

**CITY OF NORWALK
TRAFFIC AUTHORITY
REGULAR MEETING
BY VIDEO CONFERENCE AND TELECONFERENCE
October 19, 2020**

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Members of the public who wish to view the meeting, but are not participating, can view a live stream on the City of Norwalk YouTube channel. This stream is delayed by approximately 20 seconds. Please find the information using the link above. The meeting recording and minutes will be posted on the City of Norwalk website within seven (7) days after the meeting.

Members of the public who wish to provide public comment are encouraged to submit those via e-mail in advance of the meeting. For these comments to be read into the record, they should be submitted at least three hours in advance of the meeting start time. Please email Michael Yeosock at myeosock@norwalkct.org to provide written comment prior to the meeting.

ATTENDANCE: Mayor Harry Rilling, Commissioner Kelly Straniti; Commissioner Fran Collier-Clemmons

STAFF: Chief Thomas Kulhawik; Deputy Chief Susan Zecca; Deputy Chief James Walsh; Michael Yeosock, Asst. Director, TMP; Fred Eshraghi, TMP Traffic Engineer; Vanessa Valadares, DPW Principal Engineer; Jessica Casey, Chief of Economic and Community Development; Steven Kleppin, Director of Planning & Zoning

OTHERS: Attorney Elizabeth Suchy; Neil Olinski, Malone & Mcbroom; Diane Cece, East Norwalk Neighborhood Association; John Curran; Richard Bertoli, WSP

Mayor Rilling called the meeting to order at 6:36PM.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Diane Cece- East Norwalk Neighborhood Association

Ms. Cece stated she is speaking for the community at large specifically for East Norwalk because the East Norwalk Neighborhood Association finds it extremely unsettling that the DOT put a request in of this magnitude on Thursday with the expectation that it would be on the Traffic Authority agenda as an action item tonight. She said because of the implications of closing East Avenue at that underpass in the summer at 8:00PM on the weeknights and from 8:00PM on Friday until 6:00AM on Monday is a serious concern because July- September are the heaviest traffic roads during the week and on the weekends, and it would impact the residents as well as out of towners and tourists. She said the hope is that the Traffic Authority will review the application and take some of those things into consideration and she hopes given the communities concerns would table the item to a later date so the public can be apprised of this and also so staff and elected officials can go back to Project Manager John Hannafin of the DOT and see if there are some alternatives, and if for some reason they can't change the time frame the public needs to be well aware of this now so that the public can express their concerns and requested that the Traffic Authority table the item. She also said detours do not seem to work well in Norwalk and will be particularly concerning during the week when there may be people who are unfamiliar with the area.

John Curran- Cedar Crest Place

Mr. Curran provided input regarding the Colonial Village expansion plan and said the traffic situation as he is leaving his street at any time of the day is extremely heavy especially on Saturday, and the intersection on Scribner Avenue near Best Buy is one of the toughest intersections because it is a four way stop and heavily traveled.

Melissa Dino

Ms. Dino submitted the following email for the record:

Dear Norwalk Common Council, Zoning Commission and Traffic Authority,

I am writing as a resident to express concern over the proposed distribution center at 10 Norden Place.

While I do not live in the East Norwalk neighborhood, my family and I visit frequently for walks and to patronize businesses and of course beautiful Calf Pasture Beach.

From what I have read about the proposal, the distribution center would impact traffic and congestion enormously with multiple tractor trailers and box trucks/vehicles using this facility in and out all day, as well as possible operations overnight.

Please re-consider this proposal. Neighborhoods like East Norwalk are becoming far too congested and the environmental and traffic toll of such a proposal is alarming. I am hearing and seeing loud and clear numerous residents express frustration and concerns over the overall overbuilding of our quaint city on social media and otherwise; and the subsequent traffic and environmental issues. If I lived in the neighborhood near Norden Place I would be devastated by this possibility!

On a related note, I recently read more apartments are being considered by Toll Brothers near Wayppinte. Please, please do no overdevelop Norwalk especially with ugly box like apartments. We are losing the maritime charm (and mom and pop businesses) of this city in several places. I certainly hope money from the developers does not outweigh the environmental and esthetic impacts to our city.

