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**PARKING AUTHORITY
SPECIAL MEETING VIA ZOOM VIRTUAL VIDEOCONFERENCE AND
TELECONFERENCE
DECEMBER 16 , 2020**

ATTENDANCE:

Michael Harden, Chairman
Eric Rains, Vice Chairman
Jud Aley
Tom Vetter

STAFF:

Community Development

Jessica Vonashek, Chief of Economic and
Vanessa Valadares, DPW Principal Engineer

OTHERS:

Stathis Manousos, LAZ Parking

Rocky Legesse, LAZ Parking

CALL TO ORDER

Mr. Harden called the meeting to order at 6:05PM.

1. PUBLIC COMMENT

There were no public comments this evening.

**2. APPROVE THE MINUTES FROM THE PARKING AUTHORITY MEETING HELD ON
WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 18, 2020.**

**** MR. VETTER MOVED TO APPROVE THE MINUTES AS SUBMITTED.**

**** MR. ALEY SECONDED THE MOTION.**

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

3. CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

Mr. Harden said that the budget will be discussed this evening and he has asked staff to look at a more extreme version of cutting back and what that will look like because we are in the position with the budget where we need to be very careful, and over the next month will be looking at what impacts the pandemic has had and prepare for the future.

**4. SONO MASTER PLAN- BRIAN BIDOLLI, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF THE
REDEVELOPMENT AGENCY**

Mr. Harden introduced Mr. Bidolli and said he will be presenting this evening on the South Norwalk Railroad Station study.

Mr. Bidolli said he is the Executive Director of the Redevelopment Agency and that he has been in the role for just over a year. He presented the South Norwalk Train Station Study and said it is at the beginning stages and is looking at the long term future of the South Norwalk Railroad Station and is centered around an area adjacent to the train station. He said rather than having future development projects ideas occurring separately it looks at the area holistically and will take a comprehensive look to figure out how to re-vision the entire train station area to determine the best use of the area.

Mr. Bidolli presented and said a consultant has just been selected to begin the study and he provided an overview of the questions from the RFP and said the study will identify the general interest in a type of development that can be accommodated in the area and is desired in the community, and it will take a close look at the details. He said he would like the Parking Authority's feedback throughout the process so they can understand what has worked in the past and what is expected in the future.

Mr. Bidolli said there is a great opportunity given the fact there are publicly controlled assets in the area is to reinforce the South Norwalk Railroad Station as a multi-mobile transportation hub and will look at transit routing and also the economic impacts of it all in the context of a preferred development scenario.

Mr. Bidolli said in terms of the scope of the study it will be a three phased project and will be working on the first task for the remainder of this year and into the beginning of next year, and will then frame out some of the development scenario in the second phase of the project and that is when the more detailed analysis of the modeling will occur around the concepts plans that will be developed.

Mr. Bidolli said there is robust public involvement plan that he will send it the Parking Authority for review and comments. He said the plan includes outreach sessions and there will be also advisory committee meetings as well as biweekly staff meeting to address anything that comes up along the way. He said the project will be for nine months and he is looking forward to hearing comments from the Parking Authority.

Mr. Rains asked when and what kind of thinking goes into the specific contents of the development so that it supports the urban core, or is a project like this expanding the urban core to more of what is in the urban core. Mr. Bidolli said they would like to look at the market to look at what uses can be identified and complementary to what is going on in the urban core.

Mr. Harden said there has been a tremendous push to get Columbus Magnet School developed which may fit into this redevelopment plan in some way.

Mr. Rains said he is concerned that if the South Norwalk Railroad Station gets developed to a point where people will not have to go to the rest of the urban core of South Norwalk that it will be detrimental to the area. He said if this will become its own district it would be beneficial to understand what the vision of it is. Mr. Bidolli pointed out that it is very early in the study and they want to achieve balance and are not trying to shift the demand but are trying to understand the demand and determine how best to distribute it based on the development opportunity. He clarified that the study area is for the targeted analysis but is in no way at the expense of the things that Mr. Rains pointed out because they are hugely important and need to be a very robust part of this plan. Mr. Rains said this will not be good from a Parking Authority perspective if everyone that needs to come to South Norwalk never leaves the train station because all of the other assets will suffer.

Mr. Aley said he sees this as one part of South Norwalk as a Transportation Center which he likes and he sees this as enhancing everything else and if this area of the train station is a really thriving place he would hope it would drive people to take the train into South Norwalk. Mr. Rains agreed but said if it is going to be a multi-modal transportation hub study then it should except if zoning requires ground level retail and commercial on the ground floor. Mr. Bidolli said it is not just ground floor retail it ground floor activated uses and there are other ways to achieve that in a way that is supportive to other businesses and he is looking at the vacancy rate in the area and the absorption of that. He said they want to be sure that whatever is developed is supportive to address those issues.

5. MARITIME AQUARIUM REQUEST

Mr. Harden said at the last meeting it was discussed that the Parking Authority would relieve them of their past debt through the summer due to the pandemic as requested but any request for the future would be left to be determined in the future. Mr. Legesse said that one payment was made this week so the total amount now due \$4,600.

