

**CITY OF NORWALK
COMMON COUNCIL ORDINANCE COMMITTEE
REGULAR MEETING
JANUARY 16, 2024
VIA ZOOM**

ATTENDANCE: Lisa Shanahan, Chair; Jalin Sead, Heather Dunn, Johan Lopez, Melissa Murray, Josh Goldstein, Nora Niedzielski-Eichner (7:21pm)

STAFF: Brian Candela, Corporation Counsel; Jessica Vonashek, Tyisha Tomes, Sharon Connors, William Ireland, Stuart Wells

OTHERS: Darlene Young (Council President), Steve Mednick, Esq.

ROLL CALL

Ms. Shanahan called the meeting to order at 7:02 p.m. A quorum was present.

PUBLIC HEARING (possible action on):

None

PUBLIC HEARING DISCUSSION

None

PUBLIC COMMENT

1) Diane Lauricella

Ms. Lauricella spoke about Chapter 9-3 and also 58(a) and doesn't feel there should be a vote tonight and provided examples to the committee.

2) Lisa Brinton

Ms. Brinton spoke about the Blight ordinance and how it will be enforced. She also spoke about the Redistricting Plan and how the members will be selected for the committee.

3) Jennifer Magnole

Ms. Magnole spoke about the Blight ordinance mainly enforcement of complaints and the follow up.

4) Richard Bonenfant

Mr. Bonenfant spoke about the sale of city property. He was also questioning the redistricting committee.

5) Fred Wilms

Mr. Wilms spoke on redistricting and who is going to sit on the commission, it needs to be even numbers.

6) Lisa Henderson

Ms. Henderson spoke about Blight and redistricting

7) Alex Weaver

Muted & was removed

8) Scott Mason

Muted & was removed

9) Diane Paladino

Ms. Paladino spoke about Blight and redistricting

10) Mitzy Bephe

Muted & was removed

The commission explained how the public comment portion of the meeting works.

11) Ana Tabachneck

Ms. Tabachneck spoke about Blight

12) Diane CeCe

Ms. Cece agrees with everyone else and had additional Blight concerns

13) Rudy Hess

Muted and was removed

14) Annalise Frankfort

Was removed

15) Rex Yuden

Was removed

At this point the committee cut off public comment and announced that the police were notified as the commentators who were muted and removed, made antisemitic and racist comments.

ACCEPTANCE OF MINUTES

Acceptance of the minutes were skipped over by Ms. Shanahan.

OLD BUSINESS

Discuss and vote on Section 9-3: Procedure for sale of city property

Ms. Tomes began to discuss Section 9-3. She explained this Section does not include Real Property it is just Personal Property. Ms. Tomes and Ms. Connors looked at all personal property since 2018 and shared the screen with that information so the Committee was able to view.

There was discussion on what the value should be for a hearing. There are usually 20/25 items in a given year and they have all been \$25,000 or less. There was discussion going back and forth between the idea of \$100,000 or \$25,000. The committee thought \$50,000 was a good number.

Mr. Candela made the change on the document.

Mr. Candela apologized that he overlooked an email from Donna Smirniotopoulos, which was to be read into public comment. Mr. Candela read it at this point for the record.

Ms. Simertous was concerned about Blight enforcement, meadows and how the redistricting was going to be done and to make sure that the minority population is added to the new committee.

The committee then went back to Section 9-3.

****MR. GOLSTEIN MADE A MOTION TO SEND SECTION 9-3 TO PUBLIC HEARING
MOTION PASSED UNANIMIOUSLY

Mr. Candela realized that the acceptance of the December, 2023 minutes were skipped over. The Committee went back to that item.

December 19, 2023 – regular meeting of the ordinance committee

****MS. NIEDZIELSKI-EICHNER MADE A MOTION TO MOVE THIS ITEM**

****MINUTES OF THE DECEMBER 19, 2023 REGULAR MEETING PASSED
UNANIMOUSLY**

Discuss and vote on Chapter 58A – Blight Prevention

Mr. Candela discussed the current Chapter 58A and the changes the committee has been making. He went through the document explaining 58A-3 discusses managed natural meadow landscape and 58A-4 discussed the fines and the amounts that went up per statute.

Ms. Vonashek and Mr. Ireland were also in attendance and went through the process, procedure and the enforcement of Blight. The City is looking to hire a Neighborhood District Manager.

Discussion spoke about pedestrians, the mobile app (click & request), immediate risk which falls under the building code and sidewalks. The main goal of this is to get into compliance.

****MS. NIEDZIELSKI-EICHNER MADE A MOTION TO TAKE 58A TO PUBLIC HEARING AT THE FEBRUARY MEETING**
****MOTION PASSED UNANIMIOUSLY**

Discuss and vote on redistricting ordinance with Attorney Steve Mednick

Attorney Mednick presented a powerpoint presentation on the statutory requirements regarding redistricting. The reason why the committee is moving very quickly with the redistricting plan is to tackle the issue for 2025, another election. The drop dead date for 2025 election they need to get the districts set up. There was specific note of page 8 of the 2025 Charter Revision Commission.

