

CITY OF NORWALK
ZONING COMMISSION – SPECIAL MEETING
May 26, 2020

PRESENT: Louis Schulman, Chair; Galen Wells; Richard Roina; Joshua Goldstein (left the meeting at 7:50 p.m.); Stephanie Thomas; Nicholas Kantor; Rod Johnson and after the roll call Michael Witherspoon and Nate Sumpter (6:16 p.m.)

STAFF: Steve Kleppin; Bryan Baker

OTHERS: Atty David Waters

I. CALL TO ORDER

Mr. Schulman called the meeting to order at 6:03 p.m. It should be noted that this meeting was held on Zoom.com with all participants calling in, separately.

II. ROLL CALL

Mr. Kleppin called the roll. Mr. Schulman explained noted that the public hearing was a continuation from the last Zoning Commission hearing.

III. REVIEW AND ACTION ON NEW APPLICATIONS

a. #1-20M - Merritt Station Norwalk, LLC et all - 67, 69, 79, 87, 111, 117, 129, 135, 155, 156 & 201 Glover Avenue and 2 Oakwood Ave - Proposed change to the zoning map from AAA Residence and Business #2 zone to entirely Executive Office zone – Preliminary review and b. #2-20R - Merritt Station Norwalk, LLC et all - Proposed amendments to add a new definition for Executive Office Development Park and to permit the new use in the Executive Office zone and related technical amendments – Preliminary review and c. #2-20SPR - Merritt Station Norwalk, LLC et all - 67, 69, 79, 87, 111, 117, 129, 135, 155, 156 & 201 Glover Avenue and 2 Oakwood Ave – Site plan review of proposed Master Plan for Executive Office Development Park – Preliminary review

Mr. Schulman said that all three applications would be heard as one presentation. Mr. Kleppin began with a brief overview of the project which included an amendment to the Zoning Regulations and re-zoning of some parcels. The commissioners would receive the traffic study the following week.

Atty Waters began the presentation with an introduction and noting that he represented all of the owners of the properties. He then shared his screen which showed an overview of the project in a Powerpoint presentation. The project was currently known as North Seven and then he showed them the parcels on an aerial map. They are creating a “live, work, play environment” in this TOD area. He discussed the various zones that are currently in the area. He also noted that there would be a Master Plan which he showed on the map. This Master

Plan would have to be approved by the Zoning Commission. He then discussed another map which showed the current zones in the area and discussed what zone it would be changed to. He then showed them a vicinity map. He also explained the applicant's discussions with the state's Department of Transportation which included easements for the train station.

Atty Waters discussed why there would be a Master Plan. He said that after discussions with their current tenants in that area, they would like to live in a "live, work, play" area. What this pandemic has shown is that more people would like to work remotely but also be able to walk to the office, if need be. This would attract new corporate offices as well as retain those that are in the area now. He also showed them an aerial view of the existing conditions as well as the physical barriers which include the Norwalk River and the Metro-North train station.

Atty Waters then showed the proposed plans for the site which could change, depending on market conditions. He noted that this Master Plan was for 10 years, and would not be built in 1 year. It could include a hotel, warehouses and retail, such as delis, dry cleaners, etc. He then discussed the refurbished Metro-North train station which would enhance the connectivity from the Merritt 7 buildings to this new area. The Norwalk River Valley Trail would be enhanced as well. However, it will be moved to the west side of Route 7. There would also be spurs on the trail which would allow neighbors to walk throughout the neighborhood. He noted that the benefits of a Master Plan were it created certainty for both the applicant and the city. Atty Waters also noted that the applicant had not asked for any public funding such as tax breaks, etc. He said that the applicant had also provided an economic analysis for review.

Atty Waters showed them the massing plan which included the number of stories in each building, some of which were as high as 15 stories. However, he reminded them that the Merritt 7 buildings were actually 13 stories. He then discussed the parking garages. The next item he discussed were the different "neighborhoods" which even included a town square. There was a discussion about the dimensions which Atty Waters said he would have to find. Retail can be accessed from the town square. The public space areas are accessible to everyone in the area. The second neighborhood had green spaces which would also be open to the public. There would be connectivity to Oakwood Avenue. In some buildings there could be commuter parking spaces. Those costs would have to be worked on with the state. There would be some amenity spaces on higher floors that would be just for tenants. He also showed them the 3rd neighborhood.

