

CITY OF NORWALK
PLANNING & ZONING COMMISSION SPECIAL MEETING MINUTES
October 25, 2023

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

STAFF: Steve Kleppin; Bryan Baker; Alexis Cherichetti; Tammy Maldonado

I. CALL TO ORDER

Mr. Schulman called the meeting to order at 6:02 p.m. It should be noted that this meeting was held on Zoom.com with participants calling in, separately.

II. ROLL CALL

Mr. Kleppin called the roll.

III. DISCUSSION 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. Topics:

i. Flood Regulation Changes

Mr. Kleppin said that Alexis Cherichetti and Tammy Maldonado would lead the discussion. He noted that this issue had been a concern since he joined the department. He also noted that Norwalk's regulations are the strictest in the state. He explained that the best way to be in compliance with flood regulations is to raise structures. He explained the FEMA regulations that the city must comply with. He then said that they had tried to add some flexibility to the proposed regulations such as if an applicant was only doing interior renovation.

Ms. Cherichetti began with a broad overview of the proposed flood zone regulations which affected current homeowners. She explained the substantial improvement and substantial damage component as well as the lookback period and the threshold. She noted that the proposed regulations have a 10 year lookback period.

Ms. Maldonado continued by noting that FEMA has baseline regulations which the city cannot make less strict. The 50% rule would now be known as the 25% of the market rule. There was a discussion of substantial improvements. Ms. Maldonado discussed what would be changed in the proposed regulations, including the 10 year

lookback. There were some people who could make their homes flood compliant therefore, the regulations would not apply. There was a discussion about the current regulations which seem arbitrary.

Ms. Langalis explained that the land value is not included. She also noted that if the proposed regulations make it more difficult, homeowners would not get permits for improvements. She thought that it should be reviewed again as to the value and how far back it went. This proposed regulation would be for improvements to the primary structure, whether residential or commercial. Ms. Langalis also noted that lifting a house is a massive undertaking. She also thought that the lookback time frame should be shortened to 5 years to go along with the revaluations done by the city. Mr. Schulman reminded everyone that the regulation was to encourage homeowners to lift their homes. Although Ms. Langalis agreed, she thought it would also lead to homeowners doing work on their homes without permits.

Mr. Kleppin explained why the staff thought 10 years was a reasonable lookback period. Ms. Cherichetti explained the staff's process for drafting this proposed regulation.

There was a discussion about whether there were other ways for the city to incentivize homeowners to make their homes flood compliant that was separate from this regulation. Ms. Langalis asked if there was a way to check which houses had made flood claims to FEMA since they were more likely to need to be flooded. Mr. Mushak said that he was encouraged that there had been 200 homes raised but wondered if the proposed regulations would slow this effort down. He said that he was supporting the regulations. Mr. Williams said he had looked into these programs with FEMA and knew that there were grant programs that Norwalk could administer.

At this point, Mr. Schulman asked the commissioners if they supported the staff's recommendation on this matter. Mr. Kleppin said that they could give realtors a sheet of what the flood guidelines are and what Mr. Williams suggested about grant programs. Ms. Cherichetti noted that the city had received a grant for a flood resiliency study. Ms. Langalis suggested getting the mechanicals out of the flood zone.

At this point, there were six commissioners who supported the staff's recommendations. Ms. Langalis said that she was not opposed but it could be better. Ms. Langalis and Mr. Williams abstained. At this point in the meeting, Ms. Cherichetti and Ms. Maldonado left.

ii. Clarifications:

1. Parking for Funeral Homes

Mr. Kleppin discussed the parking proposal but noted that the commissioners had asked for a real world opinion from a funeral director which he said they could incorporate into the proposed regulation. Mr. Baker reminded them that there could be a difference between opening a funeral home in a more urban area as opposed to a more suburban area. There was a discussion about state regulations for handicapped parking spaces. The commissioners did not have a problem with these changes.

2. Lodge Definition

Mr. Kleppin said that the staff recommended that there be a separate definition for lodge. The commissioners received the staff's proposed changes. Ms. Wells said she was in support of this change. Ms. Tabachneck said she had a concern that this proposed definition only seemed to apply to Lakota. There was a discussion about the research and development zone. Mr. Kleppin said that an applicant could apply for a special permit and proposed a text amendment.

Mr. Schulman then noted that most commissioners were in favor of the definition.

