

CITY OF NORWALK
ZONING COMMISSION – SPECIAL MEETING
July 15 2020

PRESENT: Louis Schulman, Chair; Galen Wells; Rod Johnson; Michael Witherspoon; Frank Mancini; Richard Roina; Stephanie Thomas; Josh Goldstein (arrived at 6:05 pm)
Nate Sumpter (arrived at 6:30 pm)

STAFF: Steve Kleppin; Michelle Andrzejewski

OTHERS: Alan Lo; Mike Losasso; Lisa Yates; Diane Lauricella; Atty Liz Suchy; Dean Martin; Matt Popp; Chris McCagg; John Greenspan; Mark Hopper; Kevny Moses; Andy Ayala;

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.

III. I. PUBLIC HEARINGS

a. #4-20SP – City of Norwalk/Board of Education - Jefferson School – 75 Van Buren Avenue – Proposed additions and modifications to existing elementary school

Mr. Schulman opened the public hearing. Mr. Lo began the presentation. He gave a brief history about the Jefferson School which had never been upgraded since it was opened. They were trying to get rid of the portable classrooms and decrease the enrollment. It would help lower the traffic congestion with lower enrollment. He explained the modifications to the building including a new gym. The project should go out to bid in the winter with construction starting in January or February of 2021.

Mike Losasso continued the presentation with an introduction of the project team. Phil Katz oriented the commissioners as to the current site on an aerial map. He explained the parent parking lot for drop-off as well as the bus drop-off. He also showed them the current portable classrooms as well as the playgrounds and garden area. He then described the work that would be done, including the bus loop, drop-offs, etc. He also explained the grading work that would be done because of water coming into the building. He then discussed the lighting that would be on the site, which included cut-offs.

Lisa Yates continued the presentation by showing the architectural designs of the proposed building. She noted that the administrative floor would be on the first floor. She also showed a view from uphill as well as the retaining wall. She also noted that solar panels were being discussed because of the budget. Mr. Lo said that there was a high chance that they would be able to do it but they are still looking at the budget. She then discussed security and the cafeteria space.

There was a discussion about some trees being removed. It was explained why they were being removed and that they would be replaced. There was also a discussion about the current garden that was on the property. There was also a discussion about the staff parking lot.

There was also a discussion about waiving the traffic study. Mr. Lo said that there was an application with the CT DOT so it was believed that it was not necessary especially since the enrollment would be reduced. He also noted that more kids would walk to school.

At this point, Mr. Schulman asked for public comments.

Diane Lauricella asked that the project go back for revisions because of the use of solar panels. She asked that this be reviewed. She thought that there could be solar panels on the carports and explained which parking lots could be used. She also explained that there were other school districts in the area using carports with solar panels on them. She also said that

Mr. Lo then discussed Ms. Lauricella's comments. He noted that the solar panels were a financial decision and that the city would make that decision. He said that he would recommend the solar project to the city if it was economically feasible and then they would make a decision.

Mr. Schulman closed the public hearing. He noted that Commissioners Goldstein and Sumpter had arrived at the hearing.

b. #3-20SP/1-20CAM - 310 Wilson Avenue - WEB Construction, LLC. - New contractor's storage yard with outdoor material storage

Mr. Schulman opened the public hearing. Atty Suchy began the presentation with an introduction of the project team. She then noted that she had dropped off the certified, return receipt cards evidencing the notice of the public hearing to the abutting neighbors. She then gave a brief description of the surrounding property as well as the current property. She noted that there are wetlands on the property and had received approval from the Conservation Commission in late June. She also described the current use of the property and then what the proposed use would be.

Dean Martin continued the presentation by showing the commissioners the site plan for the project. He then discussed the proposed materials storage. He showed them the boundaries of the property. There was then a discussion about the chain link fence. There were also comments from DPW and the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection ("DEEP"). There was also a discussion about the plantings but those would be addressed by another part of the project team. She noted that the applicant needed a permit from DEEP. Atty Suchy discussed how the

materials were analyzed at 34 Meadow Street and then it was stored at 310 Wilson Avenue. Mr. Martin then noted that the site was mostly above the 100 year flood level.

