

CITY OF NORWALK
PLANNING COMMITTEE OF THE COMMON COUNCIL
SPECIAL MEETING
JANUARY 30, 2012

ATTENDANCE: Matthew Miklave, Chairman; David McCarthy, Warren Peña,
Jerry Petrini.

STAFF: Norwalk Redevelopment Agency: Tim Sheehan, Munro Johnson,
Emil Albanese, Mary Grace Weber.

OTHERS: Common Council: Michelle Maggio (8:15 p.m.)

CALL TO ORDER

Mr. Miklave called the meeting to order at 7:30 p.m. and stated that this special meeting was called as a continuation of the previous meeting in view of the volume of work involved with the upcoming project that has to be reviewed.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Mr. Miklave asked if any members of the public in attendance wished to speak and hearing none closed the public participation portion of the meeting at 7:40 p.m.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Mr. Miklave noted that the date in the heading for the January 5 minutes on page one is listed as 2011 and should be 2012.

**** MR. PETRINI MOTIONED TO APPROVE THE MINUTES FROM
JANUARY 5, 2012 AS CORRECTED.
** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY**

Mr. Miklave stated that there was a typographical error on the agenda listing the October 17 minutes as 2012 when it should be 2011, and requested a motion to amend the agenda to reflect this correction.

**** MR. MCCARTHY MOTIONED TO AMEND THE AGENDA TO CORRECT
THE DATE OF THE MINUTES FROM THE OCTOBER 17 SPECIAL
MEETING TO READ OCTOBER 17, 2011.
** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY**

Mr. Miklave noted that no one in attendance from the current Committee was present to document the accuracy of the minutes from October. Mr. Petrini stated that he was in attendance as a spectator and based on his recollection, the minutes accurately represented the meeting.

**** MR. PETRINI MOTIONED TO APPROVE THE MINUTES FROM
OCTOBER 17, 2011 SPECIAL MEETING AS SUBMITTED.
** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

BUSINESS

Connectivity - Information Session

Mr. Miklave referred to the study submitted by Mr. Johnson with replies to questions raised at the last meeting, and he thanked him for a thorough response and for boldly highlighting the questions. Mr. Johnson replied that he enjoys researching this information and offered to include more information as requested. Mr. Miklave asked about the next step and Mr. Sheehan replied that next is to inform the Commissioners with the Redevelopment Agency for feedback then on to the Common Council for approval. Mr. Miklave asked if there was a public hearing obligation and Mr. Sheehan replied no, but in an effort to be more comfortable with providing public input, he would recommend including a public information session. Mr. McCarthy asked if there was a way to collect feedback electronically from what is posted on the City's website, and Mr. Sheehan replied that there are several ways designed to capture comments.

Mr. Miklave requested that this matter be promoted as a means of gathering public comments. Mr. Albanese stated that the RDA will have an information session on February 14 at their meeting and encouraged Planning Committee members to attend. Mr. Sheehan noted that they will post this as a public information session duly noticed and will put on the Planning Committee agenda for approval at the March meeting for forwarding on to the Council.

Mr. Miklave suggested that he found it very helpful to actually walk through the project areas with the documents to gain full insight on the scope of the projects.

CDBG – Review Annual Process

Mr. Sheehan referred to the supporting documents in the packet and reviewed the background of the annual review process. He then asked Ms. Weber to go over the next steps where PY38 applications are being submitted in two phases: Phase I application was due on January 13, then on the public hearing scheduled during the Planning Committee meeting on February 2, 2012. She highlighted that following the submission of Phase II of the application; the Planning Committee will be asked to make a final decision regarding funding allocations in the form of review and a vote to approve a draft Annual Action Plan.

Ms. Weber explained that a public hearing is a required component of the CDBG funding allocation process, which been scheduled for this Thursday at 7:30 p.m.

Mr. Miklave stated that he did not recall the two phases and Mr. Sheehan explained the RDA evaluation and scoring is to set a threshold of criteria that distinguishes between the pre and full application. Mr. Miklave asked if an applicant can be prohibited from the full application, and Mr. Sheehan replied that they cannot be prohibited, but it was a screening process to determine if the initial criteria had been met. He added that based on HUD eligibility and regulations in accordance with the Consolidated Plan there are areas where matching grants were given additional points in the pre-determination process.

Mr. Petrini asked about the budget of \$576,100 in comparison of \$884,000 in applications and it looks as if the Committee needs to whittle down amounts requested to come with allocated funds. Mr. Sheehan stated that they can adjust down the funds requested based on the evaluation process. Mr. Albanese noted that in the past there are always more requests for funds than the amount of funds available and it is a multi-step evaluation process to determine criteria and eligibility requirements.