The assembly districts in Norwalk are not aligned with the council districts. The objective is to do as few changes as possible. 26b discuss the recommendations from attorney.

There needs to be party separation/representation of 5. Can have 5 unaffiliates or 2 from each party.

Mr. Wells has ideas he can share at some point. He will advise the commission but will not sit on the commission.

Discussion was had very extensively on how the committee should be non-partisan, should recognize the unaffiliates and needs to work long term. They also discussed the 14th Amendment and Jim Crow laws of recommending people and everyone needs to agree.

Ms. Dunn as the minority of the committee was very vocal on her ideas of how the committee should be structured and all the members were going back and forth. It was decided that both parties need to get involved in the process.

The committee decided that a special meeting needed to be held and went through the logistics of noticing the meeting. It was decided a special meeting would be held on January 30, 2023.

There was no vote.

NEW BUSINESS

None

DISCUSSION ITEM

None

ADJOURNMENT

**** MS. DUNN MOVED TO ADJOURN.**

**** THE MOTION TO ADJOURN PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

The meeting adjourned at 10:12 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
R. Bromark
Telesco Secretarial Services

Candela, Brian

From: ana tabachneck <serelle21@gmail.com>
Sent: Tuesday, January 16, 2024 4:24 PM
To: Candela, Brian
Cc: Shanahan, Lisa
Subject: Public comment for ordinance committee

Follow Up Flag: Follow up
Flag Status: Flagged

[Some people who received this message don't often get email from serelle21@gmail.com. Learn why this is important at <https://aka.ms/LearnAboutSenderIdentification>]

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I know I may be too late to have this on record for the meeting, but could you at least forward to the committee members? Thanks!!

Hello,

Disclosure: I am an alternate member of p and z, but am writing representing only myself, not speaking as a representative of p and z.

I know tonight you are voting on some alterations to the blight ordinance, prompted by changes at the state level. I urge you to take a deeper look at the blight ordinance enforcement process, and see where your committee has the ability to tighten the timeframe to correct violations, increase fines, increase transparency, and provide feedback to community members who report blight conditions to the city.

As someone who manages grievances, complaints, and incidents in her day job, I have taken an interest in how the city manages and rectifies blight and related zoning/building violations.

I have submitted many complaints on behalf of neighbors, who are not comfortable reporting through the online zoning violations form (where you can not be anonymous). The click and request App has an anonymous option, but seems to be less effective. Emailing the blight officer is obviously not anonymous.

There are violations that persist for years, even when they are issued citations and fines are attached. The attorney who oversees the process regularly adjourns issues, pushing cases out longer, and makes comments implying that the violation is not actually a problem, it is the neighbors putting in complaints that are the problem.

There is no response to the complainant that their complaint was received, no updates on the case etc.

There is no website where one could see if a property already has a citation in process for the issue, or to see what the status is of a submitted complaint.

Click and request will say "in progress" or "closed" but that isn't enough, particularly when one sees that the problem is not resolved.

I know some things are governed by statute, but others may be within the cities control. I'd recommend clear guidelines for when a case can be adjourned and for how long, no allowance for negotiation of fines, and a website where all violations are published and tracked.

The zoning complaint form should have an anonymous option, and blight should be an online form as well, not an email to the officer.

I have discussed my concerns with the zoning department, but wanted to bring them to you as well.

Thank you, and stay safe in this weather!

Ana Tabachneck
Sent from my iPhone

Candela, Brian

From: Shanahan, Lisa
Sent: Wednesday, January 17, 2024 8:36 AM
To: Candela, Brian
Subject: Fw: Ordinance Committee meeting January 16

From: Lisa Pisano Henderson <lhendersn@aol.com>
Sent: Tuesday, January 16, 2024 4:41 PM
To: Shanahan, Lisa <councilmemberShanahan@norwalkct.gov>; Dunn, Heather <councilmemberDunn@norwalkct.gov>; Goldstein, Josh <councilmemberGoldstein@norwalkct.gov>; Lopez, Johan <councilmemberLopez@norwalkct.gov>; Murray, Melissa <councilmemberMurray@norwalkct.gov>; Niedzielski-Eichner, Nora <councilmemberNIEDZIELSKI-EICHNER@norwalkct.gov>; Sead, Jalin <councilmemberSead@norwalkct.gov>
Cc: Hayducky, John <JHayducky@norwalkct.gov>
Subject: Ordinance Committee meeting January 16

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Councilwoman Dunn and members of the Ordinance Committee

The Ordinance Committee meeting on Tuesday, January 16, 2024 will have three major issues for discussion and a vote. There has been little to no outreach to the Norwalk community. This meeting is ZOOM only. I am requesting that this meeting be available to residents in person, in the council chambers, so that the community may gather to comment. Since all three items are major ordinances, I request that the community be allowed three minutes to speak on each item. If not, I request that redistricting be moved to next month so that the community will have ample time to review and comment on the ordinance.