Matt Popp, the landscape architect, continued the presentation by explaining how he prepared his plans. He also oriented the commissioners as to the location of the property on an aerial map. He then showed them pictures of the site so they could see what would be re-vegetated. He also discussed the tidal wetland areas. He then discussed the storm water treatment which did not currently exist on the site. He also discussed the planting plan. He then discussed the route that vehicles would enter and exit the site. There was a discussion about what was planted and what still had to be planted. There was a discussion about the boundaries of the property and flood lines.

Atty Suchy noted that they had received their approvals and received letters of support which should be a part of the public record. She noted that there had been comments from the Zoning Department staff earlier in the day which they had not had a chance to address.

Mr. Schulman opened the hearing to public comments.

Diane Lauricella noted that she is a part of the Water Quality commission but had not reviewed this project. The Shellfish Commission had not seen the final plans for this project. She noted that the applicant had been allowed to use the short form application which she did not think was proper. She was concerned about the residents of Village Creek in connection with the timing of the use of trucks at the site. She also had concerns about the flooding on the site. She asked them to keep the hearing open. She did acknowledge that there were many improvements by the applicant.

Mr. Schulman then asked Mr. Kleppin to speak about the memo that he had sent to the commissioners in the late afternoon. Staff had concerns about the elevation information that was provided, the height of the fence, as well as elevations in the past. He suggested that the applicant consider removing the access road which could be better, environmentally.

Atty Suchy addressed Ms. Lauricella's comments as well as Mr. Kleppin. She noted that the Harbor Management Commission had received the application and reviewed it. She understood the concerns of the Shellfish Commission. She had been surprised at the timing of the comments from the staff but would respond to them.

There was then a discussion of when they could hear this application again. It was decided that this application would be placed on the August 6 agenda. The commissioners agreed to that.

**** MR. MANCINI MOVED to hold the public hearing over until August 6, 2020.**

Mr. Sumpter seconded.

Louis Schulman; Galen Wells; Rod Johnson; Michael Witherspoon; Frank Mancini; Richard Roina; Stephanie Thomas; Josh Goldstein; Nate Sumpter approved.

No one opposed.

No one abstained.

II. REVIEW AND ACTION ON PENDING APPLICATIONS

a. Action on Items III a. and b.

i. #4-20SP – City of Norwalk/Board of Education - Jefferson School – 75 Van Buren Avenue – Proposed additions and modifications to existing elementary school

**** MS. WELLS MOVED: BE IT RESOLVED** by the Norwalk Zoning Commission that special permit #4-20 - City of Norwalk/Board of Education - Jefferson School (75 Van Buren Ave) for the interior renovation as new, gymnasium addition and parking lot modifications and bus loop addition as shown on the site plan drawings entitled “Jefferson Elementary School” dated 2/25/20 and revised to 6/22/20 by Antinozzi Associates be **APPROVED** subject to the following conditions;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the effective date of this approval shall be July 24, 2020.

Mr. Sumpter seconded.

Louis Schulman; Galen Wells; Rod Johnson; Michael Witherspoon; Frank Mancini; Richard Roina; Stephanie Thomas; Josh Goldstein; Nate Sumpter approved.

No one opposed.

No one abstained.

b. #9-18SPR/#18-18CAM – Play CT. LLC – 85-89 Water Street - 29,000 sf multi activity entertainment complex - Request to modify approved plan - Preliminary review - Report & recommended action

Atty Suchy began the presentation and noted that this had been approved in 2019. There would be a new operator but not a new property owner. She noted the current uses as well as the location of the property. She gave a brief history of the prior application. She noted that there are some slight changes to the plans which included fencing, golf, and outdoor food trucks. They would meet with several departments around the City.

Chris McCagg, the architect for the project, continued the presentation with an aerial view of the property which was the old Lillian August property. He then showed them the site plans for the property which included renovations to the interior. There were some concerns about the ax throwing areas. Atty Suchy said that it would be controlled and has become very

popular. She also noted that there are demising walls in between the different activities. The commissioners began to ask whether this was a minor change.

John Greenspan then continued the presentation. He noted that the children's areas would be open during the day and then the ax throwing would be at night for adults. The commissioners asked whether the ax throwing could be limited to adults only. Mr. McCagg suggested that the commissioners go to an ax throwing place in Bridgeport. There was also a discussion about the parking since there would be a loss of some spaces. There was a discussion about the food trucks and picnic tables. There was also a discussion about the amount of spaces in the Day Street parking lot. There was a discussion about the front of the building which would not be used as it had been described in the previous plans. There was a discussion about the brewery which was new to this revised plan.

