

**CITY OF NORWALK
ECONOMIC AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE
OF THE COMMON COUNCIL
REGULAR MEETING
AUGUST 4, 2022**

ATTENDANCE: John Kydes, Chair; Nicole Ayers, David Heuvelman,
Bryan Meek Lisa Shanahan; Barbara Smyth; Tom
Livingston; Darlene Young (7:08)

COMMON COUNCIL: Nicol Ayers, Nora Niedzielski-Eichner, Jenn
McMurrer

STAFF: Steven Kleppin, Director of Planning and Zoning;
Jessica Vonashek, Chief of Economic and Community
Development; Pedro Mata, Capital Access Manager, Kive

CALL TO ORDER

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

ROLL CALL

Those present are indicated above.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Mr. Kydes reviewed the procedure for public participation. No members of the public wished to comment this evening.

I. ADMINISTRATION

A. Approval of the Minutes of July 7, 2022 Meeting.

**** MR. LIVINGSTON MOVED TO ACCEPT THE MINUTES AS
SUBMITTED**

**** MOTION PASSED WITH TWO ABSTENTIONS (MEEK, SMYTH)**

II. NEW BUSINESS

A. PLANNING AND ZONING

1. Industrial Zone recommendations, presentation, and discussion

Mr. Kleppin shared the presentation “Economic & Community Development Committee Industrial Zones Study. He gave a recap of the process they’d gone through, noting that his presentation would answer questions that came in from the Council and the Committee. He said the process had been started within the 2019 Citywide plan, and said it was important to have adequate industrial land, but there were conflicts with residential zones, and it needed to be looked at. He shared committee members and the timeline of actions over the past two years.

He shared the key findings and recommendations out of the study. He said that there were definitions that needed clarifications, and definitions that were missing. He noted that they would work on correcting things over time. He said they’d tried to provide incentives like increased building height, parking reduction and supplementary uses to monetize the commercial uses.

He said the study aimed to distinguish the types of contractor yards, and one recommendation was to review a compendium study of the industrial waterfront which would be ready to view soon.

Ms. Young joined the meeting.

He reviewed the three main areas of focus—Perry Avenue, East Norwalk and SoNo and a small correction off Wall Street. He showed a map of the Wall Street Area with some legacy industrial zones and recommended changing the zoning. He said on Perry Ave, there was some land that was zoned Business 2, he said there wasn’t residential impact in this area and was a good candidate for industrial growth.

In East Norwalk he said there was Industrial 1 and a combination of other zones. He noted they’d rezoned part of East Ave last year and recommended finishing the work changing to Industrial 2.

He said in South Norwalk, they’d made some adjustments for the new SoNo school. He said they recommended changing some zoning to be Industrial 2 and maintain Industrial 1 in other areas. He said they’d made modifications based on feedback from the community. He said they’d removed some industrial land and made it neighborhood business and shared what fell under neighborhood business.

He said they'd made it so that Lexington Ave was mostly residential use, and it would make a more cohesive development plan over time. He showed a map of where the school would be, surrounded by residential zone areas. He said there was concern about leaving an area near the new school Industrial 1, he said that they took the whole area out of industrial 1, proposing it all become industrial 2.

He shared slides of what fell into Industrials 1 and 2 and what required special permits as well as bulk and height changes they proposed. He shared renderings of what they anticipated it looking like.

He concluded noting that there were currently 513 acres zoned Industrial 1 and Restricted Industrial noting they recommended a 70% reduction in Industrial 1 and a 45% increase in areas where commercial vehicles could park, and 41 acres added to Industrial 2 from Business 2. He noted that would make 20 contractor yards legally nonconforming, but they could continue to operate as they do now.

He also reiterated that the plan allowed for increased height and number of stories, reduced parking demand, allowed boutique and light manufacturing in more areas and loosened restrictions on what required commission approval.

He reviewed other South Norwalk initiatives including tree planting, sidewalks, and playgrounds. He said there were also neighborhood cleanup efforts and environmental efforts going on as well as a transportation initiative.

He shared a slide and discussed enforcement. He said they inspected approved contractor yards and did quarterly sweeps in neighborhoods prone to illegal contractor yards. He said they recommended screening or buffer requirements as part of approval for new developments.

He said they were continually working on blight remediation, and were monitoring for dust, odor and sound complaints with CT DEEP.

He noted they were working on these across city agencies.

Mr. Meek asked about the longer-term plan for the marinas. Mr. Kleppin said they were wrapping up a waterfront land use study. He said it didn't have as specific zoning recommendations. Mr. Meek asked about footpath and curb maintenance. Mr. Kleppin said they hadn't looked at that piece of it, but any project after this would be subject to city standard sidewalks.

Ms. Smyth said she appreciated the change on Meadow Street. She said that as a city they were committed to creating a safe vibrant community around the new school. She asked Mr. Kleppin

to talk through the special permit process. Mr. Kleppin reviewed three types of permits that went to the Planning and Zoning Commission and what they had to bring to the Commission. He said that they worked with the other city agencies to weigh in on projects to ensure that they were viable long term.

Mr. Meek left at 7:40

Mr. Heuvelman asked if they were eliminating storage and wholesale distribution. Mr. Kleppin said that currently the two were together, and they wanted to change that because they were two very different uses. He said that they had storage in business zones under very special circumstances. Mr. Heuvelman asked how they could reduce industrial land and preserve industrial land for future at the same time. Mr. Kleppin said they were reducing the heaviest kind by 70%, but still had about the same amount of acreage overall. Mr. Heuvelman asked if they were losing jobs by losing the I1 properties. Mr. Kleppin said that there were some properties of concern on Meadow near the proposed SoNo school and reviewed the number of employees there. He said they were proposing use that was quieter and more environmentally sound that also increased the tax base and created jobs.