Atty Waters then discussed the proposed zoning text. There was some discussion with staff whether the Executive Office Zone would have to be amended. There was then a discussion about the fact that if there should be any changes to the Master Plan, it must be reviewed by the Zoning Commission. Atty Waters also discussed the lot lines in the technical amendment so as not to create any non-conforming lots. He discussed proposed changes to the site plan under the Master Plan. He also discussed the proposed language for the parking levels as well as parking spaces. Atty Waters then discussed the proposed language for the signage package as well as the proposed language for the building height.

There was a discussion about having the applications be subject to site plan review vs. special permit review. Mr. Schulman thought that this should be a further discussion amongst the Zoning Commissioners. There was a discussion about the fact that there is no sidewalk on Grist Mill Road. Atty Waters said that the state was looking at improvements including access down to Main Avenue. With this amount of massing, additional improvements had to be made

which the state realized. There was also a discussion about the full build out at the Merritt Parkway Interchange which has not been completed.

There was a discussion about the traffic in this area if traffic mitigation is not sufficient. There was also a discussion about whether the parcels would be consolidated or not. There was a discussion about whether some of the conclusions in the Master Plan should be updated due to the pandemic. Atty Waters said they are looking at changes due to the current situation. There was also a discussion about how the economic analysis could change in connection with the public school system. There was a discussion about parking spaces as projects were approved. Some parking requirements for certain uses would be different than others. There was also a discussion about improvements on Route 7. The Merritt 7 train station would be improved over the next 18 months. There was a discussion about the occupancy rates in the residential buildings that are currently in the area that the applicant owns. There was also a discussion about the green space in the neighborhood. There was also a discussion about screening one of the parking lots from current neighbors. There was a discussion about having buildings that were lower but wider which could help the aesthetics in the area.

Mr. Kleppin expressed his concern about the fact that they would need to spread the word about this project since there did not seem to be a lot of people watching the live feed. They did not want Norwalk residents to think they had not been informed about this large project. He also noted that they would work with Atty Waters to simplify the language for the amendments. It was explained that the Master Plan would be sent out for 3rd party review.

Mr. Schulman asked the commissioners to share their thoughts on the project. Ms. Thomas was concerned about the cost to the city, especially on the public school system. Mr. Kantor was positive but would also like to see staff's concerns addressed. Mr. Roina did not have an opinion at this point. Mr. Witherspoon wanted to see more information on traffic and schools. Mr. Sumpter thought that it was important to have a Master Plan for this area. He also had concerns about the traffic including during construction. He also wanted to see a 3d model of the project. Ms. Wells thought it was a good project and would also like to see a model. She thought that it would be important to work with the Department of Education about the number of children from these buildings, although she was not that concerned. Mr. Schulman said that it seemed like the commissioners were supportive of it and would like to see it move forward.

Mr. Kleppin discussed the peer review which would be in two phases. He suggested another meeting at the end of June after the first phase of the peer review. Mr. Sumpter appreciated the details of the Master Plan that were presented by Atty Waters and the applicant.

IV. APPROVAL OF MINUTES: May 20, 2020 Special meeting

**** MR. WITHERSPOON MOVED to approve the May 20, 2020 Zoning Commission - Special Meeting minutes.**

Ms. Wells seconded.

Louis Schulman; Galen Wells; Richard Roina; Stephanie Thomas; Nicholas Kantor; Rod Johnson; Michael Witherspoon approved.

No one opposed.

Mr. Sumpter abstained.

Mr. Schulman requested a special meeting with the peer review consultants. Mr. Kleppin said that he would try to set something up. It might have to be in the daytime if they could not find a suitable time at night. There was a discussion about the transportation study. Mr. Schulman said that the city's transportation consultant could not review it since he had a conflict.

V. COMMENTS OF DIRECTOR

There were no comments from the Director.

VI. COMMENTS OF COMMISSIONERS

There were no comments from the commissioners.

VII. ADJOURNMENT

Ms. Thomas made a Motion to Adjourn.

Mr. Sumpter seconded.

Louis Schulman; Galen Wells; Richard Roina; Stephanie Thomas; Nicholas Kantor; Rod Johnson; Michael Witherspoon; Mr. Sumpter approved.

No one opposed.

No one abstained.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:22 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Diana Palmentiero