The commissioners discussed continuing the presentation to research the ax throwing further. They decided to continue it on the August 6 Zoning Commission agenda.

V. REVIEW AND ACTION ON NEW APPLICATIONS

1. #5-20SP - Workforce Partners LLC – 204 Flax Hill Road – Proposed historic preservation development to rehabilitate existing historic structures and replace existing Carriage House with new 14 unit structure – Preliminary review – Report & recommended action

Atty Suchy opened the presentation with an introduction of the project team and that neighbors had been notified of the filing of the application. She then oriented the commissioners as to the location of the property and gave a description of it. She described Workforce Partners which rehabilitated properties for teachers, police officers, etc. She noted that they had done this to several other properties in Norwalk. She then described the plans to the property which included rehabilitating several of the structures on the property. The total number of units would increase. The workforce housing would be deed restricted. She explained why it was a special permit application. They were also asking for special requests including to the parking lot, as well as to the front porch. Traffic and landscaping plans have been submitted.

Mark Hopper, the architect on the project, continued the presentation. He showed them the pictures of the original mansion, the current mansion to the proposed mansion. They had reviewed historical pictures of the original mansion in order to rehabilitate the property. He also discussed the wrap around porch. There were currently units in the mansion. They would also remove the current siding to see what was underneath and how they could rehabilitate it. Mr. Hopper discussed the color palette and materials. He then described the interiors and corridors in the building. He then described the Carriage House which was similar to the Ferris House. He showed them the elevations for the buildings. He also discussed the lighting.

There was a discussion about recreational space which Atty Suchy said followed the regulations. It was submitted to the Zoning Department staff. There was a discussion about the deed restricted units which would be 8-30(g) and what the rents would be for the current housing stock for this market. Kevny Moses of Workforce Partners said he would prepare information

about the rents for 1-2 bedrooms in Norwalk. There was concern about replacing affordable housing with housing that was no longer affordable. Mr. Moses explained that these units would be new and would fall within the range of income eligibility. Andy Ayala noted that the Carriage House would be demolished. Some of the current units are vacant after people have left. They will not be leaving people without housing. They were asked where their other properties were in Norwalk.

There was a discussion about a public hearing for this matter. Atty Suchy requested to be on the August 6 Zoning Commission agenda. After review of the agenda, it was suggested to put this on the September 3 agenda and Atty Suchy agreed.

VI. EAST NORWALK TOD: Status report

Mr. Kleppin gave a brief report and noted that there seemed to be some misunderstandings about the plan. He noted that the next step would be to amend the POCD by the Planning Commission.

VII. INDUSTRIAL ZONES: Status report

Mr. Kleppin gave a brief report by noting that the Mayor had to sign the contract. He noted that the group would meet as well as begin the process of reading the POCD.

VIII. ZONING REGULATION RFP:

Mr. Kleppin discussed the RFP and how companies would be picked with a DBE requirement. There was a discussion about the standards used to pick one. Mr. Schulman said that these standards should be used on other RFPs going forward and that these companies should find a partner to work with. There was further discussion about a draft that Mr. Kleppin shared with the commissioners. Mr. Schulman asked that it be re-written and that the firm should explain why they couldn't find a partner. He also asked him to add percentages.

IX. APPROVAL OF MINUTES: June 24, 2020 Special meeting

**** MR. WITHERSPOON MOVED to approve the June 24, 2020 Zoning Commission - Special Meeting minutes.**

Ms. Wells seconded.

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

No one opposed.

Josh Goldstein; Nate Sumpter and Stephanie Thomas abstained.

X. COMMENTS OF DIRECTOR

There were no comments from the director.

XI. COMMENTS OF COMMISSIONERS

There were no comments from the commissioners.

XII. ADJOURNMENT

Mr. Goldstein made a Motion to Adjourn.

Mr. Sumpter seconded.

Louis Schulman; Galen Wells; Rod Johnson; Michael Witherspoon; Frank Mancini; Richard Roina; Stephanie Thomas; Josh Goldstein; Nate Sumpter approved.

No one opposed.

No one abstained.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:30 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Diana Palmentiero