Mr. Kydes said he'd been concerned about the management of violation enforcement in Industrial Zones and asked what the plans were going forward. Mr. Kleppin said they'd had complaints about 229 contractor yards citywide over 10 years, he said a lot of them were focused on three or four properties. He said that several property owners had changed what they were doing. He said they swept the areas where they knew there were complaints quarterly, as did the health department. He said they also responded to every complaint they got within a couple of days. He said once they went through the citation process, they were bound to stick to prescribed guidelines. He said they had a full staff again, and that would free up staff time to be proactive in the field.

Ms. Niedzielski-Eichner thanked Mr. Kleppin and his team for their hard work, noting that it hadn't been done in 30 years. She said that this was a beginning, and it should be ongoing. She said she was concerned about Meadow and thought that Wilson wouldn't be I2 forever. She said that because there was public housing there, they had an obligation to not expose residents to environmental risks. She said with the school going into the area they needed to think strategically about redeveloping the area, consulting with the people already in the community.

Ms. Ayers thanked Mr. Kleppin for the work on this study. She said that she had concerns about the Meadows Avenue area, noting that the slide said something about making the areas more attractive to the neighborhood. She asked Mr. Kleppin what the facades on Meadow Street would look like and what the time frame was. Mr. Kleppin said if they had a new development, they could require new standards around buffers, landscaping, fencing, etc., but with existing properties they couldn't make them change. Ms. Ayers said that on Meadow right now the

contract yards were up to the curb and asked about plans to make those businesses use buffers. Mr. Kleppin said they didn't have a specific plan now, he said when the school came in to develop, they would have other things like sidewalks. Ms. Ayers asked how much of Meadow Street would change. Ms. Vonashek said the transportation master plan and its subcommittee would be working on this as well. She said that they would have residents on the subcommittee to help determine needs. She said they were reaching out to businesses to work on buffers and screens. Mr. Kleppin said this plan, when enacted, would not result in immediate change. Ms. Ayers said it was important for constituents to understand that there wouldn't be much movement even with improvements.

Mr. Heuvelman asked what the action item for the Council was. Mr. Kleppin said the council was part of the approval process for the POCD. He said once they acted, the planning and zoning committee would take it over. Mr. Heuvelman noted that the Common Council did not make the decisions on the zoning.

Ms. Young said that South Norwalk knew that major changes weren't coming right away. She said that the community had learned not to complain about it. She said that the Council didn't have a lot of say in what happened. She said that there were unacceptable things going on in that neighborhood with bulldozers and rock crushing. She said they needed enforcement, she said they didn't have enough strength to make people do the right thing.

She said this was a start and that Meadow wasn't the only street with violators, and they needed to change fines.

2. Quarterly development update

Mr. Kleppin said they were working on the North 7 project, a two-year process. He said they developed a master plan for approval in three stages and reviewed each phase. HE said each piece was contingent on improvements being made in the phase before. He said there was flexibility built into the approval. He noted that plans included a two-acre park with trail access and other amenities. He said it was a 10-year project through all the phases

He said a judge had upheld decisions on the POKO project, he said they hoped for a final resolution sometime this year.

He said in South Norwalk they'd started construction of the Spinnaker project near the police station.

He said in East Norwalk the first TOD project was before the Planning and Zoning Committee and said he would share a link to the materials.

He included that this was the busiest he'd seen in planning and zoning since he joined the department. He said they were almost fully staffed and would be able to tackle the backlog.

Ms. Young asked about the process to increase fines. Mr. Kleppin said that unless the state statute changed, it was fixed at \$150/day. He said that the citation hearing officer, a volunteer, determined the fees of others. He noted that the intent was to gain compliance, not collect fees. Ms. Young said that a business owner had a file dating back 10 years who did not incur any fines, which didn't make sense to her. Mr. Kleppin said that he understood that living next to this was not ideal, he said that he would check with the legal department to see about including neighbors in the notification process when hearings were scheduled. He noted that people were reticent to comment at hearings. Ms. Young said she wasn't sure the onus should be on the resident to testify.

Ms. Young asked how many permits were waiting, particularly in South Norwalk. Mr. Kleppin said there were no contractor yard permits because of the moratorium

Mr. Livingston said that he thought they had to look at the ordinance to ensure they were in compliance with the state law.

Ms. Ayers asked which committee would look at the process. Mr. Livingstone said he thought it would go through ordinance but wasn't sure about the zoning. Ms. Ayers asked about who oversaw the procedure of enforcement. Mr. Kleppin said the state statute ruled, and the P&Z department and the legal department developed the process to ensure they were following the letter of the law. Ms. Ayers said that if they had city workers certifying violations, there should be support around that and the neighbors not testifying shouldn't be a factor.

Ms. Niedzielski-Eichner suggest that the best way to move forward, was to bring the fines to the state delegation and show that the fines weren't effective as deterrents. Mr. Kleppin said if there was an egregious violation, they could issue a cease and desist and take the individual to court.

B. BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT AND TOURISM

1. Introduction to Pedro Mata, Capital Access Manger for the Kiva program

Mr. Mata introduced himself and shared his credentials. He said he was working to set up a funding platform for small businesses in Norwalk. He said there was a crowd-sourcing element to Kiva . He said that there were other funds available too.

He said that they were also creating a business center on Belden where he'd been working. He said that he already had a first potential client.

Mr. Heuvelman said this was a great opportunity for Norwalk. Mr. Mata said that it was not just a handout, but it required a level of self-promotion and hustle. He said they'd do educational programs as well.

III. OLD BUSINESS

There was no action on this item.

ADJOURNMENT

**** MS. SHANAHAN MOVED TO ADJOURN
** MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY**

The meeting adjourned at 8:50 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Amy Chaple
Telesco Secretarial Services