

**CITY OF NORWALK
PLANNING COMMITTEE
REGULAR MEETING
NOVEMBER 3, 2016**

ATTENDANCE: John Kydes, Chair; John Igneri, Tom Livingston, Douglas Hempstead, Shannon O'Toole-Giandurco

STAFF: Timothy Sheehan, Redevelopment Agency Director; Susan Sweitzer, Senior Development Project Manager; Elizabeth Stocker, Director of Economic Development.

OTHERS: Bruce Kimmel, Council President; Diane Cece; Stephen Kleppin, Planning and Zoning Director; John Bosio, merje Design

CALL TO ORDER.

Mr. Kydes called the meeting to order at 7:02 p.m. A quorum was present.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION.

Ms. Diane Cece said that she had not been previously aware that there was a request to extend the Enterprise Zone and that she would be very disappointed if the Committee moved the item without doing their due diligence.

I. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

A. Regular Meeting October 6, 2016

**** MR. KYDES MOVED THE MINUTES OF THE OCTOBER. 6, 2016 MEETING.**

**** THE MOTION PASSED WITH FOUR (4) IN FAVOR (KYDES, IGNERI, HEMPSTEAD AND O'TOOLE-GIANDURCO) AND 1 ABSTENTION (LIVINGSTON).**

II. GUEST

A. Introduction of Steve Kleppin, Director of Norwalk Planning and Zoning.

Mr. Steve Kleppin came forward and introduced himself to the Committee. He said that he had been working as the Planning and Zoning Director for about three weeks. Currently, there are several large projects underway. Mr. Kleppin said that he had met with the Rowayton group recently and hope to meet with more Norwalk residents.

Mr. Hempstead asked what the priorities were. Mr. Kleppin said that the infrastructure was all in one area and there was so many interesting large scale projects underway. He said that he would like to work on some planning and said people were worried about population shifts. There have been a number of developers that have come in to ask about projects.

Mr. Kimmel asked about the Plan of Conservation and Development and said that he would be interested in the projections for the next 10 years or 25 years. He asked if there should be a consensus about where the City should be in 20 or 30 years and what the role of a City Planner would be. Mr. Kleppin said that it was difficult to plan for 10 years and pointed out that the 2008 recession had changed many plan projections, just like 9/11 did. Mr. Kleppin thought that the current plan was very forward thinking, but may have been a bit too broad. He said he would like to do a summary on what the City has accomplished, and list some things that might need to be changed. He also suggested that it might be good to do some neighborhood plans. Some have been done, but they had never been acted on. He said that the potential train station was on his consideration list.

Mr. Kimmel pointed out that this was the Planning Committee for the Common Council, and there was a Planning Commission and the Redevelopment Agency. He said that it was not clear to him who really does the planning in the City. Sometimes it seems like the City departments are not in sync. Mr. Kleppin replied that he had heard the same sentiment from several people. He said that he had not come to Norwalk to be a glorified zoning inspector and that he is most interested in the Planning aspect of the job. Discussion followed.

Mr. Hempstead asked if there had been any consideration regarding the traffic. Too often the subject does not come up until it reaches critical mass. He asked if Mr. Kleppin has considered doing a broader traffic study. Mr. Sheehan reminded everyone that Public Works had undertaken a broad traffic study in reference to the GGP mall project, although it was somewhat limited in scope. Mr. Sheehan said that he felt Mr. Hempstead's point was very important. Mr. Kleppin agreed that it would be important to work on the traffic during the TOD projects.

Mr. Livingston thanked Mr. Kleppin for coming to Norwalk and said that it was good that Mr. Kleppin was listening to the feedback. Mr. Kydes agreed and said that he was very optimistic about the future.

III. BUSINESS

A. WEST AVENUE CORRIDOR REDEVELOPMENT PLAN/ WALL STREET REDEVELOPMENT PLAN/ WASHINGTON-SOUTH MAIN URBAN RENEWAL PLAN

**** MR. KYDES MOVED TO SUSPEND RULES TO CONSIDER ITEM III A2 NEXT.
** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

2. Advance Wayfinding Phase I Program to the Common Council for approval.

Ms. Sweitzer gave the Commission a very brief introduction about the Wayfinding system and how the wayfinding assessment was done. She presented a summary of how the signage was ranked in terms of gateways and pedestrian signage.

Mr. Bosio of merje Designs, came forward to greet the Committee members. He said that Norwalk was not an easy city to navigate. The parking program seemed to be well established. At this point, the City needs to consider approving the plan to move forward. Mr. Sheehan said that the Agency was looking for support from the legislative body on the project.

Ms. O'Toole-Giandurco asked what kind of funding would be needed. Ms. Sweitzer said that it was projected to cost between \$200,000 and \$250,000.

