

**CITY OF NORWALK
PLANNING COMMITTEE
JANUARY 4, 2007**

ATTENDANCE: Matthew Miklave, Chair; Nicholas Kydes;
Carvin Hilliard (7:37 p.m.); Douglas Hempstead (7:54 p.m.)

STAFF: Timothy Sheehan, Executive Director; Jack Burritt, Assistant
Executive Director; Munro Johnson, Senior Development Project
Manager; Susan Sweitzer, Senior Project Manager; Michael Moore

CALL TO ORDER

Mr. Miklave called the meeting to order at 7:39 p.m.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There were no members of the public who wished to speak about any agenda items this evening.

Mr. Miklave said that he intends to have monthly updates and provide the public with an opportunity to hear those updates and provide their input.

BUSINESS

REED PUTNAM URBAN RENEWAL PROJECT

Reed Putnam Parcels 1, 2 & 4 – Present Preliminary Conceptual Master Sit Plan (Not for Approval)

Mr. Burritt said that a site plan has been prepared by 95/7. He pointed out that there were a number of representatives of 95/7 in the audience.

Mr. Burritt revisited the charge given by the Common Council on October 10, 2006.

Mr. Hilliard arrived at 7:37 p.m.

Mr. Burritt said that tonight the Committee would hear 95/7's response to that charge. He stressed that the charge was given and 95/7 elected to stay within the height and FAR limits. He added that this was an integral step in the dialogue between the Common Council and the Redevelopment Agency.

Mr. Burritt introduced Mr. Kim Morque of Spinnaker who gave a power point presentation of the plan.

Mr. Hempstead arrived at 7:54 p.m.

Mr. Richard Yancy of the design firm Beyer, Blinder & Belle presented a power point presentation showing the various plans for the site. He showed those plans at different levels.

Mr. Miklave expressed concern about the barrier that is created by the railroad tracks and I-95. He said that they create an enormous barrier. Mr. Morque agreed and noted that the stretch of I-95 along West Avenue will never be pedestrian friendly. Mr. Burritt said that the bridge over Reed Street will be made wider, so that it is an opening to the waterfront. Mr. Morque said that he wants to think of Crescent Street as a soft connection.

Mr. Kydes said that he sees the parking structure as a big white elephant and asked if there was any opportunity to build condominiums on top of the structure. Mr. Morque said that he believed there could be an opportunity to look at green roofs or add other facilities on the roof. Parking is a huge challenge. He said that it would be more esthetically pleasing if they could put the parking underground, but that would be very costly. He said that the only time anyone would see the top of the parking structure, would be if they were flying over. Mr. Clay Fowler agreed that you will never see the roof. He said that the location for the garage was very consciously debated.

Mr. Morque presented a table top model of the site. He said that he has presented the plans to various groups and they are providing positive feedback. Mr. Burritt said that the conceptual plan is the plan that goes within the Land Disposition Agreement. He said that each plan gets a detailed review.

Mr. Hempstead asked to see elevation drawings. Mr. Burritt said that all of the ideas suggested are thrashed about during their weekly meetings. Mr. Miklave said that it would be nice to include attributes that are distinctly Norwalk on the roof of the parking garage.

Mr. Miklave offered the public an opportunity to talk about the project. Mr. Glenn Iannaccone expressed concern about the access issues at King Chemical. Mr. Burritt said that the connection that Crescent Street provides will be preserved.

Mr. Burritt said that there have been discussions about providing trolley service. Mr. Kydes said that a trolley service would be a beautiful thing for Norwalk. Mr. Miklave agreed. He also said that they have the ability to set a standard that other communities around the country could look at.

A recess was called at 8:36 p.m.

The meeting reconvened at 8:40 p.m.

WALL STREET HEAD OF THE HARBOR REDEVELOPMENT PROJECT

Mr. Johnson updated the Committee on the Wall Street project. He said that in March 2005, DiScala Company was selected to develop the project and in September 2005, Poko Properties was selected to be the developer. He said that they anticipate the formal approvals for the LDA will take place in the spring. He said that parcel 3 went before the Joint Committee on three occasions, but ran into concerns with the south parcel. He said that he anticipates going back before the Joint Committee in March. The concerns were relative to density, height and massing of the buildings. The developer listened to those concerns and worked to meet the requirements. The site is within two properties of being assembled.

Mr. Ken Olson of Poko Properties said that they focused on creating a mixed use community to try and revitalize the downtown area. He presented an aerial view of the current site and a conceptual master plan. The plan is broken down into three phases.

Mr. Olson presented various renderings and various views of the site. He said that they will provide 850 parking spaces and will work with an automated parking system. He explained how the automated parking system works. They plan to use green roofs and a cogeneration system for energy.

