

CITY OF NORWALK
PLANNING & ZONING COMMISSION SPECIAL MEETING MINUTES
October 11, 2023

PRESENT: Louis Schulman, Chair; Nick Kantor; Mike Mushak; Galen Wells; Jacquen Jordan-Byron; Richard Roina; Chapin Bryce; Darius Williams; Ana Tabachneck; Hector Pachas (arrived after roll call)

STAFF: Steve Kleppin; Bryan Baker

I. CALL TO ORDER

Mr. Schulman called the meeting to order at 6:06 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. Zoning Map and New Single-Family Zone

Mr. Baker began the presentation with a discussion of adding back a zone which would resemble the existing B residence zone. He described the new name as well as showed it to the commissioners on a zoning map. He noted that the staff had received comments from residents on Cottage Street that they did not want to be upzoned, but staff still believed it was best for this area. Some properties are legally non-conforming so the upzoning would make them conforming.

There was a discussion about residential parking passes and whether they are legal. Ms. Tabachneck said that there was a program a few years prior but that Jim Travers had said the program was not being managed anymore. Once a vehicle was registered, a resident was allowed to park it on certain streets. She explained that she had read in the newspaper that someone had been hired to research how to expand the program. It had been recommended for residents of East Norwalk as part of the TOD plan. She noted that it is tight in that area. Mr. Baker discussed properties having to provide off street parking if they were to convert to multi-family. With the proximity to the train station, etc. the goal is to reduce vehicular traffic. Mr. Schulman said that they could recommend the residential parking pass system but not implement.

Mr. Baker mentioned that on Elton Court, one resident had asked for it to be one way. Traffic, Mobility and Parking (TMP) would look at it.

There was a discussion about 4 West Main Street. There would be a hotel structure and then multi-family behind. There would also be a change in zone. Mr. Baker said what was concerning was the height gain. He said that staff was looking for a recommendation for this proposal. He then showed them the property on Google Maps. There was a concern about putting a 6 story building on these parcels. At this point, the commissioners decided to take a straw poll to see who was in opposition to what the property owner proposed. Most were against it.

At this time, they discussed the abbreviations used for the zones. Mr. Kleppin said that they could introduce them now to the public so that the public would be used to it. The consultants would also be adding in the residential zone that the commissioners had discussed. Mr. Kleppin discussed the process that the consultants would make with the edits.

ii. Article 5: Development Parcels

Mr. Baker began with a discussion of the definition of development parcel standards in the proposed zoning regulations. He discussed a section that the staff was considering deleting, especially one that is 7 acres. He discussed Complete Streets and civic zones as well. There was a discussion about what parcels this would apply to. Ms. Tabachneck had concerns that by taking this regulation out would then not obligate developers to follow certain requirements like solar panels, etc. There was a further discussion of why it should be removed. Mr. Schulman recommended that they come back to this item to see how staff addressed the commissioner's concerns.

iii. Parking

Mr. Baker reviewed the memo prepared by Amelia Williams. There were three uses, funeral homes, places of worship and commercial recreation establishments. She reviewed other town's regulations to see what they were doing. For funeral homes, Mr. Baker suggested using whatever the fire marshal recommended, 1 parking space per 3 seats, rather than using floor area ratios. There was a discussion about what would work best. It was noted that the proposed regulations would be for new funeral homes. Mr. Kleppin said that they would analyze a couple of funeral homes to give them more definitive answers.

The next item was places of worship which Mr. Baker discussed what the staff was proposing. There was a concern about making the regulations more restricted. There was then a discussion about how to do the calculations especially in situations

where congregants stand and do not sit for worship services. Mr. Roina did not think that the maximum number of people allowed should be supplied by the owner of the building, and thought the regulations should be changed as to minimum lot size for churches. There was also a discussion about off-site parking. Mr. Schulman did not think they should hold the places of worship responsible for overflow parking on a few days a year. They reviewed the staff's recommendations and voted in support of them.

There was also a discussion about changing the regulations for the minimum lot size and whether it should apply only to religious institutions or across all special permit uses. There was a discussion about corner stores. Ms. Wells thought these should be encouraged and not discouraged by increasing the lot size. Mr. Kleppin said that the architect could do the calculations which the Fire Marshall could confirm. There was a discussion about changing the setbacks for the parking requirements and changing it for special permit use, not just houses of worship. Mr. Schulman asked that the staff get clarity from Corporation Counsel.

The last item was for commercial recreation. Mr. Baker said that currently there are no regulations for this and that staff handled the parking for these establishments. He then discussed what they proposed. Mr. Baker said that they could use a peer review consultant. Mr. Kleppin discussed the different types of recreation uses that could change the amount of parking within these establishments. There was a poll of the commission in favor of staff recommendations and all were in agreement.

iv. Definitions

Mr. Baker described some use definitions which did not have any in the current regulations. The first being the National Havoc Robotic League (NHRL). They had gone to the ZBA for a temporary use definition. Staff would now add them to the proposed zoning regulations called the Robot Competition Venue. Mr. Baker said that there are big events surrounding the use. There was a discussion about whether this would still be a use in 5-10 years. At this point, the commissioners agreed to the definition by a show of hands.

Mr. Baker explained that the lodge was not defined in the current regulations although it was there. He said that the Lakota property is a Lodge use. There was a discussion as to why it wasn't a hotel use. Mr. Kleppin reminded them that a definition would have to be added to the proposed zoning regulations. The commissioners decided to table this item.

v. Sports Courts

Mr. Baker explained that residents had turned their backyards into volleyball courts and hosting tournaments. Ms. Williams had reviewed in her memo the regulations from other towns to see what they were doing. It would still be an over the counter permit unless it was larger than the requirements which would then turn it into a special permit application. It would help with the noise from these “tournaments” as well. There would be an increase in setbacks but Mr. Baker would return to the commission with specifics. There was concern about enforcement. There was a discussion about a definition for tennis and other courts. The commissioners voted to use the definition that was recommended by the staff.

IV. COMMENTS OF DIRECTOR

Mr. Kleppin said that there would be a few more memos from Mr. Baker and himself. There would also be a meeting for sustainability and flood zone discussions which could be a long one. He said that there may be 2 more special meetings similar to this one. The commissioners could email him with any other requests.

There was a discussion about the site on Main Avenue that would have been BJs. The owners were cleaning it up and neighbors were concerned that BJs was about to be built. Mr. Kleppin did not think it would be a BJs.

V. COMMENTS OF COMMISSIONERS

Mr. Roina asked if he could get a link for the old zoning regulations.

VI. ADJOURNMENT

Ms. Langalis made a Motion to Adjourn.

Ms. Jordan-Byron 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 8:01 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Diana Palmentiero