

**CITY OF NORWALK
PLANNING COMMISSION
April 14, 2021**

PRESENT: Fran DiMeglio, Chair; Tamara Shockley; Mary Peniston; Tammy Langalis; Mike Mushak; Brian Baxendale; Steve Ferguson (arrived after the roll call)

STAFF: Steve Kleppin

OTHERS: Paul Sotnik

I. CALL TO ORDER

Ms. DiMeglio called the meeting to order at 6:04 p.m.

II. ROLL CALL

Mr. Kleppin called the roll. It should be noted that this meeting was held on Zoom.com with all participants calling in, separately.

III. DISCUSSION AND/OR ACTION ON APPLICATIONS

A. #03-2021 - 8-24 Referral – DPW – Seir Hill turnaround easement in favor of the City – Report & recommended action

Mr. Kleppin introduced Mr. Sotnik, from the Department of Public Works, who explained the referral. He explained the history of the Seir Hill turnaround which was affected by the construction of Route 7. He also showed them an aerial view of the area. He then discussed the innovation center which would be constructed in this area. It was approved in 2018. There had been discussions about a turnaround easement which would be provided to the city, at no cost to it. Currently a turnaround area for first responders did not exist.

There was a discussion about whether first responders had been consulted about the proposed plan. There was also a discussion about why the owner of the property would give up some parking spots to be used for the turnaround. There was a discussion about what had been done prior to this proposed easement. Mr. Sotnik noted that the city's plow trucks had turned out in the Glen Rock Condominium without permission but now the easement would resolve this issue.

**** MS. DIMEGLIO MOVED: BE IT RESOLVED** by the Norwalk Planning Commission that 8-24 Referral #03-21 - DPW- 27 Seir Hill Road – Seir Hill turnaround easement in favor of the City be **APPROVED**.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the reasons for this action are to implement the following Plan of Conservation and Development goals, policies and actions:

1. That "Norwalk's infrastructure and public facilities are resource-efficient, well-maintained, cost-effective, sustainable and resilient" (Chapter 11: Public Facilities, Infrastructure & Services); and

2. To “Ensure Norwalk’s emergency services departments are provided with appropriate funding for equipment and facilities to provide superior service and maintain a high level of public safety” (Chapter 11: Public Facilities, Infrastructure & Services); and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that notice of this action be forwarded to the Common Council.

Mr. Mushak seconded.

Fran DiMeglio; Tamara Shockley; Mary Peniston; Tammy Langalis; Mike Mushak; Brian Baxendale; Steve Ferguson approved.

No one opposed.

No one abstained.

Mr. Sotnik noted that this referral would be on the Common Council agenda later in the month.

B. Zoning Commission Referral – 2021-12 R – Planning & Zoning – Proposed text amendment to Article 101 – Workforce Housing Regulations of the Building Zone Regulations – Report & recommended action

Mr. Kleppin began the presentation of workforce housing amendments and said he would also send it to the commissioners. He explained the statistics and noted that the city had adopted regulations in 1987. As of 2020, the city has over 13% of its housing stock which is workforce. He noted the median incomes as well as the rents that residents would pay. He then discussed the purposes of these proposed amendments and noted that there is a regulation which had been put in place a few years earlier. He explained that there is a state regulation that an Affordable Housing Plan is due in 2022. His staff is working on it at this time. He discussed the impacts of the proposed amendments.

There would be numerous small fees to the developers which would be put in a fund for affordable housing throughout the city. There was a discussion about the process of how the funds would be managed. Mr. Kleppin explained that the Planning and Zoning Department would receive application and then the Common Council would allocate the funds. There was a discussion about the collection of the funds which was from developers. Mr. Kleppin discussed the proposed text of the amendment. There was a discussion about increasing the proposed fees. There was also a discussion about other fees in surrounding towns. There was also a discussion about whether funds would be going to developers who elect not to build affordable housing and then pay the fee not to do that. There was also a discussion about what types of projects would be eligible.

There was a discussion about the resolution. Mr. Kleppin noted that it would have to be voted on at this meeting since there would be a public hearing by the Zoning Commission in May. There was a discussion about the fees from other towns in Connecticut that have a similar program. Mr. Kleppin noted that this amendment would address one segment of the housing market. There was a discussion about the workflow for these applications from developers. The commissioners thought there should be a workflow in writing since there is not one at this time. It was noted that this process for these amendments had started in 2019.

There was then a discussion as to whether it was a good time to change the regulations when the state is also revising zoning regulations. Mr. Kleppin did not think these proposed amendments would run counter to the state’s proposed regulations. There was a discussion about tax credits for these types of developments. There was also a discussion about whether these amendments were affecting the middle

class or minimum wage workers. There was a discussion about the rates of rents as well as the median income levels. There was also a discussion about revisiting this issue and that the Zoning Commission will need input from the Planning Commission. There was a discussion about changing language in the proposed amendment. Mr. Kleppin made recommendations to the commissioners as to the process.