Mr. Rains said that the Maritime Aquarium is a good partner to the Parking Authority as a generator of customers so he is very comfortable about granting the request for the past.

Mr. Harden said that the agenda was not posted correctly so the action items cannot be voted on and that he will meet with Ms. Vonashek following this meeting to schedule a brief meeting so that the action items can be voted on. Ms. Vonashek apologized for the agenda not posting correctly and there may have been an issue with the page and she will email the members of the Parking Authority to schedule a special meeting to vote on the action items.

6. EXECUTIVE SESSION- MAX EX PUBLIC RELATIONS, LLC CONTRACT CLOSEOUT

There was no executive session held.

7. MAX EX PUBLIC RELATIONS, LLC CONTRACT CLOSEOUT

There was no discussion.

8. FINANCIAL REPORT

Mr. Manousos reported and said we are still coming out of the Covid-19 related impacts to the operation and the revenues compared to budget are down by 58% and compared to last year are down 48%.

Mr. Manousos said the expenses are down 29% compared to budget and are down 28% compared to last year.

Mr. Manousos reported on the demands and said the biggest hit has been on the railroad stations and the demand overall year to date compared to last year is down 45%. He said the impact to the revenues is 69% which is mainly due to the impact on the railroad station facilities and the reduced demand.

Mr. Manousos reported on the permit activity and said it is down 17% but out of the three revenue sources (monthly parking permits, transient and meter revenue) the permits have taken the least hit and even though they are down over 30%, it has been somewhat stable because of the actual permit revenue is approximately 51% of the year to date parking revenue.

Mr. Manousos said the ratio of ticket to demands has been going down which is due to fewer tickets being issued.

Mr. Manousos said that \$1.4 million dollars was requested from the fund balance for the reopening plan and there is still an operating loss which we had anticipated, but is lower than what was requested from the fund balance. Mr. Harden asked what the specific numbers were over the last couple of months for the Maritime Garage. Mr. Manousos said the Maritime Garage tracks with the attendance at the Maritime Aquarium and the success of the garage depends on the success of the aquarium and their attendance has been down due to the construction. Mr. Harden said he is worried about the aquarium and the aquarium unlike any other business in town has to keep staff on so they have a high expense rate whether they are open or not, and as a big customer of the Parking Authority he is interested in what they are doing. Mr. Rains asked at what level of service is the aquarium open. Mr. Harden said he believes that are fully open but he does not know what the attendance rate is. Ms. Valadares said they are open but due to Covid-19 guidelines being rolled back to phase II they are at 50% capacity. She said the IMAX Theater was closed all

of this month but have now reopened for a few showings on the weekends only. She said one of the things that hurt them was that the camps and summer programs normally have trips to the aquarium but they were all cancelled this year.

Mr. Rains asked what the difference is in working alongside them to promote their final film series and offering free parking during those events in an attempt to help with their attendance. Ms. Vonashek said that can absolutely be done and not only partner with the aquarium to offer free parking, but can also push out the film series and we are working with them on the promotions and the social media piece already. She said if we were to use some of the budget that the Parking Authority currently has for the fiscal year for the parking programs we would be able to allocate some of the funding to alleviate parking fees related to the IMAX Theater, and in addition to that also look at not charging them for parking and having that used for another line item in the budget. She said that would need to be a decision for the Parking Authority but staff would be happy to act on it given the direction. Mr. Harden said he is interested in having a conversation with representatives of the aquarium on how better to partner with them to help bolster attendance. Mr. Rains said the Parking Authority has been talking for a long time regarding our role in economic development and vitality and asked Ms. Vonashek what her thoughts are on what the Parking Authority can be doing.

9. CAPITAL REPORT

Ms. Valadares said there are not many updates since last month and are still in the design phase for the Webster Lot but still have not received anything back from the consultant as of yet.

Ms. Valadares said the design for the calking for the outside of the South Norwalk Railroad Station is almost complete and she had met with Desmond this week for the final walk through and are planning to have the project out to bid by the end of January so that the work can be done in the summer.

Ms. Valadares provided an update on the Walk Bridge project and said at the last meeting the Parking Authority had suggested turning the temporary lot on East Avenue @ Fort Point Street back to the CONNDOT and she and Ms. Vonashek had contacted the CONNDOT and they are looking at the contract to see if the lot can now be returned back to them and are hoping to have an answer by the next meeting.

Ms. Valadares provided an update on the usage of the North Water Street lot for the Walk Bridge project and said that the IMAX Theater will be demolished next year as part of the aquariums major renovation project to accommodate the new bridge. She said they are now in the process of finalizing the construction of the renovation and one portion will be done by the second week in January and the seal tanks should be completed by March. She said in the spring the IMAX Theatre will be demolished and she would like them to start that demolition process as early as possible to avoid the summer months. She said in order for that to be done they will need to get into the IMAX Theatre so they can inspect it but in order to that will need to change the easement, and they are in the process of updating the easement map and will be asking for a right of entry so that the process can be expedited and it will go before the DPW Committee for approval next month. She said once the easement map has been finalized she will share it with the Parking Authority for discussion. She said when they partially need to close the North Water Street Lot they will not be doing any construction from the lot, but will need access from the lot and have agreed that each time they need to close the parking spaces they will pay for each of the spaces on a daily basis.