In the first phase, they will have 50 conventional parking spaces to accommodate the Garden Cinema, Globe Theater and short term shoppers.

Mr. Miklave asked about housing for workforce families. Mr. Olson said that everything they are building is geared for working people.

Mr. Hempstead asked where other automated parking facilities were located. Mr. Olson said that there are four vendors that provide automated parking. There are facilities in Hoboken, NJ and Manhattan.

Mr. Hempstead said that he hoped there would be more green space on the site. He also said that he hoped there would be an effort to rescue the Globe Theater. Mr. Olson said that their program contemplates re-furbishing the theater to perform live performances.

On the street side of the project there are 5 stories; 8 in the interior. They will work to break up the façade.

Mr. Fowler said that this is a great addition and complements what they are doing on their end of town. Mr. Miklave said that he would like to see a trolley connecting both sites.

WEST AVENUE REDEVELOPMENT PROJECT

Ms. Sweitzer said that Mr. Seligson is the developer for the project. They submitted plans and a public hearing on those plans will be held in March.

Mr. Seligson was approved as the developer at the November 28, 2006 meeting of the Common Council. Ms. Sweitzer said that Mr. Seligson has met with various community groups in terms of making adjustments to his plan.

Ms. Sweitzer said that his project relates closely to the 95/7 and Wall Street projects. Mr. Hempstead said that he attended one of the community meetings and was blown away by what he saw. He said that Mr. Seligson has done a great job of outreach to the community. Mr. Miklave said that he was very pleased with all three developer's willingness to work with everyone.

Ms. Sweitzer said that the developer teams have seen an incredible value in the willingness of the developers to work with the public. Mr. Miklave applauded the efforts of the developers.

Mr. Hempstead asked if there were any hiccups in resolving any issues with the West Avenue project. Mr. Sheehan said that they first need to approve the conceptual plan. Mr. Miklave said that he would like to look at the status of the projects at each meeting. Mr. Sheehan said that as soon as the plans are filed, they will go on the City's website, therefore, there will be no delay in terms of feedback.

Metro North Force Account Agreement and Budget (Informational)

Mr. Burritt said that this item deals with the Reed street railroad bridge underpass that will connect Reed Street to North Water Street. It is a critical piece of the infrastructure in the project.

A great deal of thought went into correcting the underpass. Mr. Burritt said that they obtained a cost estimate of \$816,000 from Metro North. He said that the work is essential and necessary. They can not start work until the Force Account Agreement has been signed. This is a two year construction project.

Putnam Avenue – North Roadway Abandonment (Informational)

Mr. Burritt said that Putnam Avenue North roadway is proposed to be abandoned, because the roadway would run right through a proposed building. Mr. Miklave stressed the importance of preserving emergency access.

Update on Project Status (Wall Street)

Mr. Sheehan advised the Committee that the Redevelopment Agency is going to bring forward a modification to the Wall Street plan. When the plan was approved, the Common Council authorized the Redevelopment Agency to use the power of Eminent Domain on 28 parcels. He said that they heard the concerns from the Common Council about Eminent Domain. The issue will be brought before the Committee in a more formalized manner at the February meeting. To achieve the objectives of the modifications, they need to have clear acceptance by the first Common Council meeting in March. Mr. Sheehan added that the time line deadline for taking properties is coming up in July.

Mr. Miklave said that this initiative came about from discussions in respect to the West Avenue project. Before there is a vote on the taking of any property, the Common Council will vote property by property.

Mr. Miklave said that he applauded Mr. Sheehan and the staff for coming forward in order to make more rational and appropriate decisions. Mr. Sheehan said that both developers are supportive of the steps the Redevelopment Agency is taking.

Mr. Kydes said that the Common Council was concerned that about providing fair and equitable compensation to the property owners. Mr. Hilliard said that the Common Council realizes that Eminent Domain is necessary but they want it used as a last resort.

Mr. Sheehan said that a public hearing will be scheduled at the February meeting.

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT BLOCK GRANT PROGRAM

Program Administration – PY33

Mr. Moore said that the staff drafted a document to come up with suggestions that would bring long term benefit to the neighborhoods. This focuses on sustainable long term impact. He said that there is an expectation by public agencies to get funding through the CDBG program.

Mr. Miklave said that his sense is that they are letting the public know that a significant portion of the grant will be focused on housing programs. Mr. Sheehan confirmed that housing is the priority in the five year plan.

Mr. Hempstead said that he would like to see details of the plan. He suggested that instead of creating more public housing, that the existing housing be enhanced.

Mr. Sheehan said that he will present the details at the next meeting. He said that the urban corridor is the priority.