3. Standards for Religious Institutions

Mr. Kleppin said that no memo had been sent to the commissioners, but showed them the use table for religious institutions in residential areas. There was a discussion about the limitations in those zones on religious institutions which Mr. Kleppin did not think were inappropriate. There was a discussion about the function of a nursery school. Mr. Roina said that he would like to see 3 times the lot size for religious institutions but was fine with this proposed regulation. There was a discussion of impervious surfaces.

4. Corner Store Limitations

Mr. Kleppin said that this and #5 had been sent out in the same memo. There was a discussion about whether to exclude vape shops and liquor stores in residential areas. There was also a discussion about parking requirements especially for shared, mixed-use parking. There was a discussion about properties on a corner lot. There was also a discussion about which roadways the corner stores should be located. There was a discussion about how far from the street the store should be. There was also a discussion about limiting the number of stores in an area. Some commissioners said that if these applications were through a special permit, they would have discretion over what would be in the neighborhood. There was also a discussion about the parking on

the side or rear of a corner store. There was a discussion about allowing apartment units to the top of these structures. Mr. Kleppin suggested a maximum of two units. At this point, Mr. Schulman suggested that the staff re-draft the language for the commissioners to review.

5. Bed & Breakfast Limitations

Mr. Kleppin said that the staff had recommended no more than 6 rooms. There was a discussion about the lighting of the front sign. Mr. Roina said that he did not want to see this. Ms. Jordan-Byron agreed with him. There was a discussion about changing where they would be allowed. Ms. Tabachneck thought the city should allow it. Mr. Mushak agreed with her. There was also a discussion about the amount of rooms and to change the language to “6 rentable rooms.”

At this point, there was a discussion about how long the remaining items would take so they could end the meeting at 8:30 pm.

iii. North 7

Mr. Kleppin noted that North 7 was part of a Master Plan. He then discussed the memo that he had sent to the commissioners. He discussed key points of the Master Plan including parking, building layout and notes that Development Park should not have been excluded from the proposed regulations. He also discussed the proposed changes in connection with the Master Plan. He also discussed private frontage types which would be expanded to 2 more proposed zones. There was a discussion about the sidewalk widths and traffic calming measures.

iv. Merritt 7 Edits

Mr. Kleppin said that they were suggesting adding parks back to the use table which they had not been in 3 zones in an earlier draft.

v. Walmart Memorandum and CD-3C (formerly CD-4C)

Mr. Baker noted that Walmart had concerns about the proposed regulations including bringing structures closer to the street and replacing the parking lots that are currently up and down Connecticut Avenue. The city would like structures closer to the street without the large parking lots in front. There was a discussion about whether Walmart was expanding at the other Norwalk location. Ms. Langalis said that she would like there to be regulations about landscaping, specifically Walmart, TJ Max and Best Buy and wanted to see more enforcement about this. Mr. Kleppin noted that the

Complete Streets Plan would help this. There was a discussion about the parking requirements and the negative impacts.

vi. Sustainability Discussion

Mr. Kleppin opened the discussion for sustainability. There was a discussion about structures being eligible for certification in different sustainability measures. He noted that staff would like to research this a bit more as well. Mr. Kleppin said that he would speak with Steve Klocke, the Conservation Commission chair. There was a discussion about amenity points consistent with EVTZ standards. There was also a discussion about blue roofs and green roofs receiving more points than solar panels on a roof. He also noted that there would be more changes before the public hearing as well.

IV. COMMENTS OF DIRECTOR

Mr. Kleppin discussed the calendar for the proposed zoning regulations. The staff thought they could hold public hearings on December 5 and December 6. They could then review later in the following week. He then discussed the edits for the regulations. He noted that the public could see edits in red-line as well as an edit table. There would be memos explaining changes and how to find them.

There was a discussion about whether the meeting would be in person or hybrid. It would be similar to past public hearings in the Community Room. Mr. Schulman asked whether the Community Room was larger than Council Chambers which Mr. Kleppin said it was. The commissioners began to discuss their availability in December and when they would be making decisions on the proposed regulations. Mr. Kleppin said the staff would try to keep all other items off their agenda.

V. COMMENTS OF COMMISSIONERS

There were no comments from the commissioners.

VI. ADJOURNMENT

Mr. Mushak made a Motion to Adjourn.

Ms. Tabachneck seconded.

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

No one opposed.

No one abstained.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:27 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Diana Palmentiero