

CITY OF NORWALK
ZONING COMMISSION – SPECIAL MEETING
June 24, 2020

PRESENT: Louis Schulman, Chair; Galen Wells; Rod Johnson; Michael Witherspoon; Frank Mancini; Richard Roina; Nicholas Kantor

STAFF: Steve Kleppin; Bryan Baker

OTHERS: Bob Grzywacz; Alan Plattus; Atty David Waters; Craig Yannes

I. CALL TO ORDER

Mr. Schulman called the meeting to order at 6:02 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.

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, Business #2 zone and Executive Office to entirely Executive Office zone – Applicant presentation and further review and #2-20R - Merritt Station Norwalk, LLC et all - Proposed amendments to revise definition for Development Park; to revise the Executive Office zone to permit a new Master Plan approval process by Special Permit and to increase height and FAR, to revise parking requirements for multifamily developments and related technical amendments – Applicant presentation and further review and #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 – Applicant presentation and further review

Mr. Kleppin gave a brief introduction of the application as well as noting what some of the issues were that the commission would have to be aware of. He noted that they may need one more meeting to discuss these issues.

Bob Grzywacz, a member of the city’s peer review team, began the presentation by sharing his screen and orienting the commissioners as to the location of the properties on an aerial map. He then discussed the boundaries of the properties that were being re-zoned. He also discussed the size of the town or neighborhood center. He showed them a picture depicting

the train station at Merritt Seven which would connect the Merritt 7 office park to it. He did note that the area was mostly accessed by autos, and a few buses, even though there is a train station. Mr. Grzywacz discussed some of the recommendations as he went through the report. Mr. Plattus said that Glover Avenue currently feels like an access road but it should be more of a Main Street. The commissioners were shown examples of this from different cities. Mr. Grzywacz discussed the topography of the area and which parts of it would be the active pedestrian area. He showed them different options including a park area adjacent to Raccoon Stream. There was a discussion about a new identity for the neighborhood. There was also a discussion about how to re-distribute the density on the sites. There was a discussion of the view corridors and keeping them. Mr. Grzywacz said that this project would add much needed residential to the area which currently was mostly office space. There was a further discussion about the density.

As the presentation was completed, there was a discussion about the density issue from the current neighborhood. There was a concern about having much more residential density in the area and what the benefits would be to the public.

David Waters, attorney for the applicant, continued the presentation by noting how the north of Glover Avenue had been changed from a previous project that his client had completed. He agreed that Glover Avenue would become the main thoroughfare of the area. There was also a discussion about having retail without residential. He noted that the way to attract larger corporations and maintain the offices that were there now would be to have a live, work play type of development. Atty Waters noted that the applicant would like the flexibility of design. They would continue to review and discuss the comments of the peer review team.

There was then a discussion about a traffic study for this area especially whether Glover Avenue could handle the traffic from projects from Connecticut Department of Transportation (CT DOT). Mr. Schulman wanted to find out when they would be completed. Mr. Witherspoon said that the public would want to know those answers as well. There was also a discussion about whether the Danbury line would be improved in connection with the Walk Bridge project. Ms. Wells said she would try to find out more about that.

Atty Waters said that the Merritt 7 train station improvements would be started this summer. He reminded the commissioners that each project under the Master Plan would have to have their own traffic study. He noted that if they thought this was a high priority for the city, they could go to the state to ask them to act now on these projects.

Mr. Schulman did not think these applications were ready for a public hearing in July. He thought they needed another meeting. Mr. Roina had questions about the neighborhood concept as he was understanding it from the application. Atty Waters noted that they wanted to make this a neighborhood that the northern part of Glover Avenue would feel a part of. Mr. Witherspoon said he would like another meeting for discussion. There was a discussion about the vacant office space that is currently in Norwalk. Atty Waters addressed those concerns by noting that there were some things that had to be done but that the buildings could be flexible if demand changed over the years.

Mr. Kleppin discussed the timelines from the CT DOT. He also discussed the level of service at some of the intersections and whether the project could be approved with those levels. Atty Waters said that the Master Plan could be approved first, but could not take action to build without that. Craig Yannes, the traffic engineer on the project, noted that they understood the levels of service for the traffic. He believed that as time went on they would have more information.

There was then a discussion about whether to add these items to the July 15 Zoning Commission agenda. Mr. Schulman did not think that they could hold a public hearing in July. He thanked the peer review team for their work.

V. ZONING REGULATION RFP: Review & discussion

Mr. Schulman asked the commissioners for comments and questions. He also asked for a DBE requirement to encourage minority and female owned businesses to participate. On federal projects, it was required. He told Mr. Kleppin that they could move forward. Mr. Kleppin said it could be issued by mid-July. Mr. Mancini asked how they vet to get the best candidates possible. Mr. Schulman explained the grading process and noted that many firms would have experience to use a DBE.

V. APPROVAL OF MINUTES: June 17, 2020 Special meeting

**** MR. MANCINI MOVED to approve the June 17, 2020 Zoning Commission - Special Meeting minutes.**

Mr. Witherspoon seconded.

Louis Schulman; Galen Wells; Rod Johnson; Michael Witherspoon; Frank Mancini; Nicholas Kantor approved

No one opposed.

Richard Roina abstained.

VI. COMMENTS OF DIRECTOR

Mr. Kleppin noted that the July 15 agenda had several public hearings on that night which would make the agenda rather long. He wondered if they should have another meeting between then and August. In connection with the North 7 project, there was a discussion about having a special meeting, or having it on the 1st Thursday in August. Mr. Kleppin said he would check with Atty Waters and what would work for them. There was also a discussion about which neighbors should be notified about this project. There was then a discussion about what time to start the Zoning Commission meetings, such as keeping it at 6 pm or making it later.

VII. COMMENTS OF COMMISSIONERS

There were none.

VIII. ADJOURNMENT

Mr. Mancini made a Motion to Adjourn.

Mr. Witherspoon seconded.

Louis Schulman; Galen Wells; Rod Johnson; Michael Witherspoon; Richard Roina; Frank Mancini; Nicholas Kantor approved

No one opposed.

No one abstained.

The meeting was adjourned at 8 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Diana Palmentiero