

**CITY OF NORWALK  
PLANNING COMMITTEE  
REGULAR MEETING  
AUGUST 4, 2008**

**ATTENDANCE:** Rev. Phyllis Bolden, Chair; William Krummel, Kelly Straniti, Douglas Hempstead, Andrew Conroy and Amanda Brown (7:40 p.m.)

**STAFF:** Timothy Sheehan, Director of Redevelopment; Jack Burritt, Susan Sweitzer, Sally Johnson

**OTHERS:** Council Member Laurel Lindstrom, Stanley Seligson, Atty. John Louizos, Tony Doumlele

**CALL TO ORDER**

Rev. Bolden called the meeting to order at 7:37 p.m.

**PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

Mr. Tony Doumlele came forward and distributed copies of a document. He said that he was a Norwalk resident and a Norwalk Agency Commissioner. He said that the average ratios that were used in the forecasts were done in 1999 when the price of oil was much lower. This forecast was based on obsolete energy prices.

*Ms. Brown joined the meeting at 7:40 p.m.*

Mr. Doumlele said that the parking garage at the Maritime Aquarium had not generated much revenue. He said that the Blue Back Square parking had not generated as much revenue as expected. Mr. Doumlele had asked for a copy of the report regarding the revenue generated by Blue Back Square and he did not receive it.

Rev. Bolden asked if there was anyone else who wished to speak. She repeated the question two more times. Hearing none, Rev. Bolden then closed the Public Participation portion of the meeting

**APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES**

**\*\* MR. KRUMMEL MOVED THE MINUTES OF THE JUNE 26, 2008 SPECIAL MEETING.**

Mr. Krummel stated that his questions regarding the intramodal transportation plans for the railroad station and consideration of the street trolley had not been included in the minutes. Rev. Bolden said that she would request that this be added from the tape.

The following corrections were noted:

Page 7, paragraph 2 of Number 2, line 10: please change the following from:

“When acquiring property, the timeframe is 5 years, with the option of extending it another 5 years.”

To:

“When acquiring property, the eminent domain timeframe is 5 years, with the option of extending it another 5 years with the approval of the Redevelopment Agency.”

Mr. Hempstead asked for clarification regarding the details of eminent domain and the request for an additional 5 year extension. Mr. Sheehan reviewed this and explained that the Council would have to approve the original taking of any parcel, but the extension would be subject to approval by the Redevelopment Agency and would not have to go back to the Council.

**\*\* THE MOTION TO APPROVE THE MINUTES AS AMENDED PASSED WITH FOUR IN FAVOR (STRANITI, HEMPSTEAD, KRUMMEL AND BROWN) AND ONE ABSTENTION (CONROY).**

**NEW BUSINESS**

Mr. Sheehan explained that Ms. Sally Johnson had been promoted to the CDBG coordinator and that Mr. Moore had been promoted to special Project Coordinator.

Ms. Johnson greeted everyone and said that she was looking forward to working with the Planning Committee.

**WEST AVENUE REDEVELOPMENT PROJECT**

Mr. Sheehan said that in order to have the same level of information available to the Council and to the Committee, the presentation would be made about Waypoint. Ms. Brown asked about the virtual tour listed on the agenda. Mr. Sheehan replied that tonight, the Committee would be seeing some photos of Blue Back Square, but that he hoped to have the entire Council tour the actual Blue Back Square.

Mr. Narva came forward and said that he was a Managing Partner at Streetworks and also was involved in Blue Back Square also. He said that it was important to remember that Norwalk was not West Hartford. He also said that the project really was not about Waypointe but about the West Avenue Redevelopment projects. All four projects are very important economically and in terms of the districts being formed.

Retail drives the mixed use projects, but it is often not the largest component. He said that Blue Back had begun opening in November of 2007 and has continued to have various open right up to the present. The focus is sustainability and smart growth for the future. Using green technology for the building would be wise for a number of reasons. The theme is centered around the concept of not having to drive long distance, which is a really a suburban concept.

