

**CITY OF NORWALK
PLANNING COMMITTEE
JANUARY 5, 2011**

ATTENDANCE: Matthew Miklave, Chair; Michael Geake; Douglas Hempstead;
Carvin Hilliard; David McCarthy; Warren Pena; Jerry Petrini

STAFF: Timothy Sheehan, Executive Director; Munro Johnson; MaryGrace
Weber

OTHERS: Bruce Kimmel, Common Council

CALL TO ORDER

Mr. Miklave called the meeting to order at 7:31 p.m. and called the Roll.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Mr. Bill Nightingale said that he has been following the Globe Theater for several years. He said that the current owners are desperate to be taken out by the City and are disingenuous. Mr. Nightingale said that he feels it is not appropriate for the City to spend money on these types of ventures. They are looking for a bail out. He said that the building is not worth \$850,000 in its current state. What is being proposed is a wild business plan with no thoughts of how to generate revenue. He said that this is a terrible idea; they do not have parking and won't share in the robo park facility as the Globe owner was opposed to this.

Mr. Nightingale said that he likes the idea of re-doing Washington Village, but a big part of that is getting people off of government dependence. He said that people should be nurtured so that they are not dependent upon the government. He said that Washington Village should be improved to shrink the number of people dependent upon it.

Mr. Miklave said that as an item comes up for discussion, he will allow members of the public to make short commentary.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES – December 1, 2011- Regular Meeting

**** MR. HEMPSTEAD MOVED TO ACCEPT THE MINUTES WITH THE FOLLOWING
CORRECTION**

Page 1 – should read – Mr. Miklave called the meeting to order at 7:30 p.m.

**** MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY**

BUSINESS

WALL STREET REDEVELOPMENT PLAN

Globe Theater – Owner’s Redevelopment Proposal

Mr. Frank Farricker, Project Director/Finance made a presentation for a different approach for the Globe Theater. He said that they came up with a new financial plan and an operating plan that will keep the facility moving and support itself.

Mr. Farricker reviewed the plan to turn it into a community based theater that will act as a draw to the Wall Street area. He said that the project has been reviewed by a number of architects. They intend to keep the historic structure of the building and not add any residential component.

Mr. Farricker reviewed the prospective uses and discussed funding sources. He presented the business structure and said that the building would be owned by a non-profit and governed by a board.

Mr. Miklave asked the Committee if they had any questions. Mr. Pena asked about the on-going liability. Mr. Farricker said that it was \$2 million. Mr. Miklave asked about the appraisal of the theater. Mr. Sheehan said that it was under \$1 million; he said that he believed it was in the high \$800’s. Mr. Hempstead concurred. Mr. Miklave asked about asbestos in the building. Mr. Farricker said that it does exist, but is not substantial. Mr. Miklave asked who holds the \$850,000 first mortgage. Mr. Farricker said that the Bank of West Texas holds the first mortgage.

Mr. Miklave asked about the equity. Mr. Farricker said that the equity would go to the current owners of the project. The new owners have nothing invested. Mr. Farricker discussed funding and how state tax credits work. Mr. Miklave asked about the City’s liability. Mr. Sheehan said that the City guarantees a fall-back on the Section 108 through its CDBG program.

Mr. Kimmel said that he thought the State film credit was going to end. Mr. Farricker said that it has been enhanced and once the credits are issued they would be fully valid.

Mr. McCarthy asked for details and if anyone has been identified who would be willing to pay up front. Mr. Farricker said that there is a large syndicate of tax credit

enterprises that work to be sure all steps are taken in compliance with the law. He said that the market is very robust, both in Connecticut and federally. Mr. Farricker said that the Reagan administration rolled out the first tax credits in 1987 and it is a very popular and wide spread program.

Mr. Miklave commented that if this is approved, the City is liable for \$2 million and is obligated to maintain the theater in compliance with the plan. Mr. Sheehan said that the issue is that the City does not want to have a deficit. He suggested that the City mirror those obligations.

The Committee discussed financing. Mr. Miklave said that he is not comfortable with the amount of information presented concerning the liability of the City in the event of default. He stressed that he has real concerns and needs more information before he can send this item to the full Common Council. He said that he would like a formal recommendation from the staff. Mr. Geake added that he would like to see the legal opinion about the City's liability.

Mr. Hempstead said that early on, he supported the loan, but the dynamics of this deal are different. He said that he wants clarification about the financing and is far from comfortable right now.

**** MR. MIKLAVE MOVED TO TABLE THIS ITEM TO THE NEXT SCHEDULED REGULAR MEETING**
**** MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY**

Mr. Sheehan asked the Committee members to send their questions to him and he will forward them to the developer.

