

**CITY OF NORWALK
PLANNING COMMITTEE OF THE COMMON COUNCIL
MAY 2, 2013**

ATTENDANCE: Nicholas Kydes, Chairman; Michael Geake, Douglas Hempstead, Carvin Hilliard, David McCarthy, Matthew Miklave, Warren Peña, Bruce Kimmel, Anna Duleep

STAFF: Norwalk Redevelopment Agency: Tim Sheehan, MaryGrace Weber.

CALL TO ORDER

Mr. Kydes called the meeting to order at 7:30 p.m. and stated that the members as listed above were in attendance, and that there was a quorum present.

Public Hearing on the Neighborhood Assistance Tax Credit Program for 2013.

Mr. Kydes asked if there was any member of the public in attendance who wished to participate in the Public Hearing on the Neighborhood Assistance Tax Credit Program for 2013. Hearing none, Mr. Kydes closed the Public Hearing, and used Chairman's prerogative to move up Item II-B to next in the order on the agenda.

Neighborhood Assistance Tax Credit Program

Ms. Weber referred to the supporting documents in the packet and explained that this program provides a tax credit to business firms that make cash investments in qualifying community programs. The following proposals were received for the 2013 program:

Organization	Proposal Title	Amount
Broad River Homes (Norwalk Congregate Homes for the Elderly)	Installation of Outdoor Patio at Broad River Homes Low Income Housing Development	\$24,644
Courage to Speak Foundation	Drug Prevention Education for After School Programs and Parents	\$45,780
Housing Authority of the City of Norwalk	Installation of Energy Efficient Windows at Roodner Court Housing Development	\$150,000
Norwalk Economic Opportunity Now	NEON Neighbors Helping Neighbors Social Service Program	\$150,000
Norwalk Housing Foundation	NHF Scholarship Program	\$150,000
The Food Bank of Lower Fairfield County	The Food Bank of Lower Fairfield County	\$20,000
The Norwalk Maritime Aquarium	Hybrid Diesel Electric System	\$150,000

- ** MR. HEMPSTEAD MOVED TO ADVANCE THE ABOVE LIST OF PROPOSALS TO THE COMMON COUNCIL FOR APPROVAL OF THEIR INCLUSION IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD ASSISTANCE ACT TAX CREDIT PROGRAM FOR 2013.**
- ** MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

Approval of Minutes

April 4, 2013: Mr. McCarthy noted that the spelling of Webber should be Weber.

- ** MR. MCCARTHY MOVED TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF APRIL 4, 2013 AS AMENDED, THE CORRECTION NOTED.**
- ** MOTION PASSED WITH FIVE VOTES IN FAVOR, NONE OPPOSED AND TWO ABSTENTIONS (HEMPSTEAD, HILLIARD).**
- ** MR. MCCARTHY MOVED TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF APRIL 15, 2013 AS SUBMITTED.**
- ** MOTION PASSED WITH FIVE VOTES IN FAVOR, NONE OPPOSED AND TWO ABSTENTIONS (MIKLAVE, HILLIARD).**

West Avenue Corridor Redevelopment Landscape Design Master Plan

Ms. Weber referred to the supporting documents in the packet and explained the background and objectives of the Landscape Design Master Plan as the principal gateway to Norwalk's two Central Business Districts and as part of the Connectivity Master Plan. She presented the schematic plan and stated that it is a comprehensive streetscape design that provides a focal point from the I-95 exits. The design features sculptures, trees, bricked crosswalks, lighting (underneath the I-95 and Route 7 overpasses), public art installations, and several pedestrian plazas that include bus shelters, benches and bike racks.

Mr. Kydes asked about the flowering trees such as dogwoods and fruit trees and stated that he would like to have a beautiful vista that is welcoming and artistic. Mr. Sheehan explained that there is a deliberate color scheme in place that combines the many factors such as heartiness and tolerance to thrive in the environmental climate conditions of that area with respect to watering capacity and sunlight. Ms. Weber added that in the Art Park, there is up-lighting that is changeable.

Mr. Hempstead asked about the location phases and timing, and Mr. Sheehan replied that the plan is to begin late this summer along Main Avenue to Route 7.

- ** MR. KIMMEL MOVED TO ADVANCE TO THE COMMON COUNCIL FOR APPROVAL THE LANDSCAPE DESIGN MASTER PLAN FOR THE WEST AVENUE CORRIDOR.**
- ** MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

Choice Neighborhoods Planning Grant - Washington Village

Mr. Hempstead thanked those involved with the recent tour and the Public Hearing that was held yesterday to receive public comment on the project.

Ms. Weber referred to the supporting documents in the packet and explained that the Transformation Plan, once finalized, would serve as the basis for the Norwalk Housing Authority's application for a Choice Neighborhoods Implementation grant which would provide up to \$30 million to carry out the recommendations outlined in the Transformation Plan.

Ms. Duleep asked about the next steps with the infrastructure plan for the flood plan and possible road elevation. Mr. Sheehan explained that there is a complexity based on the definition of critical use and this is not yet determined by the DEEP and DECD. She asked if it will be reviewed by the DPW and the Council, and Mr. Sheehan further explained that as it relates to the State's investment as critical use this restricts affordable housing. Mr. Kydes added that we are not yet there with the infrastructure plans as the project is just now underway with state and federal approvals.

