

CITY OF NORWALK
PLANNING COMMISSION – SPECIAL MEETING
January 15, 2019

PRESENT: Frances DiMeglio, Chair; David Davidson; Brian Baxendale; Tammy Langalis; Mike Mushak; Mary Peniston; Steve Ferguson; Nora King

STAFF: Steve Kleppin; Mike Wrinn

OTHERS: Larissa Brown; Nancy Rosett; Steve Bartush; John Pinto; John Romano; Lisa Briton; Donna Smirniotopoulos; Mike McGuire; Jason Milligan; Adolph Neidermyer

I. CALL TO ORDER

Ms. DiMeglio called the meeting to order at 7:17 p.m.

II. INTRODUCTION

Mr. Kleppin gave introductions and then a brief review of how the draft of the Plan of Conservation and Development (“POCD”) progressed including the oversight committee, neighborhood meetings and workshops. He explained the matrix of comments. He also noted that there would be a second meeting the following week.

III. PRESENTATION OF NORWALK CITYWIDE PLAN: 2019-2029

Larissa Brown discussed the state requirements, through a PowerPoint presentation, and how it was different from the last plan. She said that it was much thinner and a list of projects. She also discussed the vision and what the city hoped to accomplish. It was the big picture and trends that the city saw happening. She discussed the strengths which included its proximity to New York City, the waterfront and private development. The weaknesses included the fragmentation and traffic congestion. She noted the opportunities including the mixed use and TOD developments, and tourism economy. She discussed what the oversight committee had prioritized which included rewriting the zoning regulations, establish an economic development office and the city website more customer friendly. She noted the top priorities for the 10 year plan which included industrial zones, retail and open spaces plan. She also discussed transportation problems and noted that Norwalk could fix the problems within their boundaries. She then made reference to a handout that had left for the members of the public to review. She also discussed that Norwalk did not have strong economic development leadership. She spoke about enhanced transportation and connectivity throughout the city as well as the school system. The draft plan noted that the zoning regulations should be on line and more user friendly. It also noted that there should be a better plan for open spaces and enhanced protection of environmental resources. The housing plan should be revamped. The Climate Action Plan should be implemented. There are opportunities for the he Historic Preservation

Plan which included tourism. There were also opportunities for higher education activity in downtown Norwalk. She also suggested that there be an annual public review of implementation progress.

IV. PUBLIC COMMENT

Ms. DiMeglio then began to read names of anyone that had signed the sheet to speak.

Nancy Rosett, a member of the Bike/Walk Commission. She read from a letter that had been previously submitted. She asked that there be a definition of complete streets in the POCD. She also suggested that the city allow streets to be closed off from motorized vehicles for biking and walking events. She also asked to incorporate the increase of the use of walking routes.

Steve Bartush, a member of the Norwalk Shellfish Commission, felt that the sea had been omitted from the plan and it didn't equally support the sea. He noted that the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection ("D.E.E.P.") agreed with the Shellfish Commission and quoted from a letter sent to them and the Planning and Zoning Department. He said that he had not received a response from the Planning and Zoning Department. He also requested that the Shellfish Commission help draft language for the POCD. Mr. Kleppin said that some of their comments had been addressed in a revised version of the POCD which Mr. Bartush did not have.

John Pinto, Norwalk Harbor Commission, requested that there be no action on the POCD until proposed amendments is reviewed to make sure it is consistent with the Harbor Management Plan. He explained the Harbor Commission's input in the draft. He said that the Harbor Management Plan is similar to the POCD but was approved by the state of Connecticut. They have to complement one another. They must review all proposals that affect the harbor. He noted that there should have been a separate section for the Harbor Management Plan and because there is not one, then it is not adequate. It was noted by D.E.E.P. as well as in letters to the Planning and Zoning Department and the consultant. He also said that the Harbor Commission would review the draft before it was adopted and then explained that the POCD had to be consistent with the Harbor Management Plan once it was final.

John Romano, Harbor Management commissioner, noted that the POCD did not seem to reflect comments that were given to the consultant and Mr. Kleppin over the many months of drafting. He also thought that the schedule for the POCD to be finalized seemed aggressive and he urged them not to rush.

Lisa Briton, 24 Highland Ave., had comments about the public school system. She noted that the school system is growing faster than the city is. She reminded everyone why they were revising the POCD. If it is not done, then the city is ineligible for state funds. She was concerned about the development of the water. She also noted that jobs were leaving the city and that funds sent to the state were not re-distributed back to Norwalk.

Donna Smirniotopoulos noted that while people were in this important meeting, there were city council members in the ordinance meeting. She also noted that she had been impacted by bad land use decisions. She said that the POCD or People's Plan, as she called it, should be a plan for making all neighborhoods better for everyone. She also thought that there was more time needed for the POCD. She thought there was no vision or single focus. She said that the Coalition of Neighborhoods did not hear from any Planning Commissioners when they sent them a letter several months prior. She was concerned that the amount of rentals was growing to the detriment of the growth of property taxes.

Mike McGuire agreed with the previous speaker, and owner of 64 Wall Street. He thought that the Wall Street was growing with small businesses. He noted that the small offices are empty because of the owners. He also wondered why there was no train station at Wall St. He said the Wall Street area was large and that the gig industry would be helped with a train station. He also noted that there would be more apartments coming in the area. He said that the new Wall Street Plan was not necessary and let the market decide.

Jason Milligan said he was encouraged by the goals of the POCD. He attended several of the POCD meetings and they were engaging. He discussed the themes especially the Wall Street area since it was so unique. He thought that the Wall Street should be looked at as one area as a village district, with its own rules. He thought that some regulations made it harder to develop. He thought that certain projects could be fast tracked. He also thought that the Planning and Zoning Department should be separate from the Redevelopment Agency. He thought their role in the POCD was a conflict. He also noted that it seemed like the Redevelopment Agency was also putting out a plan, simultaneously to this plan. He thought it was the wrong time for it. He believed that the Redevelopment Agency was running the city. He thought the plan looked good but thought that the city should take some "smaller wins".

Ms. King asked Mr. McGuire for his input on page 191 of the Plan as it discussed re-opening the Wall Street train station. She asked him to submit his comments.

Adolph Neidermyer said that he thought the plan was reasonably good but what was missing was where to start. He was concerned that there had been 2 important meetings happening at City Hall that evening. He noted that everything should follow this plan and that the Wall St. plan should not be approved before the POCD.

V. COMMISSION ACTION

Ms. DiMeglio noted that there would be another meeting next Tuesday at 7 p.m.

VI. ADJOURNMENT

Ms. Langalis made a Motion to Adjourn.

Mr. Mushak seconded.

Frances DiMeglio; David Davidson; Brian Baxendale; Tammy Langalis; Mike Mushak; Mary Peniston; Steve Ferguson; Nora King voted in favor.

No one opposed.

No one abstained.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:50 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Diana Palmentiero