Mr. Narva then gave a brief overview of how West Hartford was composed and reviewed an aerial view of West Hartford. He then gave a slide presentation regarding the Blue Back Square development. He stressed that two other development projects nearby were only retail and were not doing well because they were lifestyle stores rather than mixed usage. He stressed that this was a neighborhood, not a shopping center. He explained that the statute of Noah Webster holding the "blue back speller" had been moved to one of the mini parks. The development derives its name from Webster's "blue back speller".

He then showed a slide of the garage and explained that the resident parking was underground. He added that the condominiums and lofts were mostly sold out. None of the condo purchasers walked away from the closings. He stressed that the key retailer tenants were chosen for specific reasons.

Mr. Narva explained that when the referendum had been done, the project had about 80% approval and that there would still be about an 8-10% who would still be negative about the project, but this was normal.

Mr. Hempstead asked about the fact that Norwalk would still retain its identity. Mr. Narva said that it would be important to look at the major retail centers in Fairfield County and realize that there would also be a number of local tenants. Anchor tenants would be important, like a wellness center from Norwalk Hospital and also to have a mixture of soft goods and other items.

Mr. Hempstead asked about the continued maintenance of the garages and public spaces. Mr. Sheehan said that it would not come out of the general maintenance budget and that there were healthy reserves for these. Mr. Narva said that one major difference is that in Waypointe, the sidewalks would belong to the developer. The SSD formula has been added to the development to provide maintenance. Mr. Narva then reviewed the SSD revenues, tax revenues and parking revenues, which were all ahead of projections. One group of figures that are frequently misunderstood had been based on Blue Back being

opened fifteen months before it actually did. Once this is adjusted for the time lapse, the figures are all ahead of projection. Mr. Hempstead asked if he could get a copy of the Blue Back projections. Mr. Sheehan explained that the information had already been sent to the Committee earlier.

Mr. Narva said that in Blue Back, a purchase concept was used. He then reviewed the contract and pointed out that 75% of the tenants were required to be in place along with a number of other qualifications before the City assumes ownership.

Ms. Brown asked about the anchor stores. Mr. Narva explained that if the store or restaurant were located in Westport or nearby, it would not be in Waypointe.

She then asked about the bonding and the purchasing of the garages by the City. Mr. Narva explained that the cost of the public improvements requires the developer to pay 100% of the new taxes from Day One, and the SSD tax is an additional tax. A city can borrow money at a lower rate than a private entity. Mr. Sheehan added that in the Master Development there is a provision that requires an audit be done before any funds are drawn down. The City will only disburse the amount that was actually spent. Anchor tenants are the ones that are looking three to four years forward.

He said that he believed that it was a two year before breaking ground and then it would take another three years before the project would be completed. Mr. Sheehan said that the contract requires that the developer be breaking ground within two years of completing the site plans.

Mr. Hempstead asked about providing culture for the neighborhood. Mr. Narva said that at Blue Back, there are eleven people who coordinate events at Blue Back because people are living and working there.

Ms. Brown asked about contract and ownership. Mr. Sheehan said that during the period of the bond, the developer has to come to the City for any change in ownership. Mr. Narva said that there would be too much invested in a mixed use project to ignore maintenance. Mr. Seligson said that he has no plan to get out of the project and that it was a long term asset. He added it would be some time before the project turned a profit and reminded everyone that it was not the most favorable financial climate.

Rev. Bolden asked what the major commitment was for anchor tenants. Mr. Narva said about twenty years, but the smaller tenants may only have ten year leases. He then proceeded to review some of the investments for the tenants at Blue Back.

Mr. Sheehan said that he would like to respond to what Mr. Doumlele had presented earlier in the meeting. He explained that page 1 was from a report that the Agency had commissioned. Page 2 was from a PowerPoint presentation that Walker Parking had

done that the agency had nothing to do with. On page 3, there was a request by the Finance Director that Walker be re-engaged before the pending sale of the bond. The project will be at least four years in the making and that the City would not be involved until all the conditions were met. On page 4, all the off street parking rates are made by the Parking Authority. The Redevelopment Agency has nothing to do with this. Mr. Sheehan said that Walker had used an hourly rate for the Maritime Garage for the start rate for calculations for the new garage.