13 AND 20 DAY STREET

Approval of Option Agreement Between the City of Norwalk and the Norwalk Housing Authority

**** MR. HILLIARD MOVED THE ITEM**

Mr. Miklave asked Mr. Sheehan if he had any idea what the properties are worth. Mr. Sheehan said that combined they are worth about \$2 million. He said that the Planning Commission made two resolutions; one denying the request and the other approving it with conditions relative to parking. Mr. Hempstead said that there was concern about tying up an asset for a protracted period of time which could be sold. Mr. Sheehan said that a five year time frame can be incorporated into the agreement as it was already discussed and agreed to by Corporation Counsel.

Mr. Miklave noted that this is purely an advisory, non-binding vote. Mr. Sheehan said that they are being asked to provide the master developer with an indication of what the City would be willing to accept relative to the property. It is understood that this vote is not binding.

Mr. Sheehan said that the Committee will ultimately be presented the transformation plan for review and ultimately, if the Committee is supportive of both the plan and the option agreement, will advance it to the Common Council for final approval.

**** MR. HEMPSTEAD MOVED AN AMENDMENT THAT THERE WILL BE FIVE (5) YEAR EXPIRATION ON EXERCISING THE OPTION**
**** AMENDMENT PASSED UNANIMOUSLY**
**** MOTION AS AMENDED PASSED UNANIMOUSLY**

Ms. Diane Cece said that she had concerns that there is not an up to date document. Mr. Miklave explained that this Committee voted to approve the resolution as amended. The option is an agreement between the City and the Norwalk Housing Authority subject to a five year option. The Common Council will not be acting on this. This is an advisory vote.

Ms. Cece said that she believes there has been no public comment on this. She said that the Committee is agreeing to something they have not seen and the public has not seen. She said that the document she has looks like a purchasing agreement that could be moved to the Common Council. Mr. Miklave said that it will not be moved to the Common Council. Mr. Miklave told Ms. Cece that he understood her concerns.

Ms. Cece said that this is being done in absence of public comment. She said that she did not understand how this would be guarded against Common Council vote.

CONNECTIVITY

Information Session

Mr. Johnson gave a power point presentation showing the master plan for connecting downtown, between the two transportation hubs. He said that the presentation is also available on the project website. He said that the charge is to manage the connections between the separate and distinct project areas.

The strategy is to utilize the interproject proximities and existing transit assets to build a multimodal and intermodal corridor, linking different means of transportation.

Mr. Johnson reviewed the five point plan for connecting downtown Norwalk. He said that this is not an anti car but rather a "cars-plus" plan. He said that they are dealing with the reality on the ground now, but are planning for the new development in downtown Norwalk.

Mr. Miklave asked Mr. Johnson to provide a copy of the plan for the Committee members. He proposed holding a special meeting on January 30th to continue with the agenda and to complete this discussion.

CDBG

Schedule Public Hearing for PY38 and Review Annual Plan Process

**** MR. HEMPSTEAD MOVED TO SCHEDULE A PUBLIC HEARING FOR PY38 ON FEBRUARY 2, 2012 AT 7:30 P.M.**

**** MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY**

**** MR. MCCARTHY MOVED TO TABLE THE FOLLOWING ITEMS TO JANUARY 30, 2012 SPECIAL MEETING:**

CDBG

CONNECTIVITY

WORKFORCE HOUSING REGULATION AND AFFORDABLE HOUSING INVENTORY

Update

TOD GRANT REQUESTS

Update

**** MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY**

Mr. Mushak said that he loved the presentation and didn't understand why the Planning Commission was not in favor of the bike lane. He said that every day he reads that new apartments are being built in Stamford and people are looking for bike lanes. He said that the City needs to think about the marketability of Norwalk. Mr. Mushak said that it is extremely important to create bike lanes; this is a huge plan in other cities. Mr. Miklave said that he stopped riding his bike when he was hit by a car on East Avenue. He said that if the City makes it accessible, people will use it.

Ms. Diane Lauricella said that she agreed with Mr. Mushak and referred to the master plan of parks. She said that there was a cycling club in Norwalk that raced to the reservoir in Weston. She said that it was found that most people have bikes, but this is not a bike friendly community.

Mr. Marcus said that as a member of the 25 – 34 year old demographic, he is looking for a place to walk and bike. He said that he feels it is important to the economic development of Norwalk.

Mr. Hempstead asked for density issues that make connectivity work. He also asked for information about a maintenance plan for the greenery in the center lanes and brick sidewalks.

Mr. Miklave said that he would like to hear a deeper discussion about circulator buses.

OLD BUSINESS

There was no old business discussed this evening.

NEW BUSINESS

There was no new business discussed this evening.

ADJOURNMENT

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

There was no further business and the meeting was unanimously adjourned at 10:08 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Rosemarie Lombardi
Telesco Secretarial Services