

**CITY OF NORWALK
PLANNING COMMITTEE
REGULAR MEETING
MARCH 7, 2019**

ATTENDANCE: John Kydes, Chair; John Igneri; George Tsiranides; Eloisa Melendez, Barbara Smyth; Tom Livingston; Doug Hempstead

OTHERS: Tim Sheehan, Executive Director, Redevelopment Agency; Tami Strauss, Community Development Director, Sabrina Church, Community Development Planner

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Mr. Kydes called the public participation portion of the meeting to order at 7:00PM. A quorum was present.

Mr. Michael McGuire - 64 Wall Street

Mr. McGuire submitted the following document into the record:

Robust public policy comes from robust public debate. Agreed?..... 3 minutes is not a debate

Why I came to Wall Street:

- I knew the market could not miss this.
- This area was perfect for what we saw coming-dynamic growth of small business driven by the computer.
- The Wall Street area could not miss-access, location and linkage, character, affordability and small size.
- Wall-West-Main area is the heart and soul of small business in Fairfield County. Don't suffocate this neighborhood with this flawed plan. CC members- educate yourself why the plan is flawed. I've touched on that in the written material I provided after the last meeting.

I'm also publicly stating here that I am all in favor of redevelopment agencies, economic development, tax incentives, etc.

- But only if they are done fairly, under scrutiny, and well vetted with robust public debate.
- Why? Because the complexity and complicated nature of these programs and plans leaves us all wide-open to abuse. Particularly if you don't fully understand the pros and cons of the request before you.

- Without robust public debate policy makers will get lazy and sloppy-why because they have no competition.

All we, the members of the Wall Street Neighborhood Association, are asking for is a fair shake-

- We have serious concerns with this plan.
 - Therefore, as our representatives so should you.
 - We are not making unsupportable or crazy claims.
 - We are well informed, some of us are highly experienced professionals in this area, and all of us are successful small business people.
- Therefore, we are asking/demanding the following:
 - Table the plan as is.
 - Redo the blight/deterioration analysis.
 - Have it done by a well vetted firm that is independent of the RDA.
 - Allow those of us who are expert in this area help craft the scope of service, participate in the vetting process, review the final report, and request clarification etc. If necessary.
- Without this level of participation all of us, CC members included, are at the mercy of lazy and sloppy policy like the Wall-West Plan.

Jason Milligan- Wall Street

Mr. Milligan stated that Mr. Sheehan's testimony in court had ended today with him confirming what they had suspected which is that the Redevelopment Plan that was created in 2004 for the Wall Street area had expired in 2014, and was extended until June 2018 and has now been expired for almost one year. He also said that the LDA will need to be done again because there is not an active site plan, building permit or active anything and to give it life again will cost the taxpayers a fortune. He said that nobody would come into this section of town and determine this area to be a slum, and the State Statute is clear and chapter 130 is what gives Redevelopment Agencies their right to exist and the preamp is very clear, and the steps that should be taken before the extraordinary step is taken of determining an area to be a redevelopment plan area, and is also very clear and it is not something that should be done without public participation. He said in this instance there are three properties that have been issued blight violations and two are POKO and the other instance of blight in the entire redevelopment plan area is for a porch at the Congregational Church and warned that a lawsuit is coming. He said normally when there is a blighted situation that any help from the city would be welcomed and that is not what is happening and the exact opposite is happening and an entire neighborhood association has been formed to help. He said to determine the area to be a slum area is probably fraud and there is more than one person gathering a report to bring to the FBI.

CALL TO ORDER

Mr. Kydes called the meeting to order at 7:12PM.

I. ADMINISTRATION

A. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

1. February 7, 2019

**** MR. IGNERI MOVED TO APPROVE THE MINUTES.**

**** THE MOTION PASSED WITH SIX (6) IN FAVOR AND (1) ABSTENTION- MS. SMYTH**

II. COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT BLOCK GRANT (CDBG)

A. Recommend CDBG PY45 funding allocations.

Ms. Church stated that they have received over 30 applications this year totaling over \$25 million dollars in requests, but only have an estimated \$880,000 to be able to be disbursed but she will not know the actual allocation numbers until they receive notification. She said the Planning Committee will participate in the approval process on the Annual Action Plan which is the application of sorts to HUD with the estimated amounts and then will receive final signatures on the actual allocation amounts, but who was approved will be read into the minutes and the amounts approved can only change by 10%. Mr. Kydes asked how much was received last year. Ms. Church said \$80,000 more than they had anticipated.

Mr. Kydes read the CDBG recommendations from the Common Council members as follows:

For Services:

- Child Guidance Center - \$20,000
- Domestic Violence Crisis Center- \$25,000
- East Norwalk Library- \$7,000
- Higher Education Learning Professionals- \$14,000
- Open Door Shelter- \$35,000
- Person to Person- \$28,560
- Senior Services Coordinating Council- \$15,000

For Facilities:

- Carver Center- \$25,733
- Homefront- \$15,000
- Keystone House-\$20,857
- Norwalk Senior Center- \$50,000
- Norwalk Redevelopment Agency obo City of Norwalk- \$346,760
- Open Door Shelter- \$50,000

**** MR. IGNERI MOVED TO APPROVE THE FUNDING ALLOCATIONS AS READ.**

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY**

- B. Advance the draft PY45 Annual Action Plan to public comment from March 25, 2019 to April 23, 2019, with a contingency provision for the final allocation by HUD.

Ms. Church said that the Annual Action Plan will be posted online for people to view and comment on.

- C. Approve scheduling a public hearing g on the draft AAP during the Planning Committee meeting on April 4, 2019.

