

CITY OF NORWALK
PLANNING & ZONING COMMISSION MINUTES
August 21, 2024

PRESENT: Louis Schulman, Chair; Hector Pachas; Galen Wells; Diana Lenkowsky;
Tammy Langalis; Jacquen Jordan-Byron; Richard Roina; Chapin Bryce

STAFF: Steve Kleppin; Bryan Baker

OTHERS: Atty Liz Suchy; John Sterry; Kelly Bederman; Pete Romano; Phil Cerrone;
Will Caple; Garrett Bolella

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 & SEATING OF MEMBERS

Mr. Baker called the roll. Mr. Schulman said that he would seat Ms. Lenkowsky and Mr. Pachas for the meeting.

III. REVIEW & ACTION ON APPLICATIONS

**a. #2022-39 SP – The Norwalk Hospital Association, Inc. – 34 Maple Street
– Two Year extension of time request for the construction of a seven-story
addition to existing hospital – Report & recommended action**

Atty Liz Suchy began the presentation with an introduction of the Nuvance Hospital team. She said that they are requesting a 2 year extension. She noted what has been recorded previously. The zoning permit was applied for in February, however, one outstanding item was the removal of the behavioral unit from the hospital which was denied by the state agency. It would be back on campus but now their plans had to be revised. They thought a 2 year extension would be more appropriate in this case. They hope to have construction commence in early 2026.

There was a discussion about Nuvance merging with Northwell Health. John Sterry said that it is in process and could take up to 1 year for the necessary approvals. Mr. Sterry said it would not interfere with the construction. Mr. Sterry explained further about the behavioral health unit being relocated. He said a full design would be completed by the end of 2024. He hoped the construction would take 1 year.

**** MR. PACHAS MOVED: THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED** by the Norwalk Planning & Zoning Commission that application #2022-39 SP – The Norwalk Hospital Association, Inc. – 34 Maple Street a request for a two year extension of time request for the construction of a seven-story addition to existing hospital be **APPROVED**.

Ms. Langalis seconded.

Louis Schulman; Hector Pachas; Galen Wells; Diana Lenkowsky; Tammy Langalis; Jacquen Jordan-Byron; Richard Roina; Chapin Bryce approved.

No one opposed.

No one abstained.

b. #2024-43 SP/CAM – 50 Day Street LLC – 165 Water Street (District 2, Block 83, Lot 9) – Robot Competition Venue within existing two-story, 54,000sf building – Preliminary review

Atty Suchy began the presentation with an introduction of the project team, but noting that the owner was unable to join the meeting. She then gave a brief history of the application process which included notification of the filing to the neighbors. She then discussed the location of the property, as well as the use of the property which was a robotics competition venue. The competitions are held seven times a year and began several years ago. However, the use was not permitted so in 2023 they received a temporary 2 year permit from the Zoning Board of Appeals. She explained that there is now a definition for a robotics competition venue which would allow them to continue in this venue. The application is to allow them to continue to use the building and the grounds as they have been doing. She then explained how the building would be used on each floor. There are eight competition booths at the back of the building. Participants build the robots, which weigh different amounts, and will then fight one another. The competitions have also been streamed worldwide. She noted the number of parking spaces as well as mentioned that the applicant owned the property next door. They have worked out agreements with neighbors for the use of their parking spaces on competition Saturdays. She said that there had not been issues in the neighborhood that they were aware of. The applicant also hired off duty police officers to make sure that driveways and businesses are not being blocked by the overflow cars.

Kelly Bederman, CEO of Havoc Robotics, which organized the competitions, explained that the league has grown since she joined in 2021. She explained how the league worked, as well as how they worked with the local community.

There was a discussion about the food vendors on site, as well as recycling for garbage. There was also a discussion about the shared parking at a nearby church, as

well as how customers were directed to other parking lots they owned and nearby municipal lots. Ms. Bederman noted that the church would sometimes use their parking lot when needed. The headcount allowed in the facility is 1,000 - 1,200. They have not counted the number of vehicles for this many people. The number of people ebbs and flows during the day and there are never 1,200 people in the building. There are enough restrooms in the facility. Atty Suchy noted that the Fire Department has been concerned about the capacity in the building. The applicant has worked with them as well as State Police and the state's Fire Division. They can cap the number of tickets sold and number of competitors. Ms. Bederman explained that they also count people that are coming in.

