

PLANNING COMMITTEE MINUTES

For copies of the previous minutes please contact Sally Johnson at
Phone: 203-854-7810 x 6778 or Email sjohnson@norwalkct.org

**CITY OF NORWALK
PLANNING COMMITTEE
SPECIAL MEETING
MAY 19, 2008**

ATTENDANCE: Rev. Phyllis Bolden, Chair; Kelly Straniti, William Krummel, Andrew Conroy, Amanda Brown (8:02 p.m.); Douglas Hempstead (10:10 p.m.)

ABSENT: Carvin Hilliard

STAFF: Tim Sheehan, Redevelopment Director

OTHERS: Mayor Richard Moccia, Council Member Richard Bonenfant, Council Member Laurel Lindstrom, Council Member Michael Geake, Tony Doumlele, Diane Cece. Robert Koch, Jack Burritt, Tad Diesal, Bill Lindsay, Bond Counsel

CALL TO ORDER

Rev. Bolden called the meeting to order at 7:42 p.m.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Mr. Tony Doumlele came forward and distributed a hand out to the Committee members. He said that this particular developer was not shy about asking the City for special tax revenues. Mr. Doumlele said that the developer claims that the special taxes along with the revenue from the garage would help to pay for the garage. Mr. Doumlele then reviewed the fees associated with the plan. He said that it would be important for the City not to have any pressure to use eminent domain. If the City cannot just say no, it would be important to know this in advance.

BUSINESS

A. WEST AVENUE REDEVELOPMENT PROJECT

Mr. Sheehan then came forward and gave a history of the project. He said that he did not believe that over the years that the conceptual plans that were developed were some of the most publicly reviewed and vetted plans he had worked with. The Common Council designated Seligson Properties as the preferred developer for the West Avenue project now referred to as Waypointe. Mr. Sheehan said that he and Mr. Hamilton had developed an investment 104 million plan for this plan.

Mr. Sheehan pointed out that due to poor timing, the City had missed other revenue projects in the past. He pointed out that all the tax revenue not dedicated to debt service remains with the City.

Mr. Sheehan said that the major question was whether the negotiation team had reduced the risk factor for the City to the absolute minimum. He said that he believed that the risk factor had been reduced to the minimum. This is a substantial investment on the part of the City. Mr. Sheehan then introduced the members of the negotiation team.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES OF

Mr. Krummel asked about the minutes from the March meeting. Mr. Sheehan said that they had been returned to the secretarial service for corrections and had not come back yet. Rev. Bolden said that she wished to have this noted in the minutes.

APRIL 3, 2008 PUBLIC HEARING

**** MR. KRUMMEL MOVED THE MINUTES OF THE APRIL 3, 2008 PUBLIC HEARING MINUTES AS SUBMITTED.
** THE MOTION PASSED WITH THREE IN FAVOR (BOLDEN, CONROY AND KRUMMEL) AND ONE ABSTENTION (STRANITI).**

APRIL 3, 2008 REGULAR MEETING.

**** MR. KRUMMEL MOVED THE MINUTES OF THE APRIL 3, 2008 REGULAR MINUTES.**

The following correction was noted:
Page 4, motion: please change the following from:

Rev. Bolden asked the Committee members to go back to Mr. Conroy's original motion.

**** MOTION FAILED WITH TWO (2) VOTES IN FAVOR (MR. CONROY AND MR. HEMPSTEAD) AND FOUR (4) VOTES IN FAVOR (MR. HILLIARD, MS. BROWN, REV. BOLDEN AND MR. KRUMMEL**

Mr. Conroy said that he believed they needed a specific amount. Mr. Krummel said that he hopes the Board of Education representative will be at the Common Council meeting to explain the request.

To:

Rev. Bolden asked the Committee members to go back to Mr. Conroy's original motion.

**** MOTION FAILED WITH TWO (2) VOTES IN FAVOR (MR. CONROY AND MR. HEMPSTEAD) AND FOUR (4) VOTES IN AGAINST (MR. HILLIARD, MS. BROWN, REV. BOLDEN AND MR. KRUMMEL**

Mr. Conroy said that he believed they needed a specific amount. Mr. Krummel said that he hopes the Board of Education representative will be at the Common Council meeting to explain the request.