****MR. LIVINGSTON MOVED TO APPROVE THE ITEM.**

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

- D. Advance to the Common Council permission to authorize the Mayor to submit waiver requests related to the CDBG program HUD on behalf of the affected persons as identified by the PY45 Public Disclosure forms.

****MS. MELENDEZ MOVED TO APPROVE THE ITEM.**

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY**

- E. Approve advancing the extension of the contract with the Redevelopment Agency for CDBG Program Administration for the years 2020 to 2025.

****MS. SMYTH MOVED TO APPROVE THE ITEM.**

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

- F. Advance to the Common Council a request for permission to authorize the Chair of the Norwalk Redevelopment Agency to execute a contract with Mullin & Lonergan Associates, LLC in an amount not to exceed \$49,200 from CDBG Administration funds (Fund300) to complete the 2020-2025 Consolidated Planning process.

Ms. Church said they had gone out for and RFP process on February 1, 2019, and they were due back on March 1, 2019 and received two responses for the plan and she has chosen the firm with more experience. Mr. Livingston asked if there was a big difference in price. Ms. Church said “yes” and the firm she chose was \$10,000 less than the alternative.

****MR. IGNERI MOVED TO APPROVE THE ITEM.**

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

III. REDEVELOPMENT PLANS & PROJECTS

- A. Action- Advancement of the Wall Street-West Avenue Redevelopment Plan to the Common Council. (See link below)

<https://www.norwalkct.org/DocumentCenter/View/14232/2-28-19-REDEV-FINAL-Draft>

Ms. Strauss said since the plan was provided and reviewed by the committee at the January meeting there have been no changes to the plan, and that they have met publically on the plan seven times since the creation of the document. Mr. Kydes asked when was the first meeting the committee had. Ms. Strauss said February 1, 2018. Mr. Livingston asked how many public hearings have been held regarding the plan. Ms. Strauss said there have been over 40. Mr. Livingston asked why the plan was created and what the advantages of the plan are. Ms. Strauss provided a background and said this urban neighborhood has seen some development and infrastructure improvements over the last 10 years, yet still does not exhibit the signs of a healthy urban environment economically, physically or socially. Despite the population density is too low, highly visible sites are not built out to their highest and best use, there is significant commercial and ground floor vacancy, and there is a lack of appropriate urban amenities.

She said that this plan does the following:

- Sets forth the vision of participating stakeholders for how the plan area should be built out over the next ten years
- Provides implementation recommendations for achieving that vision.
- Provides a framework for developers, business owners, area intuition and the city when advancing developments.
- Analytically identifies priority development sites and associated uses that would serve as a catalyst for future neighborhood investment.

- Provides the planning context for zoning amendments towards achieving the vision.
- Provides the basis for capital improvements for public infrastructure and open space improvements.
- Sets design guidelines that would ensure the preservation of the desired physical character of the neighborhood for new construction, historic preservation and adaptive reuse.
- Provides the statutory framework required if at some point, eminent domain is deemed necessary for the benefit to the community with Common Council approval.
- Enhances funding applications to State and Federal financial grant and loan resources, some of which require a finding of deteriorated/deteriorating conditions.

Mr. Livingston asked if the loan for the Wall Street Theater was applied for on the basis of the plan. Ms. Strauss said “yes”, it was applied for from HUD on the basis of slum and blight. Mr. Livingston asked if there is any significance to the fact that the existing plan is expired. Mr. Sheehan said “no”, the intent ultimately was to advance forward with the new plan and let both of the old plans lapse.

Mr. Hempstead asked how many people live and work in Norwalk. Ms. Strauss said there are 6500 jobs in the Wall Street and West Avenue Redevelopment Plan area and that the Norwalk Hospital is the top employer, South Norwalk has 3200 employees and the City of Norwalk has 41,000 employees. She said out of the people that work in Norwalk 25% live in Norwalk. Mr. Hempstead said there are not enough jobs in Norwalk for the people that live here and we are creating more living space but not more work space. Ms. Strauss said that the plan calls for both commercial and residential recommendations. Mr. Sheehan said that the fundamental problem is that the census tract has gotten one of the lowest population numbers in the entire city next to Silvermine, and this is the heart of the city’s urban corridor and in order to have a vibrant urban environment there needs to be a residential base to support the businesses seeking to operate in that area. Mr. Hempstead asked if parking requirements are waived. Ms. Strauss said they have recommended reducing the parking requirement in the plan to 0.7 spaces per micro unit.

Mr. Kydes said that he thinks the plan gives the tools and direction needed to improve the area.

Mr. Hempstead asked if there is an amount included in the plan that the city will need to invest to make the area more attractive. Mr. Sheehan said “no”, the plan lays the priorities out that should be invested in the capital budget and should be consistent with the POCD. Ms. Strauss said that one of them is implementing the Freese Park Master Plan and the first phase has gone through the capital budget process. Mr. Hempstead asked if a train station is included in the plan. Ms. Strauss said “yes” and it states that the State has undertaken a Wall Street Train Station feasibility study and whatever the findings are the city and the Redevelopment Agency support the finding.

- ** MR. IGNERI MOVED TO ADVANCE THE WALL STREET-WEST AVENUE REDEVELOPMENT PLAN TO THE COMMON COUNCIL.**
**** THE MOTION PASSED WITH SIX (6) IN FAVOR AND ONE (1) ABSTENTION- MR. HEMPSTEAD.**

IV. OLD BUSINESS

There was no old business discussed this evening.

V. NEW BUSINESS

There was no new business discussed this evening.

ADJOURNMENT

- ** MS. MELENDEZ MOVED TO ADJOURN.**
**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

The meeting adjourned at 8:05PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Dilene Byrd
Telesco Secretarial Services