

CITY OF NORWALK
SPECIAL MEETING OF THE PLANNING COMMISSION
October 23, 2019

PRESENT: Frances DiMeglio, Chair; John Lesko; Steven Ferguson; Mike Mushak (left at 7:55 p.m.); Nora King; Brian Baxendale

STAFF: Steve Kleppin; Mike Wrinn

OTHERS: Kartik Shah

I. CALL TO ORDER

Ms. DiMeglio called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m.

II. ROLL CALL

Mr. Kleppin called the roll.

III. DISCUSSION OF OTHER ITEMS

a) Update on East Avenue TOD study

Mr. Kleppin introduced Kartik Shah from Harriman who was presenting to the commissioners from Boston via videoconferencing. This would be an update on the East Avenue TOD study. He also mentioned that Mr. Baxendale is on the Oversight Committee for this study.

Mr. Shah continued the presentation and noted that they had been working on it for 8 months. The goal is to change the area around the East Avenue train station to one that is vibrant and walkable. They would be focusing on the area which is within a half mile radius of the train station. He discussed the stakeholders that they had met with for the study. He described meetings with the public and a survey that had been done. They also had a survey for commuters at the train station. They asked what is working in the area and what is not working. He described the pros and cons which included the green spaces, restaurants and sidewalks. Some said those sidewalks could be improved upon. Parking was also a challenge.

Mr. Shah discussed the measures of success for the study which included improving the quality of life for everyone in East Norwalk. He said they would make recommendations to preserve the residential character of the neighborhood. They would also recommend ways to support the local businesses to bring in jobs. They would also encourage appropriately scaled development by creating focused areas of activities.

Mr. Shah also discussed working with the Oversight Committee on what the recommendations could look like. There would zoning guidelines for these recommendations.

He then discussed Winfield Street and East Avenue. He also discussed the scale of the buildings that were recommended which were 3- 3 ½ stories. During the public workshops, citizens also requested amenities in the area.

He discussed how to enhance leisure opportunities. They suggested improvements to sidewalks, office park plazas, etc. which could activate the streetscape. Since there is water surrounding the East Norwalk area, they would make recommendations to improve the access to it. They would like to promote new open spaces in the area. He discussed Seaview Avenue and Veteran's Memorial Park which is another asset. There could be seating areas, exercise areas, trails, etc. Mr. Shah noted that cemetery areas could be used respectfully as parks for concerts, etc. Access would have to be improved in order to do that.

Mr. Shah noted that parking is limited in the East Norwalk area and would have to be monitored to avoid conflicts between commuters and residents. He discussed ways in which to do that as well as how to get people to managed parking areas. He again noted that sidewalks would have to be improved for people walking to the train station.

He discussed traffic patterns to help improve mobility. He also discussed how to improve the area for bike lanes. If safety was improved more people could ride their bikes to the train station.

Mr. Shah then discussed next steps for the study which would include recommendations for zoning and design guidelines. He noted that Mr. Kleppin would have to update the Plan of Conservation and Development ("POCD").

There was a discussion about the maps which showed the areas of focus. There are some areas near the train station that had been flagged. There was also a discussion about making some areas feel more like a village. There had been some interest about making areas outside the study area included in this and have it become more walkable.

There was a discussion about improving walkability on Strawberry Avenue, as well as improving it everywhere. Sidewalks should be added to the study. He showed them a picture of what is currently in the area as well as what is proposed.

There was a discussion about cemeteries in the area. Mr. Shah pointed out that in earlier times; they were used for picnics, as well as parks. In some cities where there is not a lot of open space, they are being used as open space again. Some of the other

cemeteries around Norwalk are being used for historical recreations, concerts, etc. There was a discussion about how many people could fit. There was also a discussion about the traffic in the area. Many vehicles speed on these one way streets. Mr. Shah noted the streets that they had studied including Van Zant St., and Belden St. He noted that they could also change the circulation around the Ludlow Square. It was suggested to study having rotaries at each end so that there would be a constant flow of traffic. It was felt that this area could become congested around rush hour times.

