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**CITY OF NORWALK
PLANNING COMMITTEE
REGULAR MEETING
SEPTEMBER 17, 2020
Via Teleconference**

ATTENDANCE: John Kydes, Chair; Thomas Keegan; Thomas Livingston;
Lisa Shanahan; Barbara Smyth; George Tsiranides; Darlene Young

STAFF: Steven Kleppin, Director of Planning and Zoning

OTHERS: Dominique Johnson, Manny Langella, Common Council members;
Emily Innis, Haminity Group

CALL TO ORDER

Mr. Kydes called the meeting to order at 7:01 p.m.

ROLL CALL

Mr. Kydes called the Roll as indicated above.

PUBLIC HEARING

Plan of Conservation and Development (Citywide Plan) amendment to accommodate the addition of the East Norwalk Transit Oriented Development Plan.

The East Norwalk TOD Plan information can be found at the following link: <https://www.norwalkct.org/1684/Plan-of-Conservation-Development>

Mr. Kleppin with Ms. Innis gave an overview of the East Norwalk TOD Plan. Mr. Kleppin explained that when he arrived in Norwalk, four years ago, his first task was to complete the Citywide Plan. The Citywide Plan was adopted in 2019 and it clarifies where the City should develop and why. One of the principle areas was East Norwalk.

In 2017 an opportunity arose to submit a grant request for the East Norwalk TOD Plan. The grant was awarded. The total plan area is about 500 acres. Along with multiple presentations, there was a lot of public outreach as well as two public hearings. This evening's public hearing is the third.

Ms. Innis discussed the vision and goals of the plan. She explained that it is more than just zoning changes; it is the ability to support the neighborhood. They are looking for a way to create a high quality of life for the residents. She said they heard that parking is a huge issue and there is action in the plan to address parking. In addition, open space and recreation are key areas.

Mr. Kleppin reviewed the big picture recommendations that came out of the plan. Among those recommendations was to create a new Village District along the East Avenue corridor, allow residential use above ground floor commercial use, relocate the Public Works location and create a promenade to connect South Norwalk to the Cove Avenue area.

Ms. Innis presented examples of studies that were used. She said it was suggested increasing building heights to 3 ½ stories as long as amenities were offered. She presented the proposed East Norwalk Village TOD zone and said it was based on the existing Neighborhood Business district. She noted that the vast majority of East Norwalk will not experience any changes. Ms. Innis said the plan provides benefits from preservation and adaptive re-use of historic buildings.

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Ms. Innis reviewed the point system that included reduced for ground floor tenants and green development standards. She presented the design guidelines and specific standards that would be used by any future developments.

Mr. Kleppin reviewed infrastructure capacity for waste water generated by developments. He also reviewed infrastructure capacity for traffic. He reviewed traffic improvement initiatives. Mr. Kleppin said they need to look at Gregory Boulevard and the Cemetery Street area. He noted that it was not a safe intersection and needs to be studied. Every applicant will have to provide a traffic study.

Mr. Kleppin discussed water capacity and said that the new infrastructure and increased population has not contributed to the drought. He said that the annual withdrawal of water was 2.1 billion gallons. In 2018/2019 it went down to 1.7 billion gallons. In 2024, they project the annual water withdrawal will be 1.8 billion gallons per year. He said that while they are adding more to the population, they are using less water.

Mr. Kleppin explained that if they maxxed out the total development area, the new Village District would yield 700 new units and the Industrial Zone would yield 540 units. The East Norwalk Village district is 35 acres. He said there are a lot of underutilized one-story buildings. He said there has not been any incentive for people to improve those buildings. He said that unfortunately, there has been a lot of misinformation put out by members of the public regarding building height.

Mr. Kydes thanked Mr. Kleppin and Ms. Innis for their presentation.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Public participation comments are not verbatim and represent a summarization of statements unless otherwise noted.

Mr. Michael Anteri said that the presentation made sense, but his biggest concern was the traffic. He noted that in the presentation the street begins to widen at Myrtle Street and asked why it starts there are not closer to I-95.

Ms. Sarah Hunter, Board member of ENNA said that she represented a number of people and read a statement recommending that the plan be amended. She said that 58% of their association do not support the plan; 32% support the plan with modifications and 8% approve the plan as is. She said they do not support the current plan.

Ms. Anya Tabachneck said the plan looks good and that she looks forward to more people walking on the street and seeing a sense of community.

An East Norwalk resident said that the plan looks good, but she sees a number of issues. She asked what was going to be provided to residents asked to reduce the proposed height. She said the plan needs more green space and that should not be an option.

Ms. Diane Lauricella said she often goes to Calf Pasture Beach and is pleased that there will be an improvement in traffic management. She said that as a member of the Connecticut Green Building Council she is very much in favor of the TOD study. She said that other towns put together a sustainability study and suggested hiring a consultant. She said that she would like to see the TOD plan increase a greener lens. Ms. Lauricella said she would like to see mandatory sustainability design practices.

Ms. Lauricella asked Mr. Kydes if he and the Common Council would accept written comments. Mr. Kydes said would accept written comments no later than Monday, if possible.

Ms. Diane Cece asked if this item would be on the Common Council agenda and if people will be able to comment at the Common Council meeting. Mr. Kydes said this item would be on the Common Council agenda and the public will be able to comment.

Ms. Cece said she serves on the board of the ENNA and was a member of the former Oversight Committee for this project. She explained that this study came to be because there was support from the stakeholder groups.

Ms. Cece expressed concern that East Norwalk would be under the purview of the Redevelopment Agency and there are concerns about the possibility of Eminent Domain. She said it was ironic that the major opposition of this plan is over development and heights. She said there were a number of concerns presented by the residents and they have been dismissed. She said an example had to do with density. Ms. Cece said the staff said the East Avenue project would address that, but that project was approved long ago and is no longer relevant with the additional residents.

