CITY OF NORWALK
PLANNING & ZONING COMMISSION SPECIAL MEETING MINUTES
August 30, 2023

PRESENT: Louis Schulman, Chair; Nick Kantor; Tammy Langalis; Mike Mushak; Galen Wells; Chapin Bryce; Jacquen Jordan-Byron; Ana Tabachneck; Darius Williams; Richard Roina (left the meeting at 8:24 pm)

STAFF: Steve Kleppin; Bryan Baker

I. CALL TO ORDER

Mr. Schulman called the meeting to order at 6:03 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 rewrite of the zoning regulations and map amendment for complete re-zoning of the entire city – Continued discussion

Mr. Kleppin did a brief recap of past discussions. He made suggestions as to how the evening's meeting should progress. The first item on the map was Elton Court, near Exit 16. Most of the area is B residential zone and is surrounded by the East Avenue Village District. Mr. Kantor and Mr. Bryce thought this would be a good area to upzone. Ms. Langalis disagreed and should be left the same as it is now. Ms. Jordan-Byron agreed that if the zone is upzoned, residents may not choose that option. There was a discussion about the average size of the lots. There was also a discussion about allowing for a higher density in this area, although they had not heard from the neighbors that lived there. There was a discussion about housing prices in Norwalk and how to add to the housing stock and make it more affordable. Mr. Schulman believed density would come from larger housing projects while Mr. Bryce thought the regulations should permit more 2 family houses. Ms. Wells noted that much of the 2 family houses are owner occupied. There was a discussion about the heavy traffic in the area as well as the parking requirements in the proposed regulations and the ADU regulations. Ms. Langalis discussed mortgage requirements for multifamily homes which would not necessarily make them more affordable for buyers. There was a discussion about the supply and demand for housing in Norwalk. Mr. Mushak believed it would be a positive thing for the zone to go to CD3. Mr. Schulman reminded the commissioners that the public would be allowed to make comments on these properties again. He then took a vote with a show of hands to make a decision about whether to upzone this area or not. There were 7 commissioners who raised their hand that they should upzone it.

Mr. Kleppin discussed small and large multi-family buildings. There was a discussion about the definition of a transit station.

The next property that they discussed was the Hospital Hill area. He said that he would attempt to find out how many hospital employees lived near the hospital from Atty Liz Suchy, who represented Norwalk Hospital. There was a discussion about the differing density in this area. Ms. Langalis discussed the current zoning and then compared it to the proposed zoning. She thought that there would be a lot more density in this area so that there is not much green space. She was concerned about the parking which could get more difficult on several streets in this area. Ms. Jordan-Byron saw this as a lack of enforcement. Mr. Williams thought that the enforcement issue should be handled separately. Mr. Bryce was looking forward to the new regulations providing guidance about off street parking and enforcement. On street parking makes vehicles go slower and is not necessarily a bad thing in a neighborhood. Mr. Mushak gave examples of that. There was also a discussion about emergency vehicles not being able to get through these streets.

Mr. Kleppin made some suggestions on which streets should be in different zones, such as CD3 or CD4. Ms. Langalis suggested Cedar Crest and Ivy be reverted back to CD3 including both sides of Ivy. Taylor Avenue on the west side should be included into CD4. All of the commissioners agreed with this except Ms. Wells. She said she was not sure of her opinion.

The next area was by Magnolia. There was a discussion as to whether the lots would be too small to build a 2 family. Mr. Mushak noted that there is a row of 2 family homes on Ferris Avenue that have no trees or landscaping in their front yards. He thought affordable housing should look more attractive. There was a discussion about whether that should be in the proposed regulations. Mr. Kleppin said that those types of details would be in the Complete Streets plan and were removed from the proposed regulations. Ms. Tabachneck said that she reviewed tax assessor information about absentee landlords.

There was a discussion about Christy Street and Magnolia Street. Ms. Tabachneck noted that there were already parking issues in this area, possibly due to illegal 2 families. Mr. Williams said that Christy Street was similar to Magnolia. Ms.

Langalis suggested that both sides of the street should match each other. She did not think Stuart would match.

After the discussion, Mr. Kleppin said that Stuart Avenue would be in CD4 and Christy Street would remain in CD3S. The zone line would be in the rear of the Fairview Avenue properties and Magnolia would be left as is. Mr. Baker confirmed what zones were proposed for HIghwood, Finley, Spruce and Maple in this area. Most of the commissioners agreed with the changes except for Mr. Kantor who said he was unsure.

The next area was around Fodor Farm and then an area to the east of it, which Mr. Kleppin discussed. Ms. Langalis noted that the area is congested currently and by adding density, it would become more so. There was a discussion about Upland and Meredith. Ms. Langalis and Mr. Bryce made suggestions for the revisions in this area which included making Soundview CD3. The commissioners agreed on it with Ms. Tabachneck abstaining.

