

**CITY OF NORWALK
ZONING COMMITTEE
OCTOBER 8, 2009**

Present: Jackie Lightfield, Acting Chair; Andrea Light; Karen Spencer. Michael Mushak; Adam Blank; Bob Hard

Staff: Mike Greene; Frank Strauch; Adam Carsen

Others: Keith Crosby; Ron Kellogg; Atty. Liz Suchy; Atty. Lisa Lauer

I. PROPOSED AMENDMENTS TO THE BUILDING ZONE REGULATIONS & SPECIAL PERMITS

a) #7-09R/#7-09SP - Norden Place, LLC - 8 Norden Place - Proposed amendments to Section 118-711 to permit multifamily and single family dwellings by special permit in Restricted Industrial zone and special permit for 240 multifamily units, 4 single family residences (25 units to be designated as workforce housing units) and related recreation facilities - Final review prior to public hearing

Mr. Greene said that the item was scheduled for a public hearing on October 21 and that the Committee needed to comment before the vote.

Ms. Light asked if there had been any response from Westport about the access road.

Mr. Greene discussed the concern briefly.

b) #8-09R/#8-09SP – Norwalk Board of Education – 23 Calvin Murphy Dr/Strawberry Hill Ave - Proposed amendments to Article 121 regarding signs at public high schools in residential zones and proposed changeable copy (automatic) ground sign at Norwalk High School – Review of public hearing

The Committee agreed to postpone the discussion, due to the absence of Mr. Keyes and Mr. White.

c) #9-09R - Zoning Commission – Proposed amendment to Section 118-1220 regarding the use of municipal parking lots in Norwalk Center - Preliminary review

Mr. Greene discussed the nature of parking and development in the area.

Ms. Spencer asked about the people who had already paid in-lieu fees. Mr. Greene said that nobody had needed to pay in 10 years, adding that in this particular area, the fees were inapplicable.

Mr. Blank asked if any uses were exempt. Mr. Greene said no.

Mr. Greene said that staff strongly recommended renewing the amendment.

Ms. Light addressed the concern about encouraging the area to become inundated with

nothing but bars and restaurants due to the parking regulations.

Ms. Lightfield discussed the impact that limitations on active floor space had upon businesses. Mr. Greene said that the only business owners who had complained about the fee-in-lieu parking were those who wanted to put bars and restaurants in place of retail.

Ms. Lightfield stated her objection to the fee-in-lieu policy, stating that it contradicted everything else the Commission did. She added that most urban cities did not have parking requirements. Mr. Greene disagreed, but stated that he would investigate the matter.

Ms. Light said that the Commission did not have any facts in front of them. She asked if there were minutes from any commission concerning the issue. Mr. Greene pointed out that Stepping Stones Museum had proposed to put in extra parking, but was told by staff that it could be waived.

Mr. Mushak asked where fee-in-lieu money went. Mr. Greene said that the money went into capital improvements. Mr. Mushak pointed out that the investment in improved parking areas in Sono made the area a far more appealing destination.

Ms. Lightfield emphasized the importance of filling up empty retail spaces, which were dying out all over the country. Mr. Blank said that the Commission needed to consider what would encourage retailers to go into the empty spaces. Mr. Greene described the exemption for retail stores with office space or residential space upstairs.

Mr. Mushak pointed out the importance of providing a mass transit alternative in order to discourage the use of cars.

Mr. Blank said that the problem was the number of vacant stores in SoNo. Mr. Greene stated that marketing and tax incentives, rather than zoning regulations, would change that situation.

II. PROPOSED AMENDMENTS TO THE BUILDING ZONE REGULATIONS & PROPOSED CHANGES TO THE BUILDING ZONE MAP

a) #10-09R/#1-09M - Zoning Commission – Cedar Street/Fairfield Avenue - Proposed Golden Hill Village District –Preliminary discussion

Mr. Greene described the proposal.

Mr. Hard asked what the village district designation would accomplish. Mr. Greene discussed the character of the neighborhood, design guidelines, and signage. He also clarified the regulation concerning non-conforming parking.

Mr. Mushak emphasized that the residents wanted guidance and professional advice, adding that the proposed village district designation was not viewed as a layer of bureaucracy.

Mr. Blank asked if there were a cap on building size. Mr. Greene said yes.

Ms. Light pointed out that the village district designation could improve property values.

Ms. Lightfield emphasized the importance of the non-conforming parking incentive.

Mr. Hard asked why small retail would work in this area, if it were dying out everywhere else. Mr. Greene discussed the distinction in the types of retail, pointing out that the intended retail here would involve affordable, neighborhood services.

Mr. Mushak discussed the advantages of architectural review, including the fact that it protected the area from strip malls.

b) Comments of Commissioners

Ms. Lightfield asked if there were any big issues intended for the upcoming months' zoning meetings.

Mr. Blank addressed the move of the juvenile court and housing court.

Mr. Blank asked about liens on properties.

There was a discussion of blight and enabling legislation.

Mr. Mushak commented on the importance of improving the quality of life in Norwalk.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:28 pm.

Respectfully submitted by Charlene Smith.