Mr. Mccarthy asked if applicants attend and Mr. Sheehan replied CDBG funding applicants are encouraged to use this hearing as an opportunity to present their proposed projects to the Planning Committee. Each organization will be given 2 1/2 minutes to present their proposal. Members of the public are also invited to provide their input regarding the allocation of available funds. Mr. Sheehan added that following this hearing, the Planning Committee will be asked to make a decision regarding which applications to advance to Phase II of the application process, and it is usually a very long involved process

Mr. Miklave stated that he represented Star and that he will not participate in the discussion for their application. Mr. McCarthy stated that he was on the Board for the Norwalk Senior Center, and Mr. Miklave stated that he did not see that as a conflict. Mr. Albanese noted that in the past Committee members that served on any of the Boards would recuse themselves from input relative to those applications to avoid any potential conflict.

Update - Norwalk's Workforce Housing

Mr. Sheehan suggested that Ms. Weber go through the supporting documents, and Mr. Miklave replied that it was not necessary as they had reviewed the packet in advance. He asked for an explanation of the trends and Mr. Sheehan replied that the trend is that there is a re-up from older units at market rate on the list as mortgages expire. He added that it is important to note that does not apply to all construction projects in the city but only the urban corridor and the threshold begins at developments of twenty units.

Mr. Sheehan referred to the supporting memorandum and further explained that the City's strategy reinforces Norwalk's commitment to maintaining the 10% affordability threshold that grants the City exemption from the State of Connecticut's Affordable Housing Appeals Act (8-30g).

Mr. Miklave stated that the availability of workforce housing is an impediment to attract new workers and residents in the City and is a critical element in developing business opportunities for a live and work in community. Mr. McCarthy clarified that there are really two distinct conversations here with Workforce Housing and Affordable Housing and the two should not be blurred. Mr. Miklave stated that we tend to merge the requirement with the wrong analysis but we need to look at government regulations that suppress affordable unit development such as in-law apartments that are zoned out. He added that we need to be more creative to continue to make affordability the focus on how to tackle these things and to build upon what has been successful out there.

Mr. McCarthy stated that he agreed with this as long as the purview of Zoning Commission is included and that current regulations are followed.

WALL STREET REDEVELOPMENT PLAN - Review Letter from Frank Farricker

Mr. Miklave thanked Mr. Johnson for the summary of the responses to questions raised at the last meeting, and he asked for an explanation of the second point listed in the letter regarding shared appraisal cost. He added that his experience is that both parties have input in selecting the appraiser to legitimize that adequate qualifications are evaluated within the scope of the job, but at the cost of the developer.

Mr. Sheehan referred to the supporting documents and stated that in the attached letter, Mr. Farricker seems to reiterate his willingness, although the substance of the items requested has not yet been produced. Mr. Pena asked why the requested information has not yet been provided and Mr. Johnson replied much of the work product he just does not yet have and there has been a great deal of back and forth on the analysis that is required. Mr. Johnson stated that there are pre-existing exemptions in zoning codes but the same uses must be conforming in the guidelines.

Mr. Miklave added that the City's credit for such loan must be secured and a stream of payments of principal and interest must be adhered to. Mr. Peña asked when the agency expects to receive the information and Mr. Johnson replied that it may take three months or more as many of the analysis are difficult to do and it takes time to find all the required information.

Mr. Sheehan replied that they have advised the proponent that we are forwarding his letter to the committee and will await the completion of the tasks he has agreed to before conducting their review and rendering a recommendation. He added that while it is difficult, it will only make the pre-work for the 108 easier in the long run. Mr. McCarthy stated that too much staff time has already been invested and suggested that further action be postponed until there is a solid business plan or larger market economy forces in place to support the ability to repay the loan. Mr. Sheehan added that the developer comes back with everything except what we have asked for. Mr. Petrini stated that it takes money to spend money and that he would like to see money spent in the right direction along with getting answers to entertain further discussion, as three months is a long way out at this stage.

Mr. Miklave stated that he is more sympathetic than the other comments may suggest as he values the Globe project in these tough economic times. He added that there needs to be a creative mechanism in place to make the project successful without the staff devoting more investment of their time.

Mr. Albanese noted that the Committee passed on this several years ago for many of the same reasons as stated now. Mr. Miklave suggested that further action be tabled until the developer is ready to provide all the information requested along with an actionable plan. He added that at that time the item would have to then come back to Committee for approval to remove from the table.

**** MR. MCCARTHY MOTIONED TO TABLE THE ITEM UNTIL SUCH TIME WHEN THE DEVELOPER HAS COME BACK WITH REQUESTED INFORMATION AND AN ACTIONABLE PLAN.**
**** MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

Mid-Fairfield Aids Project, Inc. - Authorize Mayor to Execute Certificate of Consistency

Ms. Weber referred to the supporting documents and gave a background overview of the item and explained that the Mid-Fairfield AIDS Project is submitting an application for Housing Opportunities for Persons with AIDS funding for the upcoming program year (PY38). She added that the Norwalk Redevelopment Agency deems the program to be consistent with the City of Norwalk's Consolidated Plan for Housing and Community Development and requested Planning Committee approval to advance to the Common Council.