Mr. Sheehan then said that one issue that the Committee members should remind themselves that the Maritime Garage was built as a non-for-profit use and built for peak occupancy at the Aquarium. He said that it might be a stretch to take the City's experience with the Maritime Garage and apply it to the new structure. He said that it would be more important to look at a project that is actually mixed use rather than a tourist site that had certain limitations.

Mr. Krummel said that he has heard about Blue Back Development where the young singles were living, the residents would be using the private parking. Mr. Narva said that only about 220 vehicles were actually residents. Mr. Krummel said that he did not see the difference between the Maritime Aquarium parking with the type of parking needed for the project. Discussion then followed about the concept of shared parking.

Mr. Sheehan said that on page five, it was clear that the Agency would be happy to provide the information but on page seven, there was no listing of the Agency as a recipient on the email. Discussion then followed about the details.

Mr. Conroy asked whether there was a study of the use of the Maritime Garage parking. Mr. Burritt then reviewed the number of the parking spaces leased to various retailers and some other details of the parking garage.

Ms. Brown asked if the timeline and the procedures that she had asked for at the last meeting had been sent. Mr. Sheehan said that he would send it to the Committee members.

Mr. Conroy asked about the executive session that was anticipated. Mr. Sheehan said that he thought it was scheduled by the Council for the 12th in executive session. Mr. Conroy said that it would be important to start getting the approvals for this project because it would not get done otherwise.

Mr. Krummel asked about the Mayor's Review Committee had completed their job. Mr. Sheehan said that he believed that the Committee had finished their work but had not issued a report at this time. Ms. Straniti said that it would be helpful to have a timeline showing where the project was in the process. Mr. Sheehan said that he had reviewed this with all the Council.

Mr. Krummel said that he had not read the Master Plan yet. He then asked when Mr. Sheehan thought there would be a vote. Mr. Sheehan said that he expected that it would be up for a vote in the fall.

Mr. Hempstead asked Mr. Seligson when he expected to file with Zoning. Mr. Seligson answered that he would like to file as soon as possible. Mr. Sheehan then reviewed the option clause that Corporation Counsel was agreeable to in lieu of approvals. Ms. Brown asked how many properties were not likely to have options. Mr. Sheehan said that there were five properties that would not be likely to have contracts. Other properties were not yet at the option stage.

Mr. Conroy asked what would be reviewed in the upcoming Council Executive Session. Mr. Sheehan said that there were nine properties that were in question and that he would be reviewing the status of those negotiations.

Mr. Krummel said that he thought it would help if the Committee had a comparison between where it was difficult to have a settlement and the properties that were close to closing. Mr. Sheehan said that he did not want to project what he personally thought into the presentation and wished to stick with the facts. Mr. Krummel then said that he was looking for a comparison with parcels where the negotiations were proceeding smoothly and those where it was not. Mr. Sheehan said that he believed that it would become evident as to why the negotiations that were stalled had reached that stage.

Mr. Hempstead then stated that there would only be one side of the story presented. He said that the Council would be only hearing the Agency's side and not the seller's. Mr. Sheehan said that the information that would be presented was what is in the file. Atty. Louizos had been contacted by the Agency Council about this. The discussion then moved to whether Atty. Louizos would be privy to the Executive Session. Ms. Straniti said that one of the reasons that the Executive Session had been scheduled because the Council said that they were hearing from the owners, but not from the City. Mr. Sheehan reminded everyone that the Agency had been at the table for all the negotiations. Ms. Brown asked if there would be any actions taken in the Executive Session. Mr. Sheehan said that this would be up to the Council. Mr. Hempstead said that the only action that has been tabled was the original resolution. Ms. Straniti said that she would like to have different options available to the Council for the vote.

### **ADJOURNMENT**

**\*\* MR. HEMPSTEAD MOVED TO ADJOURN.  
\*\* THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

The meeting adjourned at 9:37 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Sharon L. Soltes  
Telesco Secretarial Services.