There was a discussion about the resolution and whether the commissioners would be voting on it as it was drafted. The commissioners wanted to increase the proposed fee but some commissioners were not comfortable about making a recommendation. Some commissioners felt that this matter was being rushed and that there should be a special meeting of the Planning Commission meeting to vote on this matter.

**** MS. DIMEGLIO MOVED: BE IT RESOLVED** that #2021-12 R– Zoning Commission – Amendments to the Workforce Housing Regulations dated 3/25/21 be **APPROVED**.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the reasons for this action are to implement the following Plan of Conservation and Development goals, policies and actions:

1. Expand workforce housing options, including conducting a citywide housing study and reviewing the existing workforce housing regulations, to allow more employees to live in Norwalk and avoid costly commutes from distant locations. (Chapter 3, Prosperity & Opportunity, Goal 2: A.vii, Pg. 56)
2. Development of policies that promote mixed income, diverse housing environments, reduce concentration of poverty, and support economic development (Chapter 4: Housing Choice & Healthy Lifestyle, Goal 1: A.ii., Pg. 74)
3. Continue to meet or exceed the state’s 10% goal for affordable housing. (Chapter 4, Housing Choice & Healthy Lifestyle, Goal 1: D.ii, Pg. 77)
4. Continue the inclusionary zoning program. (Chapter 4, Housing Choice & Healthy Lifestyle, Goal 1: D.iii, Pg. 78):

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the proposed amendment is consistent with Chapter 4, Housing Choice & Healthy Lifestyle, page 68, which states:

“While, from the state’s point of view, Norwalk has fulfilled its regional responsibility to provide affordable housing, there is a continuing need for affordable housing to serve the city’s very low- and low-income population, including seniors and disabled persons.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Planning Commission requests that the Zoning Commission increase the proposed fee, based on research provided by Staff, in order to make a more meaningful impact for the affordable housing fund.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that notice of this action be forwarded to the Norwalk Zoning Commission.

Ms. Peniston seconded.

There was a discussion about the city providing a broader study of the affordable housing units in it. There was also a concern about home ownership versus rental units.

Fran DiMeglio; Tamara Shockley; Mary Peniston; Mike Mushak; Brian Baxendale; Steve Ferguson approved.

No one opposed.

Tammy Langalis abstained.

There was then a discussion about having off the record conversations. Ms. DiMeglio then reminded the commissioners about an upcoming training.

IV. APPROVAL OF MINUTES: January 13, 2021; January 19, 2021; January 26, 2021; January 27, 2021; February 3, 2021; February 16, 2021; March 10, 2021

Since there were many minutes to be voted on, Ms. DiMeglio asked the commissioners to review them and submit their edits to Mr. Kleppin. He would have the revised minutes emailed to the commissioners and they would vote on them at the next Planning Commission meeting.

V. COMMENTS OF DIRECTOR

Mr. Kleppin said that there were three new staff members, one was a senior planner and two were on the counter in the front. They started about 5 weeks ago. He would send the names and their titles to the commissioners so they would know who they were. He would ask if they could attend the next Planning Commission on Zoom. There was also a discussion about the workflow of the department. He said that the department had seen an increase in the number of permits being issued. Mr. Kleppin also updated the commissioners as to upcoming projects.

Mr. Kleppin suggested that the Planning and Zoning Commission should be combined. There could be a subcommittee for the Capital Budget process. He thought that it would have to be revisited by the Common Council. He said that it could help speed up the permit process for developers. He noted that many communities had a combined Planning and Zoning Commission. There was a discussion about having an independent assessment which would look into how it could affect the workload for volunteers. It was noted that this suggestion was addressed in the Plan of Conservation and Development (POCD).

The consultants for the Zoning regulation rewrite had signed their contract and started work on the project. There was a discussion about the cost of the consultants which were from Tennessee.

VI. COMMENTS OF COMMISSIONERS

There was a discussion about having a general conversation of affordable housing. Mr. Kleppin suggested that it be an agenda item and that it had been discussed in the POCD. It was suggested that the commissioners review this section and then have a discussion on it. Mr. Kleppin noted what types of conversations the commissioners were allowed to have together.

VII. ADJOURNMENT

Mr. Ferguson made a Motion to Adjourn.

Mr. Baxendale seconded.

Fran DiMeglio; Tamara Shockley; Mary Peniston; Tammy Langalis; Mike Mushak; Brian Baxendale; Steve Ferguson approved.

No one opposed.

No one abstained.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:13 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Diana Palmentiero