

**CITY OF NORWALK
PLANNING COMMITTEE
SPECIAL MEETING
JULY 2, 2019**

ATTENDANCE: John Kydes, Chair; Mayor Harry Rilling; John Igneri;
Thomas Livingston; Eloisa Melendez; Barbara Smyth;
George Tsiranides;

STAFF: Mario Coppola, Corporation Counsel;
Timothy Sheehan, Executive Director;
Tami Strauss, Director of Community Development, Norwalk
Redevelopment Agency

CALL TO ORDER

Mr. Kydes called the special meeting to order at 7:01 p.m.

ROLL CALL

Mr. Kydes called the Roll.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

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

Mr. Kydes asked the speakers to keep their comments to three minutes.

Mr. Marc Alan asked if there was an alternative plan for the Garden Cinema and if it would be purchased and donated to the Wall Street Neighborhood Association as a non-profit arts center.

Mr. Jason Milligan pointed out that the site plan depicts Isaac Street as one way and a dead end. He asked Citibank to solve that. He said there are more questions that need to be answered. Mr. Milligan said the Mayor said there are only two choices. He asked if the \$80 million government bailout is the only choice. He said that since an economic analysis was not done, the Planning Committee could

not make a decision. He said that Norwalk is currently fining Citibank for blight and Zoning violations and that could be collected under the do-nothing solution. Mr. Milligan asked the Committee to table the vote and have the Chief of Economic Development conduct an economic analysis.

Mr. Todd Bryant said the project is affordable, not low income. He said this is a signature building for Wall Street and it better be good. If it is a stock design, it will destroy the street. Mr. Bryant presented an alternative drawing and said it was a statement building that people will remember. He added that there are better ways to use the ground floor.

Mr. John Levin said that he understood that a large component is affordable housing and said that he hoped more affordable housing comes to Norwalk.

Ms. Diane Keefe said she was completely in favor of affordable housing and would like to see the Garden Cinema be a non-profit arts center. She said she loved the design presented by Mr. Bryant. She said that \$800,000 per unit is odd and suggested designing something that fits the neighborhood. Ms. Keefe suggested that people who are in the Section 8 category be put on a path to home ownership.

Mr. Michael McGuire said he read that none of the developers endorsed the project and that no alternatives were looked at. He suggested that Plan B could be to get interested parties to look at different scenarios and that it be done openly. Mr. McGuire said that Citibank does not hold the cards and suggested tabling this item and discuss this further. It has been going on for 10 years.

Ms. Diane Lauricella said she was impressed by the developers who were asked for their opinion. This is not a good project as presented. She asked the Committee to press the hold button and said that she would like to see whatever project is approved to include the Garden Cinema. Ms. Lauricella asked the Common Council to hire a third party for advice and someone without a conflict of interest.

Ms. Lauricella said she was disappointed in the Redevelopment Agency and how this project has gone the way it has. She said the public would rather see a well thought out building.

Ms. Lisa Brinton said she agreed with Mr. Bryant and that they need to look at the aesthetics of the building. She said she has been talking to residents who asked about the tax increase and Citibank getting a deal no one else gets. She said the building will add 10 children without the corresponding tax for the City. This is a deal that bails out Citibank. Ms. Brinton asked that other options be explored.

Mr. Bill Collins, former Mayor asked if the City was in a position that would lead to foreclose on the property.

Attorney Mario Coppola said that if the project does not move forward, in many years the City and Redevelopment Agency could file for dispute resolution. He added that eventually, many years in the future, they could get to the position of judgement where they could foreclose.

Ms. Debora Goldstein said the process by which this project was revealed is troublesome. The LDA has been reportedly expired for a year. She said that Mr. Bryant presented a beautiful drawing and suggested the City do the right thing.

Mr. Rich Bonenfant said that low income apartments with reduced parking is a formula for problems. He asked where the children living in the three-bedroom apartments will go to school and play.

Attorney Dan Benjamin, representing Mr. Diaz said he did not see a utility plan in the new proposal. He also said he did not see a new traffic study regarding this plan and asked if there is a potential danger exiting the parking lot.

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

1. **WALL STREET – WEST AVENUE REDEVELOPMENT AREA**

1. **Presentation of Municipal Holdings LLC, Proposal for Phase I of the Wall Street Place Project**

Mr. Kydes announced that no votes would be cast this evening.

Mr. Sheehan gave an overview of the project, noting that the parties have been in negotiations for five years. He said the project has to be economically feasible and there is a credible proposal that should be advanced to the public process. There are several approvals that are needed to move it forward.

Attorney William Hennessy introduced his team and said that Citibank has full confidence in this project. He gave an overview of the original project. He said the plan being presented tonight has been signed off by Citibank. This is the first of many meetings where the plan will be vetted. He said that all of the reports will come in the near term. Mr. Hennessy said they are here tonight to talk about the general plan concept.

Mr. Todd McClutchy gave an overview of who they are and some of the developments they've worked on. He introduced Mr. John McClutchy and their partners the Richmond Group. He explained that they were approached by Citibank to work on this project. He said that Citibank was going to take a loss, but they will move forward.