**** THE MOTION TO APPROVE THE APRIL 3, 2008 REGULAR MINUTES AS AMENDED PASSED WITH THREE IN FAVOR (BOLDEN, CONROY AND KRUMMEL) AND ONE ABSTENTION (STRANITI).**

Mayor Moccia then addressed the group and said that it was important not to prejudge the issue. He said that Robinson and Cole had been appointed to protect the City's interest and they had been the bond council for the City for many years. Mayor Moccia pointed out that not every developer was a "bad" developer and that he believed that Mr. Seligson was a "good" developer. The mayor then pointed out that the per capita of \$1,600 per resident would work out to \$80.00 a year over the life of the bond. He then added that if the residents were given the option of improving the infrastructure for \$80.00 per family over the life of the bond, he felt that people would be in favor of this.

Mayor Moccia then pointed out that if the City does not do anything, it will end up in the same place it did in 1955, following the flood when the City decided not to seek Federal aid to review. He added that there had been 50 different meetings with the public about this issue

Ms. Brown joined the meeting at 8:02 p.m.

Mayor Moccia concluded by saying that he hoped that the Committee would look at this project objectively.

Mayor Moccia left the meeting at 8:03 p.m.

Mr. Cole came forward and said that he would be doing a portion of the presentation. He said that this conceptual project would continue to be worked on as issues occurred. Mr. Cole then reviewed the PowerPoint presentation. Hard copies of this had been distributed to the Committee members earlier.

Mr. Krummel then had several questions regarding the figures in the Project Overview. Mr. Cole then explained that the figures were gross numbers and subject to change when they are broken out.

Mr. Cole then pointed out that there would be five parking garages and these would not be surface lots. He then gave a quick overview of the requirements for the developer.

The next section of the presentation was focused on the Special Services District. This will include a SSD Tax Levy, which will help repay the City Bonds along with the Parking Garage revenue. This funding will also help to maintain and enhance the project in the future.

There were several questions from the Committee about the various figures associated with the project. Mr. Cole reviewed the details of these figures with the Committee.

Mr. Cole pointed out that all changes in the plan would have to be presented for Planning and Zoning approval. Mr. Cole then pointed out that the presentation was basically a table of contents for the Land Disposition Agreement and the Master Development Agreement.

Mr. Krummel asked about the change of terms between the “Land Disposition Agreement” and “Master Development Agreement”. Mr. Cole then clarified the details of the matter for Mr. Krummel.

Mr. Hamilton then came forward to address the Committee. He said that he would focus on the financing aspect of the agreement. He asked why the City was doing this. It was because it would protect the city’s health and financial standing. He pointed out that a city that does not have a growing city grand list has a growing tax rate. This project will strengthen and diversify Norwalk’s tax and employment base. The project will preserve the property tax revenue to support city operations and the new growth will minimize the risk to Norwalk taxpayers.

Mr. Hamilton then reviewed several of the reasons why this project should be promoted. He said that without the City’s involvement, the project would have a much lower density ratio and end up with a streetscape similar to Connecticut Avenue rather than the urban streetscape that the project was proposing.

Mr. Hamilton then gave an overview of the entire project. He pointed out that it was primarily privately financed. He added that there would be an additional 4.1 million in revenue from the Special Services District. The SSD would be controlled by a city appointed Board. He reviewed the figures associated with the Public Financing Strategy.

Mr. Hamilton also pointed out that the developer was obligated to pay residential SSD Tax, even if the residential development is delayed or never constructed. He added that the two consultants on the parking garages were the top two consultants for this type of project in country. Mr. Krummel asked if the reports from the two agencies would be available to the Council. Mr. Sheehan replied that the reports would be posted on the City’s website so that everyone would have access to them.

Mr. Hamilton then proceeded to review the details and figures for a general obligation bond and a revenue bond with the Committee. Mr. Hamilton said that he would like to acknowledge the wisdom of the Council in retaining Robinson and Cole as consultants. He then spoke about the Blue Back Square project in West Hartford, which is very

successful. Norwalk's arrangement has the City assuming ownership of the parking garages after a 75% occupancy rate. West Hartford assumed the ownership as the garages were completed but before there was any occupancy of the development. With the 75% occupancy requirement, Norwalk reduces its risk in the project.