I write this on behalf of my husband and my 13 year old daughter, my daughter is a freshman at Center for Global Studies whom expressed shock at the development going on in the city and the impact of trucks through this neighborhood. She wondered why green space could not be considered in lieu of more apartments. I truly believe this type of development is not what most residents want.

Will public meetings be held with residents on these proposals?

Sincerely,

Melissa Dino

1. APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE TRAFFIC AUTHORITY MEETING OF MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 21, 2020.

On page 2, paragraph 4, change “is” to “if”

On page 4, item 4, change “safety” to “safely”

On page 5, paragraph 2 add “to”

On page5, paragraph 4, Item 5, change “know” to “knows”

**** COMMISSIONER COLLIER-CLEMMONS MOVED TO APPROVE THE MINUTES AS AMENDED.**

**** COMMISSIONER STRANITI SECONDED THE MOTION.**

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

2. APPROVE THE NO PARKING RESTRICTIONS FOR WEST CEDAR STREET AS PROPOSED IN THE TRAFFIC STUDY FOR COLONIAL VILLAGE EXPANSION PROJECT.

Attorney Succi stated that as requested they have notified all abutting property owners and those directly across the street with respect to the proposals to eliminate parking spaces on the north side of West Cedar Street, and have also sent notices to the business owners in the various structures that are across the street from the entrances to Colonial Village. She said at the last meeting it was requested the availability of parking for those businesses if the parking is removed on West Cedar Street as proposed and all of the structures have off street parking in front of each of the buildings to serve as a resource to those entities on the south side of West Cedar Street. Mayor Rilling asked how many parking spaces will be eliminated. Mr. Olinski said approximately 15-20 parking spaces. Mayor Rilling asked if there was any response received from the neighbors. Attorney Succi said “no” and the letters were sent out two weeks ago. Mr. Yeosock said that staff has also not received any responses.

Mayor Rilling said the parking on that side of the street is challenging especially when approaching Suncrest Road and a lot of the residents rely on those parking spaces and asked how that will impact their ability to find a parking space. Attorney Succi said as she had indicated last month the proposed redevelopment of these vacant acres contemplates the creation of approximately 139 parking spaces just

for the new development, and that is far in excess of what Zoning requires for multifamily developments of this number and they are confident the number of parking spaces they are proposing will adequately accommodate not only the needs of the new dwellings but also some of the spill over.

Mr. Olinski said removing the parking spaces would help sightlines for motorists leaving the site and in terms of the total parking demand the proposed development expansion of Colonial Village is going to add additional parking as Attorney Succi pointed out and is well beyond what they think will be needed for the 69 new units. He said he thinks the people that are parking in those 15 on street parking spaces largely do so out of convenience and not necessary because it is overflow parking, but again we will be providing a lot of off street parking with the expansion which he thinks will satisfy all the parking demands.

Mayor Rilling asked where they will be able to park in the meantime before the new parking spaces are available. Mr. Olinski said the idea is to leave the on street parking there now until the expanded onsite parking has been completed. Attorney Succi said that construction is not anticipated to commence until 2021 and go into 2022 so it would be appropriate to leave the parking spaces in place until such time the parking spaces are created. Mr. Yeosock said that staff agrees.

**** COMMISSIONER STRANITI MOVED TO APPROVE THE NO PARKING RESTRICTIONS FOR WEST CEDAR STREET AS PROPOSED IN THE TRAFFIC STUDY FOR COLONIAL VILLAGE EXPANSION PROJECT.**

**** COMMISSIONER COLLIER-CLEMMONS SECONDED THE MOTION.**

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

3. APPROVE THE TEMPORARY CLOSURE OF EAST AVENUE BETWEEN FORT POINT STREET AND WINFIELD STREET FOR WORK ON THE ADVANCED UTILITY PHASE OF THE WALK BRIDGE PROJECT AS DETAILED IN THE ROAD CLOSURE PLAN PREPARED BY THE CONNECTICUT DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION.

Ms. Valadares said the Walk Bridge program has been working on finalizing the design for utility projects on East Avenue that will begin next year, and they are approximately 90% completed with the design and are hoping to be at 100% by the end of the year and have the construction begin in July of 2021.