Mr. Kydes pointed out that Public Works would have to be involved. Ms. Sweitzer said that Public Works had been involved since the beginning as was the DOT and the Parking Authority. Mr. Bosio said that there were some signs that would come down.

Mr. Kydes asked why Norwalk was difficult to navigate. Mr. Bosio said that it was difficult because there were two "downtown" areas and that City Hall was not located in the center of the City.

The discussion moved to the branding for the City of Norwalk. Mr. Sheehan said that it had been discussed. Mr. Bosio said that there were two aspects, identity and branding. The marketing logos have a short life span of about 10 years, while the signs last much longer. He said that the tie to the water is clear and captures the spirit of the City.

Mr. Hempstead stated for the record that he works for Stew Leonard's and was involved with the placement of the original signs placed by Clean and Green. He said that he would check with his legal representative about conflict of interests. He pointed out that the First, Second and Third Districts all have their own signs. Mr. Bosio said that often once the Wayfinding signs are installed, the various districts fall in line.

Mr. Hempstead said that even if this went to the Council, the approval would have no teeth. Mr. Sheehan agreed and said that the Agency doesn't want to go down the road too far without Council support. Mr. Hempstead said that he felt that there was not enough information in the packet and he was unsure what the Committee was being asked to approve. Mr. Sheehan said that the Committee would be approving where the signs

would go and the hierarchy of the signage. Mr. Sheehan suggested the Commission table this item for more information. Mr. Kydes agreed but pointed out that the Committee members still had a number of questions.

Mr. Kydes asked where the funding came from. Ms. Sweitzer said it was around \$40,000 and was spread over a number of different project areas. Mr. Bosio said that Phase 1 would be a handful of signs that they felt could be done for a reasonable cost. Mr. Kimmel asked how many phases there would be for the City. Mr. Bosio said that he generally tried to avoid going beyond two or three phases.

Mr. Kimmel said that he would hate to have these signs installed and then have the technology in the vehicles telling people exactly where they were, which would make the signs obsolete. He said that in Philadelphia, there are historical signs all over the place and asked if Norwalk could imitate the same program. Mr. Bosio said that wayfinding was more than getting from Point A to Point B. It's about marketing and promoting the City. He displayed the page with information on the interpretative signage. Discussion followed.

Ms. O'Toole-Giandurco said that she had concerns about the sign placements. Mr. Sheehan said that he was looking for a level of consensus on where things like the gateway signs should go. Mr. Bosio said that what they were looking to avoid was the incorrect placement of a sign.

Mr. Kydes asked what role the Planning Committee would ultimately play with this project. Mr. Sheehan said that the Committee would play a part in implementation for Phase 1. He said that too often, signs go up without any legislative approval. He said that the Council would be in agreement about where the signs would be located, how they would be installed and who approved the signage.

Mr. Hempstead pointed out that the information was a design proposal. He cautioned everyone that when the design for the neighborhoods was installed, it could be problematic.

Mr. Sheehan said that the next time this comes back to the Committee, there would be a whole presentation about overall wayfinding and then after that, the proposal would be presented.

**** MR. KYDES MOVED TO TABLE ADVANCING THE WAYFINDING PHASE I PROGRAM TO THE COMMON COUNCIL FOR APPROVAL FOR FURTHER INFORMATION.**

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

1. Advance extension of Norwalk Enterprise Zone from I-95 north to Wall Street Redevelopment Plan/Washington-South Main Urban Renewal Plan.

Ms. Elizabeth Stocker, the Redevelopment Agency Economic Planning Director, came forward and spoke about the proposed expansion of the Enterprise Zone. She gave an overview of the information contained in the back up material. In an Enterprise Zone, everyone is treated equally in terms of tax assessments, but right now the assessments vary in the proposed expansion. She distributed a document with information Mr. Barron produced regarding projections on the taxes. These would increase the tax revenue and give the developers incentives to invest in Norwalk. It will also help keep the property mill rate down.

Mr. Livingston asked if there had been any figures showing that the existing enterprise zone benefits. Mr. Sheehan said that there were a number of projects that had used the enterprise benefit.

Ms. Stocker said that she had spoken with Mr. Stewart, the tax assessor, and the existing buildings would not qualify. However, a project like the Head of the Harbor, which is underway, may benefit if the zone is approved before the project is completed.

Mr. Livingston asked if this was an abatement or a deferral. Ms. Stocker said that in fact, it was an abatement on real estate property.

The discussion then moved to the details involved in State benefits for locating in an enterprise zone and how the tax abatement would work.

Mr. Igneri expressed concerns that this expansion would end up with a hodge podge of development.