Mr. Miklave asked why Committee approval is needed for this but not for others and asked for procedural clarification that a certificate of consistency is required for all. Mr. Sheehan replied that yes, this is now required to show that the legislative body has reviewed this for consistency with the HUD grant approval process, beyond the RDA evaluation.

**** MR. PETRINI MOTIONED TO APPROVE THE FOLLOWING:
THE AGENCY, OPERATING AS THE CITY'S CDBG ADMINISTRATOR,
DEEMS THE MID-FAIRFIELD AIDS PROJECT'S HOPWA APPLICATION FOR
PROGRAM YEAR 38 TO BE CONSISTENT WITH THE CITY'S CURRENT
CONSOLIDATED PLAN AND SEEKS PLANNING COMMITTEE APPROVAL
TO ADVANCE THE AGENCY'S REQUEST FOR COMMON COUNCIL
APPROVAL FOR THE MAYOR TO EXECUTE THE REQUIRED CERTIFICATE
OF CONSISTENCY THAT MUST ACCOMPANY THE PHA PLAN WHEN
SUBMITTED TO THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING AND URBAN
DEVELOPMENT.**
**** MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

SCOPE OF PLANNING COMMITTEE JURISDICTION
AS IT RELATES TO NON-REDEVELOPMENT AREAS

Mr. Miklave stated that he would like to pursue areas where this Committee can work beyond the realm of Redevelopment Agency projects for ways to further job creation in the City. Mr. Petrini asked if there are charter restrictions out of the realm of standard purview for the Committee. Mr. Miklave replied that it was a good question, but that this Committee comes under the Common Council, so as long as projects have Council approval, the Committee should have authority to go beyond RDA projects. He added that he does not want staff to devote more time beyond their current list of projects or areas of responsibility.

Mr. Miklave gave examples of areas listed in some of the reports in the packet that have a focus on environmental or “green” projects and stated that he would like to think about what we can do as opposed to what we cannot do. He suggested that the Chamber of Commerce is one resource that should be brought in to be a part of the conversation. Mr. Petrini stated that he agrees as long as it makes economic sense, and Mr. Miklave replied that this was a natural element of any project for consideration.

Mr. McCarthy stated that he was very much in agreement and suggested that Norwalk should capitalize on the opportunity to include Norwalk Community College in discussions about green jobs and new technology developments.

Mr. Miklave added one area that green technology should be used with all school construction projects and a practice of local hiring and purchases from Connecticut based companies. He suggested that the city should be aligned with the school district in terms of an advisory role and creating an environment of inclusion for directing City resources. He suggested that the Chamber of Commerce Leadership Institute is one area where a project can actually be created with City development in mind. He added that the term “Fairfield Marketing Corridor” is one that should be used to think locally in business development and to link into grander efforts that take a position that promote a proactive approach.

Mr. Miklave suggested that a sub-committee or task force be created to explore the subject further, and he requested to keep the item on the next agenda for further discussion. He added that there needs to be a forum to bring ideas beyond the Redevelopment Agency projects and develop creative ways to stimulate small business and entrepreneurial growth in Norwalk.

EFFORTS TO PROMOTE JOB GROWTH AND
CREATION OF JOBS IN THE 21ST CENTURY

Mr. Miklave stated that he had attended an East Norwalk Neighborhood Association meeting where concerns were raised about areas such as the Hat Factory Warehouse and Howard Johnsons and he referred to documents contained in the packet, as follows:

“STEM” report from the Center on Education and the Workforce.
President’s Council on Jobs “Road Map to Renewal”

Mr. Miklave stated that “STEM” stands for Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics and in terms of long term growth and productivity in economic competitiveness this is an area of focus for job qualification. He quoted a statement from the report that indicates the average high school graduate in certification in the above STEM core areas earns more than one with a college degree in other areas. He added that the report is very interesting and the Executive Summary contained in the supporting materials is something that he finds very useful as a guide to the types of areas that this Committee should be exploring in terms of City planning.

Mr. Miklave stated that the “Road Map to Renewal” also was an interesting report from the Jobs Council as part of economic renewal to rebuild the confidence on the strengths of our country.

He stated that these types of reports are suggested reading as this Committee forges ahead to become a city of the 21st century and to come up with creative ways to stimulate small business growth in the City.

OLD BUSINESS

Mr. Miklave stated that when there were multiple documents in the packet it was difficult to follow the order of the agenda when scrolling on electronic devices. He asked that an agenda be included with each packet for ease in following the order of supporting documents and that this be included in the meeting notification e-mail to the Committee members in advance as a matter of practice for meetings.

NEW BUSINESS

There was no further new business discussed.

ADJOURNMENT

**** MR. PETRINI MOVED TO ADJOURN.**
**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

The meeting adjourned at 8:50 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Marilyn Knox;
Telesco Secretarial Services