Ms. Valadares said it was brought to their attention that the contractor would not be able to keep an alternate lane under the bridge due to the depth on the infrastructure that will need to be installed. She said that the DOT has approached staff and requested if it would be feasible for safety reasons to close that portion of the road so that they can do the work that is needed. She said that staff had requested that they go back and look at their schedule to see how many days they would need and what the impact would be and as of now they are requesting 90 days of night closures and 12 weekends but clarified that they are not 90 consecutive days. She said the reason the DOT will need an answer is because this will change how they finalize the design because those closures will be applied to the design before they reach 100%.

Mr. Bertoli said they are requesting 90 night time closures from 8:00PM to 6:00AM and 12 weekend closures from 8:00PM on Friday to 6:00AM on Monday over a two and a half year period during the spring and the fall and during the 12 weekends will be just over 13% over the two and half year period. He said if there is other communication or any type of coordination the city would like to see to ensure that the public is well aware the DOT and WSP will work to make sure that happens.

Mayor Rilling asked how time sensitive this is because he is not sure if a lot of the people in East Norwalk are aware of the scope and magnitude of this and asked what has been done to make them aware. Ms. Valadares said there has not been any to date but the DOT is in agreement that they will do all the necessary public outreach to all of the residents in the area and they have been doing a good job in keeping the residents and commuters that are affected by construction informed. She said they have also already pre-established where the detour will be. Mayor Rilling said they will need to notify the East Norwalk Association with as much detail they possibly can. He also said he has some serious concerns for a summertime closure from Friday night until Monday morning.

Commissioner Collier-Clemmons said based on the information she had prior to the meeting that this was just for the three months in 2021, but when Mr. Bertoli spoke he said that this is over a two year period and asked when they propose to start, over what period of time is this going to cover and if this will be the maximum number of days of the closure. Mr. Bertoli said they are planning on starting in July and plan to start the closures in mid to late August and they are still working on the details.

Commissioner Collier- Clemmons said the signs for the detours will need to be clear. Commissioner Straniti agreed and said this is the busiest time of the year for that whole area and asked what alternative there might be and if there were other options that were explored. She said while she thinks it's great to keep the public notified she would also like to see their involvement and have the ability to give their input before things are put into place. Ms. Valadares said the area will be going through a lot construction over the next few years and although we would prefer not to close the road, but it would diminish the length of construction overall which would be better and although a closure may not be best for the neighborhood it is the best solution overall. Mr. Bertoli said if they were to eliminate weekends there would be 150 nights of closures so it extends the duration of the construction and it also makes the work closer the intersections very difficult and becomes a safety issue. The only other alternative which would have more impact is to do the closure 24/7 and try to get as much done as we can but the biggest problem that is that this is a utility project and coordinating that and ensuring that it moves slowly makes it very difficult.

Mayor Rilling said it has been the commission's experience that when they approve something it turns out to be a lot more than what they had anticipated and extensions, more closers etc. are requested. He suggested that there not be any weekend closings on Memorial Day weekend, Labor Day weekend and in July or August. He also suggested giving tentative approval and have it brought back to the Traffic Authority in November following a public information effort. Commissioners Collier-Clemmons and Commissioner Straniti agreed. Mr. Bertoli asked if they would be able to come back if there is some absorbent reason to require the closure in July or August. Mayor Rilling said "absolutely" but it would need to be something extreme. He said the Traffic Authority wants to accommodate because we know how important this project is as well as the coordination, but we also have to consider the impact on the residents and businesses.

****COMMISSIONER COLLIER- CLEMMONS MOVED TO TABLE THE TEMPORARY CLOSURE OF EAST AVENUE BETWEEN FORT POINT STREET AND WINFIELD STREET FOR WORK ON THE ADVANCED UTILITY PHASE OF THE WALK BRIDGE PROJECT AS DETAILED IN THE ROAD CLOSURE PLAN PREPARED BY THE CONNECTICUT DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION TO THE NOVEMBER MEETING FOLLOWING A CONCENTRATED EFFORT FROM THE DOT TO LET THE PEOPLE OF NORWALK KNOW WHAT WILL BE OCCURRING AND THERE BE NO WEEKEND CLOSURES IN JULY AND AUGUST OR ON MEMORIAL DAY WEEKEND OR LABOR DAY WEEKEND.**

**** COMMISSIONER STRANITI SECONDED THE MOTION.**

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

Mr. Yeosock said that people are parking in the road causing obstructions and staff has been working with the residents, Gray Barns and the Planning & Zoning Department and are requesting to install no parking signs

**** COMMISSIONER STRANITI MOVED TO APPROVE**

**** COMMISSIONER COLLIER-CLEMMONS SECONDED THE MOTION.**

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

DISCUSSION/CORRESPONDENCE

1. 10 Norden Place

Ms. Casey said staff has received some comments regarding 10 Norden Place including a letter from Ms. Dino commenting on the proposed distribution center and said while she does not live in East Norwalk her family visits regularly to go to Calf Pasture Beach, and her concerns were that the distribution center would impact traffic and congestion enormously with tractor trailers and box trucks using the facility and asked that the Traffic Authority to consider the proposal.

