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE JANUARY 7, 2016 REGULAR MEETING AS CORRECTED PASSED WITH FIVE IN FAVOR (KYDES, IGNERI, LIVINGSTON, HEMPSTEAD AND BOWMAN) AND ONE ABSTENTION (O'TOOLE-GIANDURCO).**

## **II. BUSINESS**

### **A. REED PUTNAM URBAN RENEWAL AREA**

1. Review and approve advancing to the Common Council the SoNo Collection document and plans that CMSP has met the conditions of approval. Such approval is independent of the overpass activation approval and the Public Realm approval. Presentation to be made by Norwalk Land Development, LLC and the Cecil Group.

Mr. Kydes said that he was pleased with the progress that has been made. He said that hopefully by the next meeting, the 3D rendering would be completed.

Atty. Cafero said that they were very pleased with the progress that has been made. The Land Disposition Agreement (LDA) has been signed by GGP and will be ready to be presented to the public soon. The group is simultaneously being moved before Planning and Zoning.

Atty. Cafero said that he had been in Hartford the previous day and that the economic picture was grim. He then reviewed some of the Community Impacts decisions.

Mr. Doug Adams and Mr. Paul Madden then came forward to narrate the PowerPoint presentation. (See attached)

Mr. Kydes asked if the new design had increased the square footage. Mr. Madden said that they had moved one corner forward, but reduced the same amount of footage on the interior.

Mr. Livingston asked if another lane had been added to West Avenue. Mr. Adams said that there would be an additional lane added for 95 North where the parking entrance was.

Mr. Kydes asked how the figures were calculated. Mr. Adams said that the traffic engineers had been taking counts for the last two years.

Mr. Kimmel asked for an update on the slip ramp. Mr. Adams said that the group believes the slip ramp is an integral part of the project in terms of moving internal traffic efficiently. The design team has worked to review the ramp and believes it is the correct compromise. Discussion followed about the details.

Mr. Kimmel said that he had difficulty understanding why the slip ramp would enhance the pedestrian experience. Mr. Adams said that they had worked with Mr. Steve Cecil about this. Atty. Cafero came forward and pointed out that a pedestrian would now be able to walk continually along the south parcel. Mr. Kimmel said that the Committee needed to know what the pedestrian experience would be with the slip ramp. Mayor Rilling said that he hoped the issue of the slip ramp would not impede the project because he realized that the timing was very critical. Mr. Adams said that they were still working on resolving the issue. Mr. Sheehan said that there had been a number of significant iterations in the design and the pedestrian environments had been enhanced because of this.

Mr. Hempstead asked for clarification on the new design for North Water Street. Mr. Adams reviewed the details with the Committee.

Mr. Hempstead asked if the new configuration would have the food and beverage establishments under 6%. Mr. Adams said that it has remained under 6%.

Mr. Kydes asked for more details on the slip ramp. Mr. Adams indicated where the slip ramp would be and how it would allow traffic to circulate on the South parcel. Mr. Kydes said that he had confidence in the Cecil Group and the Redevelopment Agency that this issue would be resolved satisfactorily.

Mr. Hempstead asked for the status on the Land Disposition Agreement (LDA). Mr. Adams said that it was moving forward and the attorneys were reviewing it. Mayor Rilling said that he would be updating the Council members on this tomorrow. Atty. Eric Bernheim said that there was some confusion regarding some figures in the LDA and everyone expected this to be resolved shortly.

Mr. Sheehan then spoke about the Conceptual Master Site Plan (CMSP) conditions review and the upcoming review of the tunnel.

Mr. Steve Cecil came forward and said that there were many layers of review that were underway. The Cecil Group has worked closely with GGP on this project. Most of the issues have been satisfied in terms of the Master Plan.

Mr. Cecil said that one issue was to make sure that the sidewalk on West Avenue was activated. The internal rearrangement will allow a good circulation for pedestrians.

Mr. Cecil said that the slip ramp was an internal design review and would affect North Water Street. The focus is what the design is trying to do with North Water Street and the pedestrian safety. Mr. Sheehan said that the flow of traffic was critical and a negative flow would impact the mall. Mr. Kimmel asked if the slip ramp was a plus or minus for the developer. Mr. Sheehan pointed out that this question had been presented to the developer and the Redevelopment Agency was waiting to hear back from the developer's design team. Discussion moved to the traffic demand and distributions. Mr. Cecil said that the key elements would be how the vehicles get in and how the pedestrians enter because North Water is a city street.

Mr. Cecil then gave an overview of the details of the hotel.