Mr. Kleppin discussed the next steps which included a community meeting on November 18, 2019. They discussed a target date for a return to the Planning Commission for a review in January or February of 2020. An amendment would be needed to the POCD.

b) Subdivision #3647 – 35 Meeker Court LLC – 35 Meeker Court – 4 lots – Status report of sedimentation & erosion controls – Report & recommended action

Mr. Wrinn said that an engineer went to the site. He also noted that a 3rd foundation would be started in the middle of November. He also said that they have not seen water coming off the site at this time. He said that the staff constantly checks on the property. It was noted that the first house had not been sold yet.

c) Zoning Commission Referral –#8-19R - Proposed amendments to Articles 10 and 50 to revise the definition of brew pub and remove definition of healthcare facilities and related technical amendments – Report & recommended action

Mr. Kleppin noted that there had been changes to definitions for brewpubs. It had been made more restricted so that they were making it less restrictive now. They are encouraging this use. They are also removing the healthcare facilities definition.

***** MS. DIMEGLIO MOVED: BE IT RESOLVED** that the proposed amendments to the Building Zone Regulations as shown on a certain document entitled “#8-19R - Zoning Commission – Proposed amendments to Articles 10 and 50 to revise the definition of brew pub and remove definition of healthcare facilities and related technical amendments” and dated September 19, 2019, be approved;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the reasons for this action are:

- 1) To implement the Plan of Conservation and Development goal to “Examine and modify existing zoning where necessary to achieve the goals of this plan” (F.2.1, p. 42); and
- 2) To implement the Plan of Conservation and Development goal to “Strengthen the revitalization of the West Avenue, Wall Street, and Reed Putnam areas by encouraging mixed-use development (i.e. offices, stores, services, restaurants and theaters together with housing, parks and cultural facilities)” (A.3.1.2, p.12); and

3) To implement the Plan of Conservation and Development goal to “Preserve the character of neighborhood businesses and neighborhood businesses districts” (A.4.1.4, p.13); and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that notice of this action be forwarded to the Norwalk Zoning Commission.

Mr. Ferguson seconded.

Frances DiMeglio; John Lesko; Steven Ferguson; Mike Mushak; Nora King; Brian Baxendale approved.

No one opposed.

No one abstained.

d) Update on 2019-2020 POCD

Mr. Kleppin noted that there were some meetings with the Harbor Commission about Chapter 9 of the POCD. They also had discussions with Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (“DEEP”). He described meetings with Common Council. Mr. Kleppin described next steps. The Common Council had voted on consent the previous evening. There was also a discussion about the final POCD as well as the final payment. There was a discussion about studies on the East Ave. TOD and the Master Plan for the Dept. of Parks and Recreation which should be added to the POCD. It was suggested that the Zoning Department staff should be involved with it. Mr. Kleppin said he had sat in on some meetings but would most likely assign it to another staff member.

***** MS. DIMEGLIO MOVED: WHEREAS**, the Planning Commission met on October 23, 2019 and made the following findings:

WHEREAS, the City of Norwalk established an Oversight Committee to aid and guide the development of the Plan of Conservation and Development;

WHEREAS, the Oversight Committee was comprised of the Mayor, members of the Common Council, the Planning Commission, Zoning Commission, several other City bodies, City staff and members of the public;

WHEREAS, the City held over twenty (20) different public meetings, including community forums, focus groups and community events to solicit questions and information from the public;

WHEREAS, City staff and the consultant collected data and input through surveys, interviews and focus groups;

WHEREAS, a draft plan was prepared and the Planning Commission held public hearings on January 15, 2019 and January 22, 2019;

WHEREAS, the draft plan was referred to CT DEEP, CT OPM, WESTCOG, the Norwalk Harbor Management Commission and the towns of Darien, New Canaan, Wilton and Westport;

WHEREAS, no comments were received from CT OPM or any abutting municipality;

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WHEREAS, WESTCOG indicated that the Plan is well researched and that the goals and strategies set forth in the Draft Plan are compatible with those of the regional plan. WestCOG will be working in support of the new Norwalk Plan of Conservation and Development;

WHEREAS, comments were received from CT DEEP and the Harbor Management Commission, to which the Planning Commission authorized amendments to the Plan which were subsequently accepted by CT DEEP and the Harbor Management Commission;