Mayor Rilling said that the Zoning Commission has received many letters and asked what authority the Traffic Authority would have because we normally do not deal with issues of this nature and what would we be asked to approve. Mr. Kleppin said he typically has not seen the Zoning Commission refer applications to the Traffic Authority but this is an unusual application based on the concerns regarding the truck traffic as well as the location and nature of the site

Mr. Kleppin said an application has been submitted to the Zoning Commission and the applicant made an initial presentation to the commission 4-6 weeks ago, and the commission had some concerns and they told the applicant that they were going to conduct their own peer review of their traffic report which is being conducted by WSP. He said they have sent his some preliminary comments and questions last week and he is expecting the draft comments to the Zoning Commission and the applicant this week, but at this point they have not reached any conclusions because there is still data that is missing and questions that need to be answered but have expressed all of the concerns that have been raised to date.

Mr. Kleppin said the applicant is scheduled to meet with the Zoning Commission on November 5, 2020, for a second review and at that point he expects a public hearing will be scheduled which is tentative scheduled for November 18, 2020.

Mayor Rilling asked if this project will require a special permit. Mr. Kleppin said "yes". Mayor Rilling asked what the criteria is that will have to be met in order to be granted a special permit. Mr. Kleppin said the special permit and site plan application both require that the applicant demonstrate that there will not be negative impacts caused by the traffic related to the project. The special permit has an additional set of criteria that include that the project is in character with the neighborhood.

Mayor Rilling as what if any part will the Traffic Authority play in this application. Mr. Kleppin said there is not an official referral process but he thinks if the Traffic Authority had specific concerns related to the application it would be good to have them in writing to the Zoning Commission.

Mayor Rilling said that as the Mayor of the city he is not allowed to influence the Zoning Commission or to make restrictions relative to any application once an application has been filed. He requested that the Law Department be contacted to ask if the Traffic Authority has conditions about this application and how it would limit the Traffic Authority or himself as the Chairman of the Traffic Authority from making comments on this application.

Mr. Kleppin provided an overview of the project and said there is a currently a large building on the site and the applicant is proposing to basically cut the site in half and carve different tenant spaces. The applicant has indicated that the trucks that will be coming in and out are intended for business to business use, but staff has concerns with the way the economy has shifted that there is so much more emphasis on business to home delivery. He said they did provide a traffic report which outlines the estimated number of vehicle trips per day, and have indicated that approximately 100 employees would be working in the facility. He said they are estimating over 300 truck trips per day and one of the questions staff has raised is when are the trucks coming and going versus the commuter traffic as well as the concern that there are three schools in the area and if it will conflict with the school buses.

Mayor Rilling asked if the only access to Norden Place is from Strawberry Hill Avenue and Winfield Street. Mr. Kleppin said he believes so. Mr. Rilling said there are several thousands of residents in that area. Mr. Kleppin said they have proposed to them to see if they can get direct access to I-95 just to service the site designated for their use only so they would not have to go onto the residential streets.

Commissioner Straniti said that there is a lot of truck traffic a day and would be interested to see if there is an alternative way.

Commissioner Collier-Clemmons said that when Ms. Cece attended the meeting last month and provided the information regarding the number of truck traffic it was a larger number than what was first presented when they first received the proposal and said there definitely needs to be more alternatives.

Ms. Casey said once Mr. Kleppin receives the updates staff will come back to the Traffic Authority with the updates and provide information as required.

ADJOURNMENT

**** COMMISSIONER COLLIER-CLEMMONS MOVED TO ADJOURN.**

**** COMMISSIONER STRANITI SECONDED THE MOTION.**

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY,**

The meeting adjourned at 7:51PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Dilene Byrd