Regarding the public realm uses, Mr. Cecil said that GGP was exceeding what would be considered public realm spaces. This could include meeting spaces, exterior active spaces and interior spaces. The sculpture garden at the northwest corner would have real benefits for the mall during the New England winter. There are some spaces that will be civic spaces, but could be converted to retail if they are not activated by civic organizations. Another enhancement is the creation of a clear sidewalk around the perimeter of the property. There will be facades to screen the parking garage. The air handling for the garage is still being developed.

Mr. Cecil said that there has been a very generous percentage of windows on the frontage. He went on to speak of the contextual components of the exterior. For those who are approaching from the Route 7 area, it will be important to have large architectural features that can be understood.

Looking at the different studies and alternatives for the North Water Street underpass, there had been a proposal to cut a hole in the parking deck. However, it was suggested that a major improvement could be created by notching the eastern border entrance. This will work without interfering with the traffic circulation on the parking deck and decrease the length of the underpass.

Mr. Sheehan said that he wanted to make a clarification regarding the public realm. There is certainly enough space in the plan for the CMSP, but the details on how it will be activated will be presented to the Committee at a later time.

Mr. Hempstead asked if the screening for the parking garage satisfied the GMP or CMSP plans. Atty. Bernheim explained that the screening was more of a design feature. Mr. Cecil said that they know that from a Master Planning view, the area covered was sufficient but they are still working on the design.

Mr. Hempstead asked what would happen if no one was able to agree on the design for the garage. Atty. Bernheim pointed out that the conceptual Master Site Plan would be approving the overall project, such as they want screening. The design review will be the ones who agree upon the actual design. Mr. Cecil said that if the design review group didn't like the design, then the project would not move forward until the design satisfied the reviewers.

Mr. Sheehan reminded everyone that how the underpass is activated would be coming back to the Council for review. Discussion followed as to whether or not there was evidence that the requirements have been met. Atty. Bernheim indicated that there would be a number of items, including the public realm that would be coming back to the Committee at a later date.

Mr. Sheehan explained that the Committee was accepting that there was sufficient space in the mall to meet the CMSP requirements. However, what is not before the committee is how the space might be used. Mr. Sheehan said that there seems to be some confusion about between what is a conceptual master site plan and the final design plans.

Mr. Kydes thanked everyone for their time and efforts on this project.

Mr. Hempstead asked if the City had actually hired a traffic analyst. Mr. Sheehan said that the City had engaged Tighe and Bond to review the traffic information. Mr. Kydes asked for an update at the next meeting. Mr. Sheehan made a note of this.

## **B. TRANSIT ORIENTATED DEVELOPMENT REDEVELOPMENT PLAN**

- 1. Continue review of TOD Master Plan (Part II) Cecil Group**
- 2. Review of TOD Urban Renewal Plan - Cecil Group**

Ms. Emily Innis came forward and gave an overview of the discussion at the January 7th meeting. She then narrated a PowerPoint presentation for the Committee members.

Mr. Cecil said that the Redevelopment plan was enabled by Connecticut General Statutes. This area is centered on the train station and matching up the boundaries. This plan is to support the transitions of an area that should be a mixed use zone. This will also allow for pedestrians, bikes and vehicles to create a higher quality environment. He outlined the strategies that were being proposed. There will be a focus on neighborhoods, economic

development, urban design Character and diversity. Other key elements include circulations and transportation, with the rail station links and security and safety.

In the past, there were many zones that were altered as needed but now a best practice is to have uniform design guidelines that will help with the look and feel of the area. The current zoning is a mishmash. Ms. Innis said that one concern was as someone goes down South Main, there needs to be a gradual transition from the taller buildings to the residential buildings.

Ms. Bowman said that this presentation was missing public input. She said that the residents were not looking for larger buildings, but wanted residences. Mr. Sheehan said that there had been a number of public meetings on this in the past and he indicated he would be happy to provide Ms. Bowman with lists of the attendees. He went on to speak about how the TOD plan had developed and said that he would be happy to have more public input. However, he reiterated that there had been a number of meetings in the past on this issue.

Ms. Bowman said that there were a number of concerning issues, including the current overcrowding in the school system. Mr. Sheehan replied that there had been a recent study about the new urban multiple family developments that were over one year old and the net increase was 25 students. Ms. Bowman replied that the Superintendent of Schools had told the public that South Norwalk was the fastest growing area in Norwalk.

