

**CITY OF NORWALK
PLANNING COMMITTEE
OCTOBER 7, 2010**

ATTENDANCE: Douglas Hempstead, Chairman; Laurel Lindstrom, Carvin Hilliard, Clyde Mount, Kelly Straniti

STAFF: Timothy Sheehan, Redevelopment Agency Director; Michael Moore, Redevelopment Agency

OTHERS: David Westmoreland, Norwalk Historical Society; Curtiss Law, Candace Meyer, Norwalk Housing Authority

CALL TO ORDER

Mr. Hempstead called the meeting to order at 6:45 p.m.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There were no public comments.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

September 2, 2010 Regular Meeting

- ** MR. MOUNT MOVED THE MINUTES OF SEPTEMBER 2, 2010 MINUTES AS SUBMITTED.**
- ** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY WITH ONE ABSTENTION (STRANITI).**

NEW BUSINESS

Mr. Hempstead asked if the subject of marketing effort to blighted businesses could be discussed and asked if there should be a policy or ordinance relative to signage requirement for vacant storefront properties. A discussion ensued, and Mr. Hilliard stated that he agreed that it was a good idea and suggested that the Ordinance Committee put it on their agenda to review.

BUSINESS

A. Mill Hill Master Plan

1. Review and consider for advancement to the Common Council for approval the draft Mill Hill Master Plan as proposed by the Norwalk Redevelopment Agency, the Norwalk Historical Society and the Norwalk Historical Commission.

Mr. Sheehan explained that a copy of the revised Master Plan was included in the information packet, and referred to the revised points, which included:

- The Head of the Harbor project had proposed in concept that the lower portion of Smith Street Mill Hill to create a two sided street. Whatever is built to the west will block the current view since the older building has been demolished.
- Approval next steps and key elements of the Master Plan for Mill Hill, along with a chart that outlined the approval path that the Master Plan has taken.

Mr. Sheehan stated that in response to last month's meeting and a public hearing was held based upon the Building and Land Use and Planning Committee recommendation and as a joint effort with Recreation and Parks Committee. He stated that the plan has been revised as follows:

Reference has been removed to a potential arrangement whereby the lower western slope of the property can be use din a trade with the Head of the Harbor Development in exchange for resources to implement the Master Plan.

Mr. Hempstead asked if there was further discussion, and Ms. Lindstrom stated that the information was very complete and she was very comfortable that public comments have been addressed, and she felt that it should now be advanced for approval

**** MS. LINDSTROM MOVED TO APPROVE THE MILL HILL MASTER PLAN FOR ADVANCEMENT TO THE COMMON COUNCIL FOR APPROVAL.**

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

B. Choice Neighborhood Planning Grant Proposal

1. Presentation on the Norwalk Housing Authority's efforts in advancing a Choice Neighborhood Planning Grant through the United States Department of Housing and Community Development for the purposes of examining a potential neighborhood redevelopment effort involving the units at Washington Village.

Mr. Curtiss Law, Director and Ms. Candace Meyer, Deputy Director of the Norwalk Housing Authority presented the background and overview of the grant application, including the following:

- Washington Village Feasibility Study
- HOPE VI Program Objectives, Definitions, Accomplishments
- Examples of other finished projects from across the country.
- Next Steps to Pursue HOPE VI to include:
 - Resident Planning Process for relocation
 - Unit and Building Site Designs
 - Site Control/Zoning Process with the City
 - Support Services/Early Childhood Education Component.

Mr. Law stated that based on the outcome of research project by EJP Consulting Group, Washington Village and the surrounding neighborhood has been identified as a candidate to receive funds from HOPE and defined as distressed, inadequate housing.

Ms. Straniti asked if this project would reduce the amount of affordable housing units, and Mr. Law replied that under Section 8 the actual number of units would increase. Ms. Straniti stated that she would be in support of this program, providing adequate relocation planning and communication to residents would be done. Ms. Meyer replied that staff would be provided to manage the process with the residents, and Section 8 vouchers would be issued to the tenants.

Mr. Hempstead asked what action was required, and Mr. Law replied by stating that the Authority is seeking to discern the level of legislative support for the proposed initiative prior to advancing to the next step of the application process. Following discussion and examination of the presentation, the Committee members were in agreement that the project would receive participation and support from the City and the application should be advanced.

C. CDBG Section 108 Loan

1. Discuss the utilization of a portion of the previously approved CDBG Section 108 Loan funds as a loan guarantee on a Small Business Loan Program to be administered by the Connecticut Economic Development Fund (CEDF)

Mr. Tad Diesel presented the program and stated that the scope of the proposal was to maintain existing and to enhance new small businesses in Norwalk. The background and scope included the following:

- CEDF (CT Economic Development Foundation) provides greater capital access and support for economic development
- Loan Guarantee Program guarantee of 30% of loans by Norwalk ranging from \$2,500 to \$150,000.
- CEDF underwrites and services all loans, and NDC reviews and approves.
- Section 108 Loans can be used as source of capitalization, with CBDG funds as primary source of repayment.