There was then a discussion about whether the traffic plans take into account the flooding on Water Street. Pete Romano from LandTech explained the current situation in the area. He noted that the building is elevated above the 100 foot flood elevation so there are no restrictions for the parking of cars. He also spoke about the drainage during storms which the project team said they would provide additional information at the public hearing.

Mr. Romano said that they had been asked to bring the site to conformity which meant they added dumpsters, enclosures and loading docks. He noted that it would be a huge undertaking to rectify the flooding situation in the area. He also noted that there were no negative impacts on the coastal resources.

Atty Suchy asked that the public hearing be scheduled on September 18.

Phil Cerrone, the architect on the project, continued the presentation by explaining that they had worked with the Fire Department to confirm that they had the required egress and plumbing for the occupancy. He said they exceeded the amount of plumbing fixtures so that the building is up to code.

Will Caple, another architect on the project, continued the presentation by discussing the site plans for each floor. On the first floor were the lobby, production offices and a large event space. There is also a deck where food trucks provide food during breaks. There are offices for the league and event build space. Mr. Cerrone said that there were glass explosion proof cages. The second floor is for contestants to fix their robots if they should break and is referred to as "The Pit."

There was also a discussion about how the public can see these competitions which Ms. Bederman said they can see on YouTube, Instagram and TikTok. The public is also able to sit in bleachers to watch the competitions. The next event is on September 14.

There was a discussion about some properties located south of this one that the applicant owns and had considered turning into a park. Atty Suchy said that the city had approached the applicant to create a pocket park on these sites. These sites would not be a part of the parking management plan. She said that the applicant does have enough parking with the other sites. She also noted that for competitors staying at nearby hotels, there is a shuttle service to the site so that their cars will remain at the hotel.

Atty Suchy noted that they had received signoffs from various city departments as well as some comments from Transportation, Mobility and Parking (TMP) which they were working on responses.

The public hearing would be on the commission's agenda on September 18.

IV. DISCUSSION

a. Discussion with Director of Transportation, Mobility & Parking (TMP), Jim Travers, regarding the Complete Streets Ordinance and TMP project reviews

Garrett Bolella, Assistant Director, Transportation, Mobility & Parking (TMP), began with a brief overview of Complete Streets. He would speak about the policy and design guide overview, as well as a project update and timeline. It is looking at streets for all ages and mobility challenges. It was a holistic process which would begin with the planning process, design and maintaining Complete Streets through construction. He showed them a cross section of the street under Complete Streets which extends beyond what has traditionally been looked at for road design. For example, they would look at things on the curb side in multi-use projects. They want things that are comfortable and attractive that people will use. The street would not necessarily have every element of the Complete Streets design. They would look at adjacent roadways to make sure everything is connected. He also connected Complete Streets to the Plan of Conservation and Development (POCD) and the TMP Master Plan update.

Mr. Bolella discussed an ordinance that they hope to have passed. It was brought to the committee in June 2024 and would be discussed again as early as September. There would be a public hearing for the ordinance. They are updating design guidelines as a Complete Streets standard for anyone developing in the city. He said there are different types of roadways. He discussed the six principles for Complete Streets. They have reviewed the new zoning regulations and do not want to have a one size fits all design, which allows for flexibility. He then discussed how Complete Streets could be achieved. He also discussed the cities in Connecticut as well as the nation

where Complete Streets had been adopted. He discussed the components which includes why the city needed to do this. He then discussed the design guide.