Mr. Hempstead said that he was surprised to see this on the agenda as an action item since this was the first time the material was being presented to the Committee members. He said that the ordinances point to a State ordinance that apparently no longer exists. Mr. Hempstead said that it sounds like they would have to approve every project. Mr. Sheehan said that he would ask Atty. Coppola about this.

Mr. Hempstead said he had concerns about the fact that a project that was underway might qualify. Mr. Sheehan said that he would have to check with the State and pointed out that a developer who had already pulled a building permit was already investing in the City. Mr. Hempstead said that he would like clarification on what the value would be on projects that were already underway vs. something that was already completed.

Mr. Hempstead said that he was also surprised to see how large an area the expansion area covered. He said that he was questioning how much economic revenue this area would generate since it was mostly housing that was being developed. Mr. Sheehan said that under the statute, the City is required to deal with the census tract. This would provide an equalized incentive package for the urban core. The second issue about

housing would be highly regulated in terms of income level that can be located. He went on to give the details of this and said that it is not often used for housing.

Ms. O'Toole-Giandurco asked why this item was included on the agenda as an action item. Mr. Sheehan said that it was up to the Committee whether they were willing to move this forward.

Mr. Sheehan said that he would get clarification from the State regarding when the abatement would apply in terms of a project that was in progress.

Mr. Igneri asked what the economic impact would be on the properties in the enterprise zone. Ms. Stocker said that the enterprise zone would not change anything, but what happens in the neighborhood due to the existence of the enterprise zone would increase property values. The more investors that are drawn to the area, the more valuable the properties in the zones would be.

The discussion moved to the 200% of the median income which is \$131,000 for Norwalk and Stamford.

**** MR. KYDES MOVED TO TABLE THIS TO THE NEXT MEETING FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION ON THE TYPE OF TAXES THAT WOULD BE ABATED FOR PROJECTS UNDERWAY AND PROJECTS THAT HAVE BEEN APPROVED.**

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

B. WEBSTER STREET BLOCK

1. Review of Webster block development recommendation

Ms. Sweitzer said that the Webster Street Development Plan was crafted in 2004 or 2005 and there was no action on the plan. Mr. Sheehan said that the Agency has been working on what could happen on the site. He said that the Agency did not want to advance a project that had been fully developed and vetted by the community, but not generate any private sector interest. It would be important to formulate the limitation on the use, the scale and the bulk of what could be on the site before going to the marketplace. The 2004 plan caused consternation when the City showed what they would be doing with other people's property. It will be important not to encroach on private property.

Mr. Sheehan stated that he would like to walk through the potential uses and the percentages assigned to those uses along with the constraints with the Committee members.

Ms. Sweitzer said that the master plan was posted on the website, but no action had been taken on it. Mr. Sheehan said that having the urban core operate with only retail uses and

multi-family housing, he said that he was convinced that there was a market for office space, but not as an office tower. Ms. Sweitzer said that there were more flexible definitions of office space, such as health care or other uses.

Mr. Livingston asked what the goal for this project was. Mr. Sheehan said that having a surface parking lot was not the highest and best use of the land. Mr. Sheehan said that the foot traffic on West Washington Street was almost non-existent. Ms. Sweitzer said that having a sea of cars at the gateway to South Norwalk was not appealing.

Ms. O'Toole-Giandurco said that the parking lot was utilized. Mr. Sheehan said that pre-2008 recession, people could not find a parking space in that lot. He said that the Agency is trying to handle how to not give up any spaces but to also incorporate better uses. Mr. Sheehan said that he had strong concerns about the commuter parking because Norwalk is providing parking for those who were living in other communities and couldn't get parking places in their own town.

Ms. O'Toole-Giandurco pointed out that there was also a major mall going in nearby and it would be important to have people be able to get to the Webster Street Parking area.

Mr. Livingston asked about the height restrictions. Mr. Sheehan said that the Agency was asking for 80 feet which would be about 7 or 8 stories. The Washington Street building was 12 stories.

Mr. Kimmel said that he understood the dilemma. He added that he had heard that something was going on at the 50 Washington Street plaza. Mr. Sheehan said that the interior of 50 Washington Street was under renovation. He said that the City needs to realize the plaza needs a whole new design. There should be some new concepts presented to the Committee in the future.

Mr. Hempstead asked whether the City could work in some protections for the residents when a developer tears up a parking lot and stalls out. He expressed concern about the City giving up an asset so that the developer can meet some regulations.

Mr. Igneri said that he liked the office space definition. Mr. Sheehan said that they need to increase foot traffic. The discussion moved to vacant spaces on Washington Street.

OLD BUSINESS

There was no old business to consider at this time.

NEW BUSINESS

There was no old business to consider at this time.

ADJOURNMENT

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

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

The meeting adjourned at 8:15 p.m.

Respectfully submitted

S. L. Soltes
Telesco Secretarial Services.