

CITY OF NORWALK
PLANNING & ZONING COMMISSION SPECIAL MEETING MINUTES
August 9, 2023

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

STAFF: Steve Kleppin; Bryan Baker

I. CALL TO ORDER

Mr. Schulman called the meeting to order at 7:21 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 – Presentation of new proposed zoning map

Mr. Kleppin introduced the Planning and Zoning Department members who were on the call, including Bryan Baker and Maribeth Chassey.

Mr. Kleppin explained that the zoning map had been released last week along On Monday he had sent them a staff memo about the areas that they recommended to be upzoned. He said that he had re-inspected areas, one being Boynton Street. He said that during discussions there were concerns about on street parking. He said his inspections had been done in the evening. He noted that under the proposed regulations there would be proper parking. He continued his discussion about Boynton Avenue which had been proposed for upzoning. He said that they would consider taking this area out of upzoning. He said he would still stand by the rationale for having the other areas remain in the plans for upzoning.

Ms. Jordan-Byron agreed with Mr. Kleppin about removing Boynton Street from the upzoning. However, she had concerns with the Sherry/Elton areas. She made suggestions about adding neighborhood names for the public.

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Ms. Tabachneck said she was surprised with how much the upzoning was cut back. She had concerns about an area in East Norwalk which Mr. Kleppin addressed. She had concerns about enforcement of parking regulations.

Mr. Schulman explained that at this meeting, the commissioners should get to a new starting point on the map. At later meetings they could have more focused discussions. They decided that as Mr. Kleppin went through each section, they could discuss it and then approve it.

Mr. Kleppin discussed the map of the neighborhood near Exit 16 off I-95, the Laurel Street/Elton Court. He thought this was a good area for 2 family houses, due to proximity to other businesses, etc. Ms. Langalis asked if it could remain single family homes and then have homeowners add an ADU if they wanted. She read the description from the map into the record. Mr. Kleppin then clarified the locations. He also discussed the proposed CD-4 area including stores and square footage. He said it was similar to the current D zone. It also allowed for neighborhood businesses.

Mr. Mushak read the Cottage Street description into the record. He then said he agreed with East Norwalk Neighborhood Association (ENNA) as they continue to push for more middle housing in Norwalk including in a private Facebook page. He explained what middle housing was.

Ms. Langalis discussed condominiums and that it makes sense to add more of them to the city. Mr. Kleppin agreed with this but noted that developers are claiming that they don't make sense financially for them. However, Ms. Langalis said that there were condominium projects in other towns. Mr. Kantor thought one reason it was happening in other towns was because some people were buying condos outright so banks would fund those types of projects. Mr. Mushak said he had been hesitant about upzoning because of investors. He explained that a rental building can be sold easier than a condominium which is important to developers.

The next area for discussion was for the Jefferson-Davenport-Godfrey Street area. It would be zoned from 2 or multi-family to multi-family housing. Mr. Kleppin said they would like to see units added. Original zoning maps were included on this page as well. They showed that many multi-family homes were in the area when those maps came out. There was a discussion about rezoning Wilton Avenue. Mr. Schulman asked staff to review the area.

Mr. Kleppin said that the Hospital Hill area would have the broadest upzone to it. He read the staff commentary into the record. There was a discussion about ADUs in the area, especially the parking regulations for them. There was also some discussion about where in the area should be left zoned for single family. There was a discussion

about making the area more walkable by strengthening the infrastructure. There was a discussion about the proposed regulations for parking spaces in the multifamily areas. There was also a discussion about enforcement of this and how it would work with the new proposed regulations. He said enforcement would be a separate topic at another meeting. There was also a discussion about Ferris and Benedict. Mr. Schulman asked Mr. Kleppin for more information in the Fairview, Spruce and Highwood area. West Cedar, Ivy and Taylor were also asked for further information.

The next area to discuss was the Avenue A - D area. Mr. Kleppin said that he had seen the area and staff thought it was a good location for 2 family housing. They continued with Flax Hill Road and Highland Avenue. There was a discussion about the traffic in the area, due to Brookside Elementary