Ms. Brown had questions about incremental taxes, which Mr. Hamilton then reviewed with her. Mr. Geake then asked about the Work Force housing being located in the project and possibly being subject to the SSD tax. Mr. Sheehan said that one of the ongoing dialogs with the Counsel was about the location of the Work Force housing offsite. Ms. Brown asked about the average size of the units, which Mr. Sheehan said was approximately 1,000 square feet, which would be between one and two bedrooms.

Mr. Krummel asked about the marketability of the units with the SSD tax. Mr. Sheehan said that there were units in Norwalk that had additional taxes, such as for a parking space or pet ownership. This would become a developer/marketing question. A brief discussion then followed about the West Hartford development followed.

Mr. Bonenfant asked about the appointment of the Board for the SSD. Mr. Cole explained that there would be expenses that would need to be managed. He also explained why a developer would want to have all the various pieces of the project available.

Ms. Lindstrom had some questions about the improvements and the bond cap associated with it. Mr. Hamilton reviewed the figures with her.

Mr. Sheehan said that was hearing that the negotiating team needed to bring forward the parking consultants and how the analysis was done, along with the issues regarding the financing. Another issue would be the new and existing projects going forward.

Mr. Krummel asked whether there would be models provided on the various aspects of the project. Mr. Sheehan said that this could be done.

Ms. Brown had a number of questions about the financing the Reed Putnam project, which Mr. Hamilton and Mr. Sheehan reviewed with her.

Mr. Krummel asked Mr. Hamilton about the triple A bond rating, which depends on the continued growth of the City. Mr. Hamilton said that the capital budget is based on the growth rate that the City expects, along with debt ratios. He then reviewed the factors associated with the rating agency's evaluations. The quality of management is extremely important to the rating agencies, but the property wealth is close behind. Discussion about this then followed.

Ms. Brown asked about the situation regarding the 16 properties that had not yet been acquired. Mr. Sheehan said that there were some properties that had not yet gone to contract. There were also some issues, such as environmental testing and issues with relocation that are still being discussed. Mr. Sheehan said that he felt that putting forward

a slate of “to be acquired” properties to be considered by the Council. This does not mean that the properties would ultimately be taken by eminent domain.

Mr. Sheehan suggested that the negotiation team come back to the Planning Committee in July. Rev. Bolden suggested June and Mr. Sheehan pointed out that this would only be a few weeks away.

A member of the audience asked about the forecasting of interest rates for 2012. Mr. Hamilton gave a quick overview about interest rate hedging methods.

RECESS

A recess was declared at 10:00 p.m. and Committee returned to public session at 10:07 p.m.

MASTER PLAN OF CONSERVATION AND DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Sheehan directed everyone’s attention to page 29 of the Master Plan. A discussion then followed on the inclusion of Norwalk Community College, the largest community college in the state, on the map as a “school”. Rev. Bolden suggested the phrase “higher education”. A discussion then followed about the addition of the word “High” after Brien McMahan and Briggs in the legend.

Mr. Hempstead joined the meeting at 10:10 p.m.

Mr. Sheehan then pointed out that if the Committee wished to change the Master Plan would require the document go back to the Planning Commission and the plan would not be able to advance to the Council for approval.

Mr. Sheehan said that he felt that the Committee had previously expressed their feeling that this section was weak and inadequate. There were additional issues besides the identification of Norwalk Community College, and the omission of the museums from the map. Ms. Brown said that it appeared the map indicated the museums but they are not included in the legend.

Discussion then followed about how to facilitate the changes that the Planning Committee wished to see in this particular section. Mr. Hempstead suggested that there be a joint committee from Planning Committee and the staff from P&Z review the entire section. Mr. Sheehan suggested that the committee send the document back to the Planning Commission with a suggestion that a joint committee be convened to review Community and Culture Facilities, Section D.

**** MR. HEMPSTEAD MOVED TO SEND THE MASTER PLAN BACK TO THE PLANNING AND ZONING WITH A SUGGESTION THAT A JOINT COMMITTEE OF THE PLANNING COMMITTEE AND THE PLANNING AND ZONING DEPARTMENT BE FORMED TO ADDRESS SECTION D – COMMUNITY AND**

CULTURAL FACILITIES.

** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.

Rev. Bolden then apologized to Ms. Lindstrom and said that she was welcomed at the committee meetings.

ADJOURNMENT

** MR. KRUMMEL MOVED TO ADJOURN.

** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.

The meeting adjourned at 10:25 p.m.

Respectfully submitted
Sharon L. Soltes
Telesco Secretarial Services

