

CITY OF NORWALK
PLANNING & ZONING COMMISSION SPECIAL MEETING MINUTES
December 5, 2023

PRESENT: Louis Schulman, Chair; Nick Kantor; Mike Mushak; Galen Wells; Chapin Bryce; Darius Williams; Ana Tabachneck; Richard Roina; Tammy Langalis; Jacquen Jordan-Byron

STAFF: Steve Kleppin; Bryan Baker

OTHERS: Caroline Ward; Lynnelle Jones; Mary Beth Sullivan; Atty William Hennessey; Stephen Christopher; Jack Pavia; Margaret Egan; Atty Lisa Feinberg; Ben Hanpeter; Paul Chenard; Abdul Khan (sp?); Jillian Sakovits; Diane Keith; Alanna Sakovits; Tanner Thompson; Richard Bonefant; Vic Palladino; Ryan O'Neill; Atty Liz Suchy; Jack Meyers; Jeff Naglekirk; Brad Craighead (sp?); Georgette Worth; Paul Fox; Sebring Sands; Mina Garcia; Courtney Austin

I. CALL TO ORDER

Mr. Schulman called the meeting to order at 6:05 p.m. It should be noted that this meeting was held on Zoom.com with participants calling in, separately, as well as the Community Room at 125 East Avenue, Norwalk, CT.

II. ROLL CALL

Mr. Kleppin called the roll.

III. PUBLIC HEARINGS

a. #2023-19 R/M – Planning & Zoning Commission – Zoning text amendment for complete re-write of the zoning regulations and map amendment for complete rezoning of the entire city

Mr. Schulman explained how the meeting would be conducted. He asked that anyone speaking should be concise and reminded them not to repeat what others said, nor would speakers at this meeting be allowed to speak again tomorrow. He also noted that the letters that had been received were already a part of the record and that it was not necessary to read them into the record. There would be a break at approximately 9 pm. Ms. Jordan-Byron read a letter into the record from Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection which was required to be read.

Mr. Schulman noted that there is a Spanish translator for anyone that may need it.

Mr. Kleppin explained that there is a sign-up sheet for those who are in person, and they will call on those that are on Zoom. He then gave a brief synopsis of the two year process of the re-write of the proposed zoning regulations. He then showed them links to the different articles for the proposed regulations. He also said there were red-line edits on the website, as well as the proposed maps including one that is interactive.

Caroline Ward, 6 Park Lane, thanked the commissioners for their work. She spoke about the current code as to how it would apply to her home and what the proposed regulations would mean to her home. She then explained how much it would cost to lift her home after Sandy.

Lynnelle Jones, 10 Point Road, said that she had lived in Norwalk since 1986. She noted that there is flood mitigation assistance from FEMA. She also said she had spoken at a public hearing on 1 Cemetery Street, East Norwalk, about the status of the Harbor Commission. She said that the Harbor Commission had not responded to these regulations as well and perhaps they should wait until next year to vote on this. She also had comments about the handicap parking requirements. She again asked for a postponement of the vote. She also had concerns about increased density in the flood plains. She said that she had submitted an FOI request to the Mayor's office.

Mary Beth Sullivan, 42 Harborview Avenue, said she had sent a letter to them but had comments about substantial improvement. She said she had been on the Conservation Commission during a re-write of the regulations so understood the process. She said that substantial improvement regulations needed to be re-written, but wanted to clarify some items. She said that she was submitting a petition and that people in these areas were unaware of the proposed changes. She also asked why the regulations were more restrictive than neighboring towns. She said that she had reached out to Planning & Zoning Department staff but believed she had received incorrect information. She noted again that she had watched the commission's meeting on October 25 and described it in detail. She asked that they look into the changes in more detail.

Atty William Hennessey spoke on behalf of his client, Weeburn Country Club, about the substantial improvement proposed regulation. He said that other towns used a rolling look back period. It allowed residents to make improvements that may not always result in full compliance. He also discussed the fact that there was not much flexibility in the proposed regulations. He again asked them to look at surrounding towns.