Mr. Hempstead requested Mr. Diesel to provide the process for review by CEDF approvals, a history of failure and success rates, a written risk assessment analysis, and loan revenue potential. He added that if members had questions or items to include with the next presentation to address them to Mr. Diesel or Mr. Sheehan. Mr. Hempstead stated he would bring the item back to next meeting agenda for action.

D. Norwalk TOD Master Plan

1. Update on the Redevelopment Agency's progress to date regarding the Transit Oriented Development Master Plan for South Norwalk as approved by the Common Council in the FY10 Capital Budget.

Ms. Susan Sweitzer presented the plan overview and stated meetings have taken place with the Planning Coordination and Stakeholder Committees that have reviewed the proposed developed into district layered boundary concentrating on development opportunities and improved connections to the Train Station. Mr. Hempstead asked what the proposed timing was and Ms. Sweitzer replied early 2011. She summarized that evaluation of market feasibility of the proposed options will be brought before the public in October-November, and the Cecil Group will begin formulating an action strategy in January-February 2011.

Mr. Hempstead asked if there were any visuals of the presentation, and suggested a tour of the area be scheduled in January to better inform the members of the location of the development for the plans. He also suggested that the power point presentation be made available to the members for review in further detail.

E. Discussion Items

1. Review with the Redevelopment Agency the concerns that were expressed regarding the proposed Wall Street Place Project at the last Coffee with Council session

Mr. Sheehan mentioned as listed in the papers, that the Seligson properties lie just outside of the footprint of Waypointe which were planned in the reshaping of the West Avenue neighborhood with new retail, housing and office space, and that Mr. Seligson has said he is working to restructure and refinance Waypointe and remains committed to the project.

Mr. Sheehan distributed a memorandum from The Cecil Group regarding the Working Drawing Review Findings and Qualifications of Parcel 2A, which stated that the mixed-use project intended to conform to applicable requirements of City regulations and agreements associated with the disposition of City land including environmental requirements. He added that the LDA includes procedural standards that must be met including approval of Working Drawings that represent consistency with the Master Site Plan and construction drawings already approved by the Redevelopment Agency

2. Update on Waypointe, Wall Street Place and 95/7

Ms. Sweitzer presented a status memo stating that Seligson Properties sent a letter to Mayor Moccia confirming the need for restructuring and recapitalizing the Waypointe project as originally presented in the conceptual master site plan approved by the Council in March of 2009. She added that to that end, Seligson is continuing negotiations to secure that investment, restructuring debt and exploring options for design, phasing, and is required to present any project redesign to the Agency for review and approval.

Mr. Hempstead stated that public perception is that the City has made a financial commitment and clarified that there has been nothing beyond the approved state funding of the project. He asked what the estimated timing was, and Mr. Sheehan replied hopefully from 60-90 days.

3. Update on first meeting regarding streamlining the economic development plan and project approvals.

Mr. Hempstead stated that the sub-committee met last week with the intention of developing a streamline of the approval procedures, incorporating recommendations from the Chamber of Commerce relative to the parallel process. He added that the group felt that the creation of a “playbook” would make the process a lot easier, but utilizing and enforcing it would be the issue and a crucial element in improving the efficiency of the City’s efforts for economic development.

Mr. Hempstead suggested there be a “boiler plate” with provisions of the City’s LDA’s to be approved in advance with a threshold for deviation from the established time frame and guidelines, and that the following suggestions and recommendations were presented and discussed:

1. Have an initial informal meeting whereby project is presented in concept.
2. Following the conceptual meeting, schedule a Public Information Session where the Redevelopment Agency, Council members and Department Heads attend, so that everyone hears the information at the same time.
3. Create a development process manual so that developers understand the process and strict time frames prior to moving forward with an application for a project.
4. Establish approval time limits whereby if the project is not voted upon for approval within the scheduled process (30 – 60 days) it then becomes authorized.

Mr. Hempstead stated that it avoids going back in the approval step process as often times there are changes required that affect prior approvals, where if all committees are in the same room it presents a greater understanding and consistency of communication.

Mr. Sheehan distributed a draft of the Redevelopment Agency Plan Development and Project Review Process that provides timelines of the Master Planning, Redevelopment Approval, Developer Selection, LDA Negotiations, Process Flowcharts, and CT General Statutes bearing directly on A Redevelopment Agency. He provided a review summary and historical schedules of public actions taken on the West Avenue Corridor project since 1997 and Reed Putnam projects since 2005.

Mr. Mount commented that the idea of procedural guidelines of requirements and a timeline of the process, would be ideal, and added that it would be interesting to see how other cities, such as Stamford have the process that moves project efficiently through their system. Mr. Hempstead responded that other cities have different forms of government either with a strong Mayor/weak Council, versus a strong City Council/weak Mayor, and that has an impact on the evolving process.

ADJOURNMENT

**** MR. MOUNT MOTIONED TO ADJOURN.**

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

The meeting adjourned at 9:25 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Marilyn Knox,
Telesco Secretarial Services