Mr. Kleppin continued the discussion in an area near the South Norwalk train station. He explained that this area could become more dense or they could try to preserve some of the older one and two family homes. Mr. Williams said he would like to see the area remain one and two family homes. Mr. Kantor said he thought it was a valuable space so close to the train station that he would like to see it become more dense. Mr. Williams also had concerns about traffic and safety issues. Ms. Jordan-Byron said the streets were narrow and that unless there was adequate parking, the area could not sustain more density. There was a discussion about historic preservation language that had been carried into the proposed regulations. There was also a discussion about upzoning the area. Mr. Kleppin said that since it was close to the train station, it made sense to upzone but that there would be change in the area. Mr. Schulman noted that since this neighborhood seemed to be deteriorating it might make sense to do something else to change it and stop the deterioration. Some commissioners wanted to change it to CD4 for the density. Ms. Wells said that they should encourage density in this area since it was walkable to the train station. Mr. Mushak discussed Keith Brown as a model for historic preservation. There was further discussion about which zone lines to move. By a show of hands, some of the commissioners decided that this area should be upzoned to CD4. Ms. Langalis said she would abstain from the straw poll. Mr. Schulman said they could revisit it at a later date.

There was then a discussion about three properties that had requested a review by their owners. The properties were 10 Bartlett Street, 57 Chestnut Street, and 43 Harbor Avenue. The first one Mr. Kleppin discussed 10 Bartlett Street which is currently legally non-conforming. The commissioners agreed it should become CD3 since the area was proposed to be the same.

Mr. Kleppin described the current use for the next property, 57 Chestnut Street. He explained that if the commission changes the zoning for this property, they should change the zoning for nearby properties as well. He explained which areas should become CD4 and which should become CD5. He also explained that there are contractor's yards and industrial uses in this area. There was a discussion about the Smilow Center. Mr. Kleppin made suggestions to the zoning in this area which the commissioners. Most of the commissioners were in favor of the suggested changes. Ms. Tabachneck was opposed and Mr. Roina abstained from voting.

Mr. Kleppin discussed the last area, 43 Harbor Avenue which is currently in a D residence zone which would then translate to the CD4 proposed zone. The property owner would like it to go into the CD5 zone, but he noted the staff had concerns, particularly with an increase in height. He then made a suggestion on how to revise the zoning which was to cap the height. Ms. Jordan-Byron had concerns about the character of the neighborhood changing and displacement of neighbors. There was a discussion the units in the building which Mr. Kleppin said that some are vacant. Mr. Kantor did not think there would be displacement since there were vacant units. There was also a discussion about the ownership of the building and whether it would be considered spot zoning to regulate the height. There was a discussion of the difference between classifying it as CD4 or CD5. Mr. Bryce suggested increasing the percentage of workforce housing with bonuses. Mr. Kantor advocated for increased density since the area already had shops that the residents could walk to. Mr. Mushak suggested more deed restricted affordable housing as a result of higher density in this area. Ms. Jordan-Byron and Mr. Bryce agreed with him. Mr. Schulman suggested that this parcel be zoned for CD5. All commissioners agreed except for Ms. Tabachneck who was opposed.

At this point, Mr. Kleppin asked if they could discuss further edits to the Use table. He noted that this spreadsheet would continuously be updated. There were two waterfront zones and he said he would like to recommend CD4W and CD5W. Mr. Roina left the meeting at this point. Mr. Kleppin then showed them the Use Table. He noted that they did not want to make some properties non-conforming. He suggested that SDMC uses be allowed in the CD4W and CD5W zones. There was a discussion about less intense uses. Mr. Kleppin also suggested that more intense uses should require a special permit. They decided that the staff would provide a memo and the commissioners would discuss it again at a future meeting.

IV. COMMENTS OF DIRECTOR

Mr. Kleppin had no comments.

V. COMMENTS OF COMMISSIONERS

Mr. Schulman noted that he would like to approve a nominating committee at the next meeting. He said that Mr. Mushak and Mr. Kantor would have to approve those being nominated. He would send Mr. Mushak an email since he would not be attending the next meeting.

Ms. Tabachneck asked about a meeting with TMP which Mr. Kleppin said would be in October at one of the extra meetings. She also said that the Harbor Management Commission, at their last meeting, had some concerns about the change to the Marine Commercial district that was being proposed in the zoning regulations as well as building in the Hundred Year floodplain. Mr. Schulman said this was something that needed to be voted on. She also asked if there would be a meeting to help the public better understand enforcement. There was then a discussion whether to hold this meeting at the TMP meeting.

Mr. Bryce asked if there could be another roundtable about other sustainability measures for drainage and lighting. Mr. Kleppin said that the staff spoke with Steve Klocke about these measures. Mr. Bryce thanked the staff for the memos.

Ms. Langalis thanked the staff for the maps since they were helpful. She also asked about a past application from the Norwalk Hospital which had included research jobs. Now the plan was to add more residential units which she did not want to see. Mr. Kleppin said that it happened when they were bought by Nuvance Health. She was disappointed that there would not be more research jobs which she believed would be good-paying jobs.

VI. ADJOURNMENT

Mr. Williams made a Motion to Adjourn.
Ms. Tabachneck seconded.
Louis Schulman, Chair; Nick Kantor; Tammy Langalis; Mike Mushak; Galen Wells; Chapin Bryce; Jacquen Jordan-Byron; Ana Tabachneck; Darius Williams approved.
No one opposed.
No one abstained.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:38 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Diana Palmentiero