Stephen Christopher, 151-153 Ely Avenue, suggested two items for the new proposed regulations. One asked for the CD4 be changed at Ely Avenue and a change to CD3.

Jack Pavia, 32 Vanderbilt Avenue, thanked the commission for their work on proposed zoning regulations. He spoke about the housing crisis for his generation, since he was 19 years old. He was concerned about how others would be able to afford to live in Connecticut. He asked that they consider housing near train stations, etc.

Margaret Egan, an asset manager at Clarion, said she would be speaking on behalf of her client, Merritt 7. She gave a brief history of the Merrit 7 office park and noted that they were one of the best office environments in Fairfield County. She noted that demand for office space had declined especially since Covid. She said that the ownership had been working with the Planning & Zoning Department in case of change of use and/or redevelopment. She said there were several concerns in the proposed regulations. One was the exclusion of multi-family buildings on major arterial state roads and that they have to have retail at the base of the building. The concern about Merrit 7 is it is not on grade. They suggested an overlay similar to the Merrit 7 Station overlay to which the staff had been receptive. She asked that these changes be added to the regulations and not wait. They also had issues with the sustainability requirements, including the sustainable roofs and EV charging stations. Their ownership requested more studies before these measures were codified.

Atty Lisa Feinberg spoke on behalf of her client, Argent Ventures, the new owner of Manresa Island. She said that Argent was in contract negotiations when the zoning re-write process had started. Argent had met with Planning & Zoning Department staff in December 2022 to begin discussions of their application to build a unique coastal residential neighborhood, with ecological restoration and communal open space. After reviewing the proposed regulations, they did not believe they could develop the site in the sensitive manner they had envisioned so they worked with staff on an overlay zone to provide flexibility for it. They met with surrounding neighborhood groups to discuss their development concepts. She believed that everyone in attendance was in support of the project. She noted that the application would be a special permit and explained that the overlay would limit density and commit to conservation.

Ben Hanpeter, 14 One Place, said he was an alternate member of the Zoning Board of Appeals, as well as an organizer for Sustainable Streets Norwalk, but was speaking as a private citizen. He said that Sustainable Streets had submitted a letter regarding parking minimums. They asked to reduce minimum parking requirements and discussed how it would help. He also noted that residents would like to see different

varieties and sizes of housing when it's built. He discussed other cities that have eliminated parking requirements.

Paul Chenard, 36 Windsor Place, asked that the Planning & Zoning Commission approve the proposed zoning regulations although he asked for some modifications, including the elimination of parking requirements.

Abdul Khan (sp?), said he had come to this country in 1975 and moved to East Norwalk which he loved living in. He was concerned about the change in zoning to CD4.

Jillian Sakovits, 1 Alden Avenue, said that she had a few concerns about the substantial improvement changes.

Diane Keith, 249 Chestnut Hill Road, said that she would speak about 10 things to improve affordability including tiny homes, solar installations and stormwater requirements, variances for residential development above commercial buildings, etc.

Alanna Sakovits, 3 Alden Avenue, had concerns about the proposed changes to the substantial improvements regulations. She believed that surrounding towns had more favorable regulations.

Tanner Thompson discussed the parking regulations and used Trader Joe's small parking lots as an example. He believed that some housing projects do not get built because the cost of the parking structures is too high. He discussed creating more walkable areas of the city near the train station. He also said that he had been a part of the letter sent by the Sustainable Streets organization which suggested reducing the parking requirements in Norwalk's urban core. He also discussed a transit district plan which could redesign the bus system. He noted that although the proposed regulations would require solar panels and EV charging stations, he believed those would add to the cost of housing which would exacerbate the housing shortage.

