

**CITY OF NORWALK
ZONING COMMISSION
April 21, 2021**

PRESENT: Louis Schulman, Chair; Rod Johnson; Frank Mancini; Galen Wells; Nick Kantor; Richard Roina and Michael Witherspoon and Josh Goldstein (arrived after the roll call);

STAFF: Steve Kleppin

OTHERS: Mike Faenza; Atty Adam Blank; Mike Barbis; Kevin Solli

I. CALL TO ORDER

Mr. Schulman called the meeting to order at 6:04 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. Mr. Schulman He also noted that since there were no public hearings, there would be no public comments.

III. REVIEW AND ACTION ON PENDING APPLICATIONS

a. #04-20 SP – Building Management – 75 Van Buren Avenue (Jefferson School) – Request for modification of approved plans – Report & recommended action

Mike Faenza explained that the plans were being modified due to comments from the Department of Parks and Recreation and would include different trees. He was asked about the maintenance of the plantings. Mr. Faenza noted that since they were maintained by the Parks and Recreation Department, it would be easier for them to maintain larger trees, rather than smaller beds of plantings that would need to be weeded, etc. He then showed the commissioners the revised renderings. He explained where the smaller shrubs would have been located under the original plans. He also noted that the trees would also create a better buffer between the school and the surrounding homes. He also noted the various types of trees that would be planted.

**** MR. MANCINI MOVED: THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED** by the Norwalk Zoning Commission that the request to modify application **#04-20 SP - Building Management - 75 Van Buren Avenue (Jefferson School) - Request for modification of approved plans** be **APPROVED** subject to the following conditions:

1. That the site will be developed in accordance with the following landscaping plan:
 - a. Drawing No. C-104, entitled“Planting and Lighting Plan” prepared by STANTEC Consulting Inc, and Antinozzi Associates, dated 2/1/21 and revised to 4/07/21; and
2. That all conditions of the original approval remain in effect; and
3. Should any of the approved plantings perish, they shall be replanted within 3 months, or as planting conditions allow.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that this application complies with Section 118-1450 Special Permits and with all applicable sections of the Building Zone Regulations for the City of Norwalk; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the effective date of this action is April 30, 2021.

Ms. Wells seconded.

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

No one opposed.

Josh Goldstein abstained.

b. #01-10SPR – Syed Reza – Request for release of bond for conversion of existing 38,000sf building to mixed general and medical office – Report & recommended action

Mr. Kleppin said that the staff had inspected the property and reviewed the bond conditions. They found all satisfactory and recommended the following proposed resolution.

**** MR. ROINA MOVED: THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED** by the Norwalk Zoning Commission that the bond release requests for application #1-10SPR – Syed Reza – 346 Main Avenue – Conversion of 38,000sf building to mixed general and medical office be **APPROVED**.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the effective date of this approval is April 30, 2021.

Mr. Mancini seconded.

Louis Schulman; Richard Roina; Rod Johnson; Galen Wells; Josh Goldstein; Michael Witherspoon; Nick Kantor; Frank Mancini approved.

No one opposed.

No one abstained.

c. #02-06 SP - Beth Israel Society – 40 King Street - Request for release of bond for accessory use/structure for existing Place of Worship – Report & recommended action

Mr. Schulman noted that since this project had never been completed, he saw no reason to hold the bond.

**** MR. JOHNSON MOVED: THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED** by the Norwalk Zoning Commission that the bond release request for application #2-06 SP – Beth Israel Society – 40 King Street – Request for release of bond for accessory use/structure for existing Place of Worship be **APPROVED**.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the effective date of this approval is April 30, 2021.

Mr. Witherspoon seconded.

Louis Schulman; Richard Roina; Rod Johnson; Galen Wells; Josh Goldstein; Michael Witherspoon; Nick Kantor; Frank Mancini approved.

No one opposed.

No one abstained.

IV. REVIEW AND ACTION ON NEW APPLICATIONS

a. #2021-13 CAM – Sixth Taxing District of Norwalk – 2 Wilson Avenue – Reconfiguration and expansion of existing public parking lot – Preliminary review

Atty Adam Blank, the attorney for the 6th Taxing District, introduced the project team and gave a brief overview of the project. He oriented the commissioners as to the location of the property on an aerial map. He noted that it was a free public parking lot and that a small piece of it was owned by someone else. They would add a parking space and make changes to the parking flow. He explained the use of the parking lot for the local businesses and restaurants. There are wetlands on the property and the applicant has a permit for this application. He then showed them the rendering for the proposed parking lot. He also discussed the drainage on the property and that the water quality on the site would be improved. He then discussed the lighting on the property which would also be moved. He noted that the ingress and egress would change under the revised plan. He also spoke about the trees on the property which would be removed as well as the landscaping plan. He noted that it was being done by the 6th Taxing District to help the public.

