

**CITY OF NORWALK
PLANNING COMMITTEE
SPECIAL MEETING
PUBLIC HEARING
MAY 9, 2017**

ATTENDANCE: John Kydes, Chair; Thomas Livingston;
Shannon O' Toole Giandurco; Faye Bowman (6:19 p.m.);
John Igneri (6:32 p.m.)

STAFF: Timothy Sheehan, Executive Director, Norwalk Redevelopment
Agency; Eric Bernheim; Mario Coppola, Corporation Counsel

OTHERS: Richard Bonenfant; Bruce Kimmel, Common Council members

CALL TO ORDER

Mr. Kydes opened the public hearing at 6:10 p.m.

ROLL CALL

Mr. Kydes called the Roll.

**PUBLIC HEARING ON THE PROPOSED MODIFICATIONS TO THE URBAN
RENEWAL PLAN AND LAND DISPOSITION AGREEMENT OF THE REED
PUTNAM URBAN RENEWAL PROJECT**

Public participation comments are not verbatim and represent a summarization of statements unless otherwise noted.

Lawrence Cafero, Attorney on the team of GGP said that it was important for GGP to speak because there have been a lot of rumors and miss information. It is time to set the re-set button. He said a preceding Common Council, Zoning Commission and Redevelopment approved the project to develop the 95/7 property to build retail space. The City was desirous to have a mixed-use project. Negotiations took place and they took seriously the City's requirement to have a mixed-use project.

GGP chose a hotel as the most feasible mixed use; however, despite efforts to sell and market a hotel, they were unsuccessful. They went to the City and explained that a hotel would not be feasible on top of the retail space. The other two successive uses were also not feasible.

Mr. Cafero said GGP was here to remove the hotel from the LDA. He noted that Bloomingdales and Nordstrom's would be the anchors. Nordstrom's committed to a 20 year lease and Bloomingdales' is also committed to a similar lease. What happens in 10-20 years if an anchor goes out of business. He said that GGP has an agreement with the City to be sure an anchor of high quality goes there. He said the only big difference with the project is that the hotel is no longer feasible.

Ms. Bowman joined the meeting at 6:19 p.m.

Mr. Cafero said the commitments with the two anchors is based on the agreement that they can open in October 2019. If they are unable to open then, they are not obligated to be the anchors. It is necessary for the approvals to be done by June 8, 2017.

Mr. Cafero said that GGP insisted on transparency, openness and honesty. He discussed the benefits to the City and noted that two weeks ago, they submitted checks for the circulator, waste water treatment plant and for the foundation. If this is passed by June 8th, GGP will have handed over to the City, \$3.5 million by the end of calendar year 2017. He said they are looking at close to \$8 million in payments to the City of Norwalk. If this is stopped, then all payments to the City will stop.

Mr. Cafero said this is not the time to re-invent the wheel and hoped that this committee would be favorably inclined to this request.

Mr. Kydes asked Mr. Cafero if the plan was to pull the foundation permit tomorrow. Mr. Cafero said it was and they have the check in hand.

Ms. Patsy Brescia said she was in total support of this project. She said she has supported development of this land for decades. This opportunity is outstanding and it would be a huge mistake not to move forward with the project.

Ms. Wini Mola spoke in support of GGP's request for modification. She said it occurred to her that their request to eliminate the hotel is because a new hotel broke ground last week. She said that she is a lifelong member of the community and has been a real estate broker for 44 years. The land has been dormant for 25 years and now there is a group who is trying to bring something that no one dreamed would happen.

Ms. Mola said that Connecticut lost GE because they were not willing to negotiate with them and a lot of jobs were lost. She said Norwalk needs something like this to bring a vibrancy to the community.

Ms. Debora Goldstein said that almost 30 years ago, through eminent domain the City took properties. At that time, they attached a mixed-use requirement. She said GGP told their investors that a Class A mall would get \$700.00 per square foot, said that the City should hold out for a higher class.

Ms. Goldstein said that the loss of the hotel will mean the loss of jobs, but none of that was considered.

Mr. Igneri joined the meeting at 6:32 p.m.

Ms. Goldstein asked why the report stated that there would be no impact from the removal of the hotel. She asked how the project could be just as valuable without the hotel. She asked the Common Council to stop negotiating with itself. She said that when she looked at the Plan of Conservation and Development, retail was not listed. By redefining Class A, this opens the door to other uses that compete with the strip malls.

There were no other members of the public who wished to speak.

Mr. Bernheim confirmed that the Mayor received payment for the WPCA easement. They continue to work on creating language that is acceptable to put forward for a vote.

Ms. O' Toole Giandurco asked if a valuation of the property with and without the hotel could be provided. Mr. Coppola said this is a complex property. Mr. Sheehan said he believed that GGP offered to share their analysis. Mr. Bernheim said late this afternoon Mr. Adams e-mailed their analysis. He said he will circulate that analysis.

Mr. Bernheim said the hotel would have generated \$3.5 million in tax revenue over 22 years. The City is getting an immediate payment of what it would have gotten over 22 years.

Mr. Livingston asked if the Tax Assessor could look at GGP's analysis.

ADJOURNMENT

**** MR. IGNERI MOVED TO ADJOURN
** MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY**

There were no further comments and the Special Meeting was adjourned at 6:43 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Rosemarie Lombardi
Telesco Secretarial Services