Richard Bonefant, 17 Park Hill Avenue, said that many comments about density during the Plan of Conservation and Development (POCD) process were not in it. He also said that Ms. Wells should allow one of the alternates to vote since she had never been to a meeting in person. He also discussed requiring dog walking areas in new housing developments. He had concerns about what is a minor change in the proposed regulations. He also had concerns about moving parking lots to the rear of commercial buildings especially if they were abutting residential neighborhoods. He discussed the changes in some areas to two family housing. He did not think it would help the affordable housing crisis.

Vic Palladino, 7 Miriam (?) St Said that he was happy that they had backed off upzoning to change single family zones.

Ryan O'Neill, 6 Roland Avenue, president of the Marvin Beach Association, but not speaking on behalf of the Association, said that he had moved to Norwalk in 2017. He noted that many residents loved the area and wanted to preserve their homes. He asked them to go back to the regulations to review what would prevent people from raising their houses and making improvements.

Atty Liz Suchy, said she was speaking on behalf of her client, Terzian Trucking. She thanked the staff and the commission for their hard work on this project. She summarized her comments from a letter she wrote to the commission on November 8 relating to non-conforming uses. Her client's property became legally non-conforming in October 2022 with the changes to the industrial zoning regulations. There were also concerns about inconsistencies of the language and requested that it be changed back to the language that property owners had fought for in 2022.

Jack Meyers, 3 Union Park South, thanked the commission for their hard work on these changes. He said that he supported Ben Hanpeter and Tanner Thompson requesting the elimination of parking requirements. He had concerns about housing affordability.

At this point, the commission took a break at 8:03 pm and resumed the meeting at 8:17 pm.

Mr. Schulman called the meeting to order.

Jeff Naglekirk, 78 Flax Hill Road, said that he would like to speak about the marine commercial area. He said he had worked at 140 Water Street in 1998. He gave a brief summary of his time there. He said that he was in support of the Devine Bros. letter. He also discussed the city's efforts for funding for dredging and said he agreed with the DEEP letter. He said he is not opposed to the changes. He wanted to see the continued commercial use at the top of the harbor. He had concerns that the harbor view would be lost. He said that light pollution has gotten worse over the years due to all of the new development. He had concerns about diminishing industrial and technology manufacturing in the city.

Brad Craighead (sp?), said he was not speaking on behalf of the Norwalk Green Association, although he was a founding member. He spoke about the East Avenue Village District. He spoke about recreational space being at ground level. He also noted that there should be small businesses on East Avenue. For example, for everyone in City Hall there is nowhere close by for them to get lunch. He hoped that Transit,

Mobility and Parking to redesign East Avenue. He suggested adding more traffic lights as well.

Georgette Worth, Cottage Street, gave a brief history of her family and said that she was concerned about the upzoning for this tiny street. Parking is difficult and it is hard for fire trucks to get through. She did not think they needed more than 1-2 family homes on the street. She had put together a petition as well.

Paul Fox, 26 Bouton Avenue, said that he did not have a car and would like to see more walkable transit oriented development.

Sebring Sands, 41 Wolfe Avenue, had concerns about affordable housing in Norwalk. He discussed the missing middle housing because of the zoning codes. He then discussed the parking requirements.

Mina Garcia, 43 Vestral Road, thanked the commissioners for their time on this project. She said she was advocating for young children and large day care centers in residential zones.

Courtney Austin, 145 East Avenue, spoke about growing up and living in Norwalk her whole life.

Mr. Kleppin said that he did not see any other members of the public, either in person or on Zoom, that would like to speak. Mr. Schulman closed the public portion of the meeting.

IV. COMMENTS OF DIRECTOR

There were no comments from Mr. Kleppin.

V. COMMENTS OF COMMISSIONERS

There were no comments from the commissioners.

VI. ADJOURNMENT

Ms. Langalis made a Motion to Adjourn.

Mr. Bryce seconded.

Louis Schulman; Nick Kantor; Mike Mushak; Galen Wells; Chapin Bryce; Darius Williams; Ana Tabachneck; Richard Roina; Tammy Langalis; Jacquen Jordan-Byron approved.

No one opposed.

No one abstained.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:08 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Diana Palmentiero