There was a discussion about the wetlands area and whether there was a park area. Mr. Barbis explained the history of the Ambler Park sign on the property and noted that it is not a traditional park that can be walked through. There was also a discussion about the additional exit on Wilson Avenue. There was a discussion about the lighting on the property. The applicant will have a lighting plan prepared. There was a discussion about the date for the public hearing which would be on the Zoning Commission's agenda in May.

b. #2021-14 SPR – WDG Norwalk, LLC - 480 Westport Avenue – Intensification of existing restaurant use – Preliminary review

Kevin Solli, the representative for Popeyes, began the presentation by orienting the commissioners as to the proposed location of Popeyes in Norwalk. There would be renovations to the facade. They have received comments from various city departments which included traffic concerns. They had submitted a traffic study which included a comparison to the other Popeyes restaurant in Norwalk. There was a discussion about how the study was prepared. There was a discussion about the date for the public hearing which would be on the Zoning Commission's agenda in May.

There was then a discussion about the number of vehicles that could be in line at the Popeyes. Mr. Solli noted that they studied the current Popeyes in Norwalk, which was near Chick-Fil-A. They had counted up to 6 vehicles at the current Popeyes and that at the proposed location they could have up to 16 vehicles in line. There was a discussion about also studying the other drive thru restaurants near the proposed location. There was also a discussion about studying other Popeyes in southwest Fairfield County.

Mr. Kleppin noted that Chick-Fil-A did not have any indoor dining during the COVID pandemic which may have been a reason for their long lines.

V. DISCUSSION OF OTHER ITEMS

a. Industrial zones study status report

Mr. Kleppin said there is a public meeting on April 29, 2021. The consultants would give their presentation and have break out sessions with the public to get their views. He asked the commissioners to attend if they could. Mr. Schulman asked them all to attend.

b. South Norwalk TOD study status report

Mr. Kleppin said he did not have anything further to report.

c. Zoning Regulations rewrite status report

Mr. Kleppin said that the consultants are receiving data from his department. The public kickoff meeting should be in July and by September would be a larger public event. There was a discussion about the timeline about the writing of the regulations. There was a discussion about whether there should be a July meeting since many people would be on vacation, especially with the end of the pandemic.

d. Discussion of Housing Bills

Mr. Schulman noted that there was a meeting the previous week with the Mayor. No Zoning Commissioners except for himself and Mr. Kleppin were at the meeting. He also explained that if the entire Zoning Commission were in attendance a notice would have to be sent out. He then explained what happened at the meeting which included a representative from Senator Duff's office, various city departments, the Mayor and a representative from WestCog. There was a discussion about 2 bills which are not going forward.

Mr. Kleppin discussed one of the bills which he noted was more far-reaching. It was a departure from the way municipalities run. It would require more affordable housing plans that had to be presented to the state. If they were not completed, there could be more oversight, etc.

Mr. Schulman would be invited to WestCog meetings. He also suggested there should be a meeting with Senator Duff and Representative Stephanie Thomas.

There was also a discussion about whether towns would end up looking the same if these new bills passed. Mr. Schulman would like a meeting within the next month. He also suggested that Norwalk has to speak with one voice. He again asked that a meeting for the Zoning Commission be set up with the city's legislators in Hartford. They also discussed something in writing, either an Op-Ed or a letter to Senator Bob Duff and other legislators. There was also a discussion about the process of how the letter should be written. This item would remain on the Zoning Commission agenda to share information to all of the commissioners. There was a discussion about whether anyone from the city had reviewed the proposed bills at the state legislature that were in the public forum. Mr. Kleppin said that he would send out a review by WestCog.

VI. APPROVAL OF MINUTES: April 8, 2021

**** MR. GOLDSTEIN MOVED to approve the April 8, 2021 meeting minutes.**

Mr. Witherspoon seconded.

Louis Schulman; Richard Roina; Rod Johnson; Josh Goldstein; Michael

Witherspoon; Frank Mancini approved.

No one opposed.

Galen Wells and Nick Kantor abstained.

VII. COMMENTS OF DIRECTOR

Mr. Kleppin noted that the moratorium would continue on contractor's yards and would be on the Zoning Commission agenda in May. He would like to add self-storage and distribution centers but it had not been noticed properly. He explained why the city should include these items to the moratorium but could be done at a later date.

VIII. COMMENTS OF COMMISSIONERS

Mr. Mancini suggested other uses for the Norden site, including a technical college or senior living housing.

IX. ADJOURNMENT

Mr. Roina made a Motion to Adjourn.

Mr. Kantor seconded.

Louis Schulman; Richard Roina; Rod Johnson; Galen Wells; Josh Goldstein;

Michael Witherspoon; Nick Kantor; Frank Mancini approved.

No one opposed.

No one abstained.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:24 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Diana Palmentiero