Mr. Kydes asked about the Heights in Darien. Mr. McClutchy said a developer was chosen for that 106 unit project, but when they did not work out, they got involved. Neighbors complained that the project devalued their homes, but that did not happen.

Mr. McClutchy said that as part of the process for this project, they will meet with the neighbors. He noted that they hold on to their properties and they intend to keep the POKO property.

Mr. Kydes said that there are concerns that this project will fall into disrepair due to the affordable units. Mr. McClutchy said the rents are subsidized to offset the costs. In addition, there are adequate reserves to keep the project viable. Due to the concentration of housing in CT, they are well able to manage their properties. They have a combined relationship with a management company.

The Architect and Mr. McClutchy reviewed the project and presented the concept drawings.

Mr. Livingston asked about the approval process. Mr. Sheehan explained that it had to go through various reviews. Mr. Hennessy said that this property is located

within an historic district, but is not an historic building. He said they are dealing with a building that was approved and this plan finishes that building.

The Architect reviewed the site plan and said that based on newly adopted regulations, this design is fully compliant in terms of Zoning. There is no change to the footprint of the approved 2015 plan.

Mr. Kydes asked about the amenities. The Architect said that it will have a community room and fitness center.

The Architect and Mr. McClutchy reviewed the exterior materials and the parking garage. Mr. Livingston asked if they considered incorporating retail space in the parking garage. Mr. McClutchy said they did not want to lose parking spaces or detract from retail in the other building.

Mr. Livingston asked about the proposed traffic flow. Mr. Hennessy said that it will stay the same as it is now. Mr. McClutchy said that one recommendation is to keep it the way it is now or look at options for a turnaround. He said the parking rates will be comparable with other parking facilities in the City. Mayor Rilling added that the City is prepared to make the traffic flow two ways at any time.

Mr. McClutchy reviewed the income and rental mix that is being proposed. It said that it allows them to create various groupings of workforce housing. Most of the units are one – two bedrooms. The 60% - 80% rent levels are comparable to other developments in Norwalk. He said that the people the mall will employ, will be able to live there and walk to work, instead of driving.

Mr. Livingston asked what rules govern annual rent increases. Mr. McClutchy said that every year HUD comes out with a study and rents are published by HUD. He said that this year the increase was 6 ½%, but normally rents increase 2 – 2½%. When each resident is interviewed there is an income verification process so that people are not overburdened.

Mr. Livingston asked about source use. Mr. McClutchy said that a considerable amount has been spent to date. Mr. Livingston asked why the project costs \$80 million. Mr. McClutchy said there are a lot of components to this project, including acquisition costs. Mr. Livingston asked about the City's obligation. Mr. McClutchy said there is a component for public infrastructure. They are using tax

exempt bonds that are sponsored by a local agency and issued by the State. Mr. Livingston asked if that is the Redevelopment Agency. Mr. Sheehan said that it could be. He said that \$4.4 million has been spent and that could be available for Phase I, then it will be up to the City.

Mr. Coppola said that the developer is paying for the public infrastructure cost and is being reimbursed from that. It has to be completed to the satisfaction of the City. Mr. Sheehan added that a major sewer relocation is necessary for this project.

Mr. Kydes asked about the Garden Cinema. Mr. McClutchy said he had several conversations with the owner. The owner planned to sell and recently closed a similar theater in Stamford. He said that the arts and cultural aspect are important and a main focus ought to lend itself to the area.

Ms. Smyth asked if they would consider art installation in the stand-alone parking garage. Mr. Hennessy said that was an interesting idea.

Mr. Livingston asked about taxes that will be received. Mr. Coppola said that the formula is similar to other affordable housing projects in the City. He said that he understood that it is similar to other towns. Mr. McClutchy said that it will be \$195,000 per year for fifteen years. After that the property will be taxed on an assessment.

Ms. Melendez asked what happens after July 18th. Mr. Sheehan said they need to deliberate what comes out of this meeting and the public hearing. He described the approval process and said this is not the end of public comments. He said that as much as people think this is the project, there will be further changes to the project.

Mr. Igneri asked for a timeline. Mr. Sheehan said that he could not give a timeline for the public process.

Mr. Tsiranides asked for a construction timeline. Mr. McClutchy said that once everything is in place, construction is targeted to take 12 – 14 months.

Mr. McClutchy invited anyone to see their other developments. He added that they can arrange tours for limited numbers of the public. Mr. Coppola said that he anticipates having the LDA ready to present to the Common Council next week for their review. He said there will be multiple opportunities to see the plans.

**** MR. IGNERI MOVED THE FOLLOWING ITEM**

**2. ADVANCE MUNICIPAL HOLDINGS LLC'S PROPOSAL FOR
PHASE I OF THE WALL STREET PLACE PROJECT TO PUBLIC
HEARING ON JULY 18, 2019**

**** MOTION PASSED WITH ONE (1) ABSTENTION (MR.
LIVINGSTON)**

ADJOURNMENT

**** MR. IGNERI MOVED TO ADJOURN**

**** MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY**

There was no further business and the meeting was unanimously adjourned at 9:01 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Rosemarie Lombardi
Telesco Secretarial Services