Ms. Cece said that the density application requires a public hearing, but to quote the developers, they have to have a certain number of units. She said the process does not give assurance to the public. Ms. Cece said the plan needs to be modified and reigned in.

There were no other members of the public who wished to speak.

Mr. Kydes thanked all the speakers and reminded the public to forward their comments to the Common Council.

I. ADMINISTRATION

a. Approval of the Minutes of the August 20, 2020 Special Meeting.

**** MS. SHANAHAN MOVED TO APPROVE THE MINUTES AS PRESENTED
** MOTION PASSED WITH TWO (2) ABSTENTIONS (MR. LIVINGSTON AND
MR. TSIRANIDES)**

II. NEW BUSINESS

a. Plan of Conservation & Development/East Norwalk Transit Oriented Development Plan

**** MR. LIVINGSTON MOVED TO FORWARD TO THE COMMON COUNCIL FOR ITS CONSIDERATION THE APPROVAL OF THE AMENDMENTS TO THE NORWALK CITYWIDE PLAN: 2019-2029, PLAN OF CONSERVATION AND DEVELOPMENT, TO INCORPORATE THE EAST NORWALK NEIGHBORHOOD TOD PLAN AND AUTHORIZE THE MAYOR, HARRY W. RILLING TO EXECUTE THE AMENDED PLAN.**

Mr. Livingston asked about the parking study. Mr. Kleppin explained that the Common Council approved money in the capital request to undertake a re-write of the Zoning regulations. They are going to bring a consultant on board who will be asked to look at parking and amenities.

Mr. Livingston asked how they would approach the sustainability study. Mr. Kleppin said he design guidelines have to go through the approval process and the Zoning Commission will look at the amenities. Mr. Livingston asked how they came up with the three- and one-half story requirement. Mr. Kleppin said they spent a lot of time on that. Right now, the regulations allow two- and one-half stories. You would get a flat roof with three stories. He said you will get a better design with three and on half stories.

Ms. Smyth commented on how beautiful the buildings are in Saugatuck and said she noticed the height of those buildings. She said it was safe and attractive. Ms. Smith said that area was similar to East Norwalk because there is a lot of traffic and a train station. She asked if this is the same vision for East Norwalk. She said that if that was what was envisioned, it was beautiful. Mr. Kleppin said that is what they are trying to achieve.

Ms. Innis said that it is a critical point to see how they can tweak the plan to increase sustainability. Mr. Kydes noted that the TOD is located in the Third Taxing District and there are restrictions on solar panels. Ms. Innis said that different sustainability measures are appropriate in different areas.

Ms. Innis said that what they see in the Saugatuck area is what they want to achieve in East Norwalk.

Ms. Smyth said she was very concerned about traffic and hopes that the improvements made by the State will help the flow of traffic. She noted that the traffic around the cemetery is terrible and would like to know there is a guarantee of improvements in the traffic there. Mr. Kleppin said that area would probably be a City project. With some of the improvements on East Avenue, they are at the mercy of the State with the WALK Bridge project. He noted that the utility work is supposed to start in the spring.

Mr. Kleppin said that the area will not be developed quickly and they realize they may have to merge parcels for anything sufficient.

Mr. Keegan said he received e-mails and spoke to residents and they are overwhelmingly against the plan as presented. He asked if there was any chance, they could hit the pause button until the concerns are addressed. Mr. Kleppin said there was no reason to halt. He said he agreed there are concerns about traffic; however, most of the proposal is appropriate to the area. He said that what is being proposed is modest and that he does not see the point in prolonging this any further.

Mr. Tsiranides said he was concerned about the traffic and said that something needs to be done in that area. He said he was concerned that if a decision is made to not go forward that a poor development could be approved. Mr. Kleppin said they do not have the tools to tell an applicant they can not move forward if they meet the current regulations. There is more control under the proposed plan.

Ms. Young asked if the Industrial Zone study will have an impact. Mr. Kleppin said they are not at that stage yet. He said it has to go through the public hearing process. Ms. Young said she heard valid points from the residents and asked if there would be an opportunity to tweak the plan based on what they heard. She asked if they could modify the plan after it is adopted by the Common Council. Mr. Kleppin explained that the Planning Commission has to hold its adoption meeting. The Zoning regulations have to go back through the Zoning Commission and the Planning Commission where they will weigh in again.

Mr. Kleppin said that the Zoning Commission and the Planning Commission are thinking about requiring more green infrastructure. He said it is a question of balance.

Ms. Shanahan said that green infrastructure was essential.

Mr. Heuvelman agreed that the green infrastructure was important and needs to be revisited. He said he would love to see it incorporated into the plan.

Mr. Kleppin said he hears the Committee loud and clear.

Mr. Kydes said when they first started this plan, the residents of East Norwalk did not want more East Norwalkers. He said he feels a good job was done taking public input and hearing their concerns. He said he believed it would be a disservice to not move this item to the full Common Council.

**** MOTION PASSED BY ROLL CALL VOTE WITH SIX (6) VOTES IN FAVOR (MR. TSIRANIDES; MS. SMYTH; MR. LIVINGSTON; MS. SHANAHAN; MS. YOUNG; MR. KYDES) AND ONE (1) VOTE IN OPPOSITION (MR. KEEGAN)**

III. OLD BUSINESS

There was no old business this evening.

ADJOURNMENT

**** MR. LIVINGSTON MOVED TO ADJOURN
** MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY**

There was no further business and the meeting was unanimously adjourned at 9:08 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Rosemarie Lombardi
Telesco Secretarial Services