Mr. Harden asked what kind of lead time there will be because the Parking Authority would like to have the ability to do public outreach. Ms. Valadares said that she meets with the CONNDOT frequently and once she has the schedule she will share it with the Parking Authority and they are also required to put

any closures on their website. She said she is not expecting any closures until late spring but as soon as she receives any information she will share it with the Parking Authority.

Mr. Rains said with outside dining and hopefully interior dining beginning there will be a great need for parking at the North Water Street lot and with the IMAX Theatre gone they will be gaining working space so there are two entrances and exits into the North Water Street Lot and asked if it is possible to give them the northern entrance and the two spaces opposite that entrance Ms. Valadares said “yes” that is what will be done and the only time the entire lot will be needed is when there is a storm and the boom on the crane will need to be lowered.

Mr. Rains suggested that CONNDOT have a community meeting once the IMAX Theater has been removed. Ms. Valadares said that she thinks that is a very good idea and that she will bring it to them to have a public information session.

10. OPERATING REPORT

This was discussed under item number eight of the agenda.

11. 2021/2022 BUDGET DISCUSSION

Ms. Vonashek said that there is a line item in the operating budget that relates to personnel which was in the pro-forma for fiscal year 2022 at \$650,000. She said the line item entails percentages of staff time at City Hall and she has been working with the Comptroller’s Office and Finance to look at the salaries moving forward and it calculates out to a \$460,000 line item instead of the \$650,000. She said that she will be giving Mr. Manousos and Mr. Legesse the updated budget number.

Ms. Vonashek said that the parking program line item was originally budgeted at \$ 200,000 and had reduced it to \$100,000 which is the amount the Parking Authority had agreed on for the marketing promotional campaign contract. She suggested due to the \$190,000 savings from the personnel line item to put \$25,000- \$30,000 back into the parking program line to support economic development efforts and allow for some flexibility. She pointed out that the Parking Authority would approve any funds prior to them being used. Mr. Rains questioned if that increase would be enough and that he always felt that the Parking Authority had a strong role in economic development and the need has now shifted to economic vitality and suggested that Ms. Vonashek look at what the grand plan is. He said he 100% approves the idea but the stipulation he would put on it is focused on efforts that are adjacent to Parking Authority assets. Ms. Vonashek said the \$25,000 could be a component of what is requested but will request that the vendor put together a proposal of what those events look like and what the assets look like.

Mr. Harden said that he had spoken to staff regarding some different scenarios for the upcoming budget. Mr. Manousos said that staff is working on some scenarios for the end of this fiscal year as well as the next budget year but don’t have anything to yet present. He also said the request that was previously made was through December and was based on the assumption that by January we would be back to at least 80% of where we were pre- Covid-19. Mr. Rains agreed and said it will need to be balanced from where the revenue is being received from as well as some of the issues that were dealt with over the years with from business owners who do not understand the value of paid and managed parking.

12. OLD BUSINESS

Mr. Aley said that he has been in contact with the bollard company and they do not supply any decorative ones so they but suggested he sent him the ones we are interested in and he will determine if they will work. He said he is hoping to have a few options to present at next month's meeting.

a. Dumpster usage at the Maritime Garage

Mr. Harden asked for an update on the dumpster at the Maritime Garage that was discussed at the last meeting. Mr. Legesse said that he has spoken with the condo association but the restaurant that is subleasing the dumpster area has been closed but they are trying to get in contact with them. Mr. Rains suggesting installing a combination lock that the actual units of the condo association and the Parking Authority has control of.

b. Discussion- App charge amount

There was a discussion regarding people who park for less than an hour using the app and being charged the full \$1.00. Mr. Rains said he has parked in Stamford using the same app and he was charged for less than an hour and asked why we can't have the ability to charge less than an hour. Mr. Legesse said that he has reached out to the vendor and that it could be programmed as long as the Parking Authority approves it, but the .35 cents convenience fee would not be reduced except for anyone who is a gold member through Park Mobile member in which the convenience fee is reduced to .25 cents. Mr. Manousos said the reason there was \$1.00 minimum charge is so that it is consistent with credit card payments of the single spaced meters because of the credit card fees. Mr. Harden asked if the Parking Authority wanted to go back to Park Mobile and negotiate who would be responsible for doing that. Mr. Manousos said that LAZ staff would do that. Mr. Harden requested that they do that.

Mr. Legesse reported on the free parking on the open lots at the South Norwalk Railroad Station and said that is was implemented on December 1, 2020 and is free on the pay stations as well as on Park Mobile.

13. NEW BUSINESS

There was no new business discussed this evening.

14. MOTION TO ADJOURN

****MR. VETTER MOVED TO ADJOURN.**

**** MR. ALEY SECONDED THE MOTION.**

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

The meeting adjourned at 7:50PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Dilene Byrd