Blight Ordinance:

I read through the updated blight ordinance and have many questions.

Most importantly, there has been no outreach to inform the community on blight and what is expected, acceptable, the help available to resolve issues, and reporting through resolution of issues. The Ordinance Committee lacks community outreach.

How does the public find and follow reported blight? Where can we review reported blight and the actions taken through resolution. Currently, it is impossible to find this information. How many council members have ever followed the zoning citation meetings? There are citations that go back many years with no resolution. Fines are regularly reduced or eliminated. What is the current number of outstanding blight and zoning issues in Norwalk sitting on someone's desk with no time to address these issues? I've heard that there are so many, and the city doesn't have the resources to address them. Is there a list where the public may access all blighted issues reported? Previously, we were told that it would be posted on the Mayor's Dashboard. To date, it still is not posted.

What has been the current, average time to correct a blighted issue? Ordinances without resolution are a waste of time.

Blight, including commercial vehicles/heavy equipment, boats, etc. stored in residential areas are often overlooked and ignored. Why aren't the building and zoning employees charged with identifying blighted issues when they are driving through the city? Why isn't the police department issuing tickets on public streets to commercial vehicles, boats, etc. that are left for weeks and months? Can police issue tickets on private property.

Why does it seem that MEADOWS are the main additional topic? As we continue to become an urban city, isn't a MEADOW not much more than a landscaped bed? Most properties in this city have less than a quarter of an acre of turfgrass, yet turfgrass is selectively defined. Why doesn't the ordinance identify dead and dying landscape, especially large trees on private property that continue to take out power lines. Is turfgrass of more than 9" really the issue in Norwalk that needs to be defined?

Watching the zoning citation meetings, it seems that fines are often reduced or removed. May you provide a list of the blight issues resolved, including fines issued and collected over the past year?

It seems that blight and zoning complaints do not make it to the zoning citation meetings. The City of Norwalk Click & Report app is not the best way for residents to report an issue and see the outcome. Often the report is closed with no resolution.

It is pitiful that the City expects neighbors to tattle on neighbors and report violations when the building inspectors, code enforcement officers, blight officers, and every other city employee ignores issues that they come across daily. Have council members ever been charged with reporting violations? This especially includes illegal apartments in multi-family homes.

The Ordinance Committee currently has three new members who are just getting up to speed on these major issues that the Ordinance Committee is pushing through. It seems that there should be additional due diligence done prior to any vote taken.

I would like this letter be read into the record for the benefit of those in attendance and those reading the minutes.

Thank you,

Lisa Henderson
Appletree Lane, Norwalk

Candela, Brian

From: Shanahan, Lisa
Sent: Wednesday, January 17, 2024 8:36 AM
To: Candela, Brian
Subject: Fw: Tonight's Ordinance Committee Agenda

From: Donna S. <dsmirniotopoulos@aol.com>
Sent: Tuesday, January 16, 2024 2:59 PM
To: Shanahan, Lisa <councilmemberShanahan@norwalkct.gov>; Dunn, Heather <councilmemberDunn@norwalkct.gov>; Goldstein, Josh <councilmemberGoldstein@norwalkct.gov>; Lopez, Johan <councilmemberLopez@norwalkct.gov>; Murray, Melissa <councilmemberMurray@norwalkct.gov>; Niedzielski-Eichner, Nora <councilmemberNIEDZIELSKI-EICHNER@norwalkct.gov>; Sead, Jalin <councilmemberSead@norwalkct.gov>
Cc: Hayducky, John <JHayducky@norwalkct.gov>
Subject: Tonight's Ordinance Committee Agenda

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Dear Members of the Common Council Ordinance Committee:

Congratulations on an aggressive agenda for tonight's meeting. It appears you will be voting on three items:

1. procedure for the sale of City property
2. new language regarding Blight Prevention
3. redistricting ordinance

With respect to the Blight Ordinance, the lack of a more nuanced definition is not what's holding Norwalk back. We all know blight when we see it, whether we're looking at a blighted structure or overgrown landscape. Micromanaging and wordsmithing the language in the ordinance will not help Norwalk combat blight. Enforcement will. Focus on enforcement, including compelling the hearing officer in blight cases to impose fines as written, not as he sees fit. Making allowances for "the intentional desire to add a meadow" is unnecessary. We know the difference between a meadow and overgrown and poorly maintained landscaping.

With respect to the redistricting ordinance, consider that 45% of those who voted in 2023 were not on your side. While that's short of a majority, 45% is a significant enough minority to warrant some consideration in populating your committee. Dare to appoint people to this committee who don't agree with you.

I would like this letter be read into the record for the benefit of those in attendance and those reading the minutes.

Respectfully,

Donna Smirniotopoulos
18 Shorefront Park