There was a discussion about making changes to the zoning regulations. Mr. Bolella said that they would have a draft for the public to review with a comment period. There was also a discussion about how projects would be prioritized. The goal was to make sure that every project is multimodal and connected. The Transportation Master Plan would help prioritize projects in different neighborhoods throughout the city. There was also a discussion about the sidewalks on West Rocks Road where the Complete Streets principles would be applied.

b. Zoning Regulations Revisions per Staff Recommendations

Mr. Baker noted that the commissioners had received a spreadsheet from the Planning & Zoning Department of the problems that they had noticed with the revised regulations. Mr. Baker said that Mr. Kleppin would go over the issues with impervious surfaces separately. He went through the document in page order. He reviewed all of the places where the regulations had problems as well as the revised language that the department was suggesting. While he was going through the revisions, the commissioners asked questions and made changes.

Mr. Baker discussed the language for the storage of tractor trailers and trailers in single family residence zones as well as other zones. There was a discussion as to whether residents could go before the Zoning Board of Appeals for a variance. He also noted that storage containers are separately regulated. He then discussed the language issues with the vehicular parking requirements, including parking in the front setback and garages. There was a discussion about options for homeowners to create legal parking spaces. There was a discussion about defining yachts and vessels.

Mr. Baker then discussed issues with the language for retaining walls. He also said that they would change the height requirement for fences so it is consistent with the Department of Public Works (DPW). There was a discussion about when the staff would require a survey and when they would not. Mr. Baker also discussed the lack of density limits for extended stay hotels. He also said that there would be some changes to the accessory dwelling units regulations for parking spaces and parking courts. There was also a discussion about on street parking. Mr. Baker discussed changes to the home office, home occupation language and the storage of commercial vehicles. There would now be a Gross Vehicle Weight Rating in the language for commercial vehicles.

The encroachment table was then addressed at which time Mr. Baker showed them the table and the changes. The next item he addressed was commercial

recreation establishments whose applications could be approved administratively but the amount of parking spaces would have to be reviewed by the commission. The staff would like the language to be such that it would be a change of use permit thus, handled administratively. There would be changes to the language for tandem parking and allowance for a backup area for vehicles into the street. Mr. Baker then addressed the section which discussed the removal of trees since another section of the regulations discussed it as well. He recommended additional language to the workforce housing section of the regulations. He also discussed incentivizing developers to construct affordable housing who may be constrained by parking requirements.

Mr. Baker also discussed signage in industrial zones, as well as the signage for notification for public hearings, text changes, etc. There would also be a change to the boarding house definition which would help enforcement. There would also be the addition of definitions for Building Materials Storage Yard, Building Coverage, Live Music. They would also revise the language for Principal Frontage since there had been problems in instances of corner lots.

Mr. Kleppin then reviewed the memo about impervious surfaces. He discussed what was in the old zoning regulations and then discussed what was in the revised regulations. The new regulations seem to be too restrictive especially on smaller lots. They reviewed these smaller lots to make things more equitable. He said that they had also sent the proposed revisions to some of the developers that they work with. There was a discussion about a clarification of language.

Mr. Baker said that there would be a few more memos coming from the staff for more changes. Mr. Kleppin discussed waterfront clubs which were a problem in the old regulations. There would now be special permit standards for these clubs.

V. APPROVAL OF MINUTES: August 7, 2024

**** MR. ROINA MOVED to approve the August 7, 2024 minutes.**

Mr. Pachas seconded.

Louis Schulman; Hector Pachas; Galen Wells; Diana Lenkowsky; Tammy Langalis; Chapin Bryce approved.

No one opposed.

Jacquen Jordan-Byron and Richard Roina abstained.

VI. COMMENTS OF DIRECTOR

There were no comments from Mr. Kleppin.

VII. COMMENTS OF COMMISSIONERS

Mr. Pachas said that he had photos and video from the NHRL building which Mr. Schulman asked if he could forward one or two.

VIII. ADJOURNMENT

Mr. Pachas made a Motion to Adjourn.

Mr. Bryce seconded.

Louis Schulman; Hector Pachas; Galen Wells; Diana Lenkowsky; Tammy Langalis; Jacquen Jordan-Byron; Richard Roina; Chapin Bryce approved.

No one opposed.

No one abstained.

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

Respectfully submitted,

Diana Palmentiero