Mr. Cecil said that there had been a number of initiatives had happened, but pointed out that the area around the Train Station was locked in and did not have some of the opportunities that other areas had. Mr. Sheehan said that there were untapped areas, such as Webster Street, but did not believe that there would be a spread beyond the current urban zone.

The discussion moved to the fee in lieu of parking. Mr. Sheehan pointed out that this practice had been suspended but still existed in the regulations.

Ms. Innis then reviewed the suggested zoning changes that would change over time. She displayed slides showing the various urban renewal plans, which have their own design districts. She said that consolidating the various plans and design requirements could be done in a number of different ways.

Mr. Hempstead asked about the decreasing of setbacks while increasing building heights. Ms. Innis said that this was done to increase density. Discussion about the details followed.

Mr. Livingston asked about the 10% affordable housing in the area and pointed out that currently, there was a large number of low income units. He wished to know what would happen to the people who were displaced. Mr. Cecil said that aside from Washington

Village, which was a special case, the studies have shown that this type of development will increase the number of units available if the balance is maintained. The fact that the Choice Neighborhood Grants was awarded to Norwalk for Washington Village is a major benefit. Discussion followed about the details of affordable housing.

Mr. Cecil said that many of the lower rent units were located in two and three family houses, some of which were historic. However, the goal was not to replace these residences, but to add to the housing stock.

Mr. Kimmel asked about the 35/65 ratio. Mr. Sheehan explained that it applied to offsite housing. Mr. Sheehan then gave an overview of how the State standard and the affordability standards differed. Ms. Innis said that the Cecil Group would be happy to look at the other standards.

Mr. Igneri said that the State was losing young people who did not drive as much as the older population. He asked if the younger people would be attracted to the TOD housing. Mr. Cecil said that there were more people commuting to Norwalk rather than from Norwalk. People are looking for food, culture in terms of evening activities and walkability. The young people are attracted to a real neighborhood with contextual history rather than a development. That's is why infill is so important to the plan. Ms. Innis said that one of the key elements is being respectful of the design context.

Ms. Innis said that the mix use allows for jobs and residences. The discussion moved to what was being leased and the size of the leased property. Mr. Hempstead pointed out that they were actually looking for an incubator for businesses.

Ms. Innis said that they would be back before the Committee again with more information.

### **C. COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT BLOCK GRANT(CDBG) PROGRAM**

1. Approve CDBG PY42 preliminary funding allocations as per the Committee

**\*\* MR. LIVINGSTON MOVED TO APPROVE THE CDBG PY42 PRELIMINARY FUNDING ALLOCATIONS OF \$123,548.00 FOR PUBLIC SERVICES.**

**\*\* THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

*Ms. O'Toole-Giandurco recused herself due to a conflict of interest due to the fact that her husband is employed by The Carver Center of Norwalk, who is an applicant to the Community Development Block Grants (CDBG).*

**\*\* MR. LIVINGSTON MOVED TO APPROVE THE CDBG PY42 PRELIMINARY FUNDING ALLOCATIONS OF \$535,378 FOR PUBLIC FACILITIES/HOUSING.**

**\*\* THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

*Ms. O'Toole Giandurco rejoined the meeting.*

**\*\* MR. HEMPSTEAD MOVED TO APPROVE THE CDBG PY42 PRELIMINARY FUNDING ALLOCATIONS OF \$164,731.00 FOR PLANNING AND ADMINISTRATION.**

**\*\* THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

2. Authorize advancement of a draft Annual Action Plan consistent with the Committee allocation for public comment.

**\*\* MR. LIVINGSTON MOVED TO AUTHORIZE ADVANCEMENT OF A DRAFT ANNUAL ACTION PLAN CONSISTENT WITH THE COMMITTEE ALLOCATION FOR PUBLIC COMMENT.**

**\*\* THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

3. Authorize a Public Hearing on the draft Annual Action Plan based on Committee allocations on March 3, 2016, at 6:30 p.m.

**\*\* MR. IGNERI MOVED TO AUTHORIZE A PUBLIC HEARING ON THE DRAFT ANNUAL ACTION PLAN BASED ON COMMITTEE ALLOCATIONS ON MARCH 3, 2016, AT 6:30 P.M.**

**\*\* THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

### **III. OLD BUSINESS**

There was no additional old business to consider at this time.

### **IV. NEW BUSINESS**

There was no new business to consider at this time.

### **ADJOURNMENT**

**\*\* MR. LIVINGSTON MOVED TO ADJOURN.**

**\*\* THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

The meeting adjourned at 9:25 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

S. L. Soltes

Telesco Secretarial Services