Mr. McCarthy asked for a point of clarification that non-committee members should refrain from participating in the discussion of items, particularly this item where there is a potential family conflict of interest and one where there has been a threat of legal action. Mr. Peña stated that he feels this comment is not justified as Ms. Duleep is a member of the Common Council and has a right to attend any Committee meetings, and it is valid for her to ask questions. Mr. Kydes did not accept further comments on this matter, and he requested to keep the meeting focused on agenda items.

Ms. Weber noted that the requested action is to advance the Washington Village/South Norwalk Choice Neighborhoods Transformation Plan to the Common Council for approval following approval of the Plan by the Norwalk Housing Authority Board of Directors, which is anticipated on May 15, 2013.

**** MR. MCCARTHY MOVED TO ADVANCE THE WASHINGTON VILLAGE/SOUTH NORWALK CHOICE NEIGHBORHOODS TRANSFORMATION PLAN TO THE COMMON COUNCIL FOR APPROVAL FOLLOWING APPROVAL OF THE PLAN BY THE NORWALK HOUSING AUTHORITY BOARD OF DIRECTORS.
** MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

A member of the public asked to speak and Mr. Kydes noted that the public comment portion was at the beginning of the meeting, and he was unable to accept comments from the public at this time.

Mr. Kydes noted that he would like to hold a Ground Breaking Ceremony with the Mayor and Committee Members on the Washington Street and Water Street projects. There was

discussion on whether such ground breakings were previously held, and Mr. Kydes stated that he believed there were no real or official ground breaking ceremonies, only photo opportunities. Mr. Hempstead suggested that a “topping off” be held.

Mr. Miklave asked it be noted into the record that he is suspect to the timing and publicity efforts of this request for a ground-breaking ceremony.

Mr. Kydes noted that he would be recusing himself from above items D1 and D2 and moved the order of the agenda to have item D3 next on the agenda.

Wall Street Redevelopment Plan Area Draft Option Agreement – Smith Street Project

Mr. Sheehan distributed supporting documents and explained the background on the item and stated that there was no required action, but this was to provide an update to the Committee for review. Mr. Hempstead asked about the timeline and Mr. Sheehan replied that the timing window depends on the date of Common Council approval. There was discussion on parking and Mr. Hempstead commented that he feels the parking issue is a diversion when there is ample parking within close proximity to the area. He asked for clarification if a municipality has rights to exempt historical property from parking restrictions, environmental testing, and what the Committee can do as far as next steps to move this forward.

Mr. Sheehan noted that he would look into those areas in question and provide a draft agreement for review.

Mr. Kydes asked Mr. Hempstead to chair the rest of the meeting, recused himself from the Wall Street Theater items and left the meeting at 8:45 p.m.

Mr. Hempstead noted that although there was a public hearing earlier on the agenda that was specified for the Neighborhood Assistance Tax Credit Program, he asked if there were members of the public who wished to speak on an agenda item as public participation.

Ms. Jackie Lightfield stated that she wanted to speak on the traffic signal placement along the West Avenue Corridor, that the walking area is impacted by the location of utility poles and electric boxes. She explained that, as what occurred in front of the old O’Neill’s, the poles are in the crosswalk that impairs the safety with pedestrian access, and DPW should obtain easements to relocate these infrastructure improvements.

Mr. Geake added that handicap access is not possible and inconsistent with the ADA plan.

108 Guaranteed Loan Application – Wall Street Theater Company

Mr. Hempstead asked for an update on the items, and Mr. Sheehan referred to the memo provided outlining the details and he gave an overview of the background on the drafted Section 108 Guaranteed Loan application. He explained that the Wall Street Theater

Company is working to comply with items required by the Council including an in-depth market study on economic feasibility of the project and a guarantee of the \$2 million in Section 108 funding requested from HUD.

Discussion ensued on the timing for the public hearing and comment period and Council approval. Mr. Sheehan explained that the challenges in completing the necessary items have been related to the lack of predevelopment capital. He added that the Agency is considering the advancement of a \$275,000 predevelopment loan, fully secured by an outside guarantor.

Mr. Hempstead noted that there was a funding issue with covering the expense of the Market Feasibility Study. Mr. Sheehan explained that the process with HUD is an eligibility issue with the City closing an obligation. Mr. Miklave noted that in accordance with procedure, no one but the Common Council can approve such a conditional agreement. He added that, for the record, he wants to document that an agreement such as this does not risk the CDBG funds. Mr. Sheehan noted that he will include in a memo that outlines the conditions. Mr. Miklave asked if such a predevelopment loan would take away from other capital needs or divert funds. Mr. Sheehan stated that as long as the guarantee is that the money is paid back to the City for any reason the project does not go through.

Mr. Miklave suggested that a Special Meeting of the Planning Committee be held prior to the next Common Council meeting to review the draft of the plan. Ms. Weber would provide a link to the plan for the members to review in advance of the meeting. Mr. Hempstead suggested that the public hearing be held at the Public Library so that a tour of the building project could be done. He noted that the intention is to forward the project on to the Council for approval at a June meeting, following the public hearing and comment period.

**** MR. HEMPSTEAD MOVED TO SCHEDULE A PUBLIC HEARING ON MAY 29 OR 30, 2013, AT 7:30 P.M.(SUBJECT TO AVAILABILITY OF THE NORWAK PUBLIC LIBRARY) ON THE CITY OF NORWALK'S APPLICATION FOR SECTION 108 GUARANTEED LOAN ON BEHALF OF THE WALL STREET THEATER, INC. FOR THE REQUIRED 30-DAY PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD.**

**** MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at 8:45 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Marilyn Knox;
Telesco Secretarial Services