WHEREAS, the Planning Commission formally referred the draft Plan to the Norwalk Common Council for consideration on August 6, 2019;

WHEREAS, the Common Council unanimously adopted the Plan on September 24, 2019, with amendments, and authorized the Mayor to sign the Citywide Plan once the amendments were incorporated and approved by the Planning Commission;

WHEREAS, the Harbor Management Commission submitted additional comments on Chapter 9, (Coastal Resources and Resilience), on September 24, 2019 which had not been considered by the Common Council;

WHEREAS, Planning and Zoning staff and CT DEEP had no objections to the additional modifications the Harbor Management Commission submitted;

WHEREAS, the Planning Commission referred the modified Chapter 9 to the Common Council for consideration on October 2, 2019;

WHEREAS, the Common Council unanimously adopted the modified Chapter 9 on October 22, 2019 and authorized the Mayor to sign the Citywide Plan once the amendments previously approved, and the modified Chapter 9, were incorporated and approved by the Planning Commission;

WHEREAS, The Planning Commission of the City of Norwalk met on October 23, 2019 and adopted the following resolution by the vote of 6 to 0:

THEREFORE, be it resolved that the Planning Commission of the City of Norwalk recommends adoption of the Norwalk Citywide Plan: 2019-2029, Plan of Conservation and Development, with the modifications contained in Attachment A and the inclusion of the modified Chapter 9;

THEREFORE, be it further resolved that the Norwalk Citywide Plan: 2019-2029, Plan of Conservation and Development, be effective upon adoption of the Planning Commission and signature of the Mayor.

Mr. Baxendale seconded.

Frances DiMeglio; John Lesko; Steven Ferguson; Mike Mushak; Nora King; Brian Baxendale approved.

No one opposed.

No one abstained.

e) Discussion of performance metrics

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Mr. Kleppin asked if this could be tabled until Ms. Peniston was present since she was interested in this matter.

At this point of the meeting, Mr. Mushak left.

IV. APPROVAL OF MINUTES: June 18, 2019; August 20, 2019; September 17, 2019

***** MS. DIMEGLIO MOVED** to accept the **June 18, 2019** Planning Commission meeting with the changes.

Mr. Ferguson seconded.

Frances DiMeglio; Steven Ferguson; Nora King; Brian Baxendale approved.

No one opposed.

John Lesko abstained.

***** MS. DIMEGLIO MOVED** to accept the **August 20, 2019** Planning Commission meeting.

Mr. Lesko seconded.

Frances DiMeglio; Steven Ferguson; John Lesko; Brian Baxendale approved.

No one opposed.

Nora King abstained.

***** MS. DIMEGLIO MOVED** to accept the **August 20, 2019** Planning Commission meeting with the changes.

Mr. Lesko seconded.

Frances DiMeglio; Steven Ferguson; John Lesko; Nora King approved.

No one opposed.

Brian Baxendale abstained.

There was a discussion about meeting with several department heads ahead of the budget cycle especially the Department of Public Works and Department of Parks and Recreation. Mr. Kleppin would set up a meeting for the November Planning Commission agenda.

There was a discussion about the commissioners receiving the TOD presentation that had been done earlier in the meeting.

V. COMMENTS OF DIRECTOR

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Mr. Kleppin discussed the Zoning regulations study and noted that the consultant was on time. The consultant had met with different stakeholders. There would also be a public forum for feedback on November 18, 2019. The consultant would give a presentation to the Zoning Commission which the Planning Commission would also attend. It would be a joint meeting, possibly on December 10.

VI. COMMENTS OF COMMISSIONERS

The commissioners discussed the SoNo Collection and whether they had seen it. Kiosks would be more permanent. There was concern about kids climbing on the railings but Mr. Wrinn noted that the Building Department had approved it.

There was a discussion about the outside electronic signage which the commissioners believed included advertising. Mr. Kleppin said that the applicant would be returning Zoning Commission about the sign manual.

VII. ADJOURNMENT

Ms. King made a Motion to Adjourn.

Mr. Ferguson seconded.

Frances DiMeglio; Brian Baxendale; John Lesko; Steven Ferguson voted in favor.

No one opposed.

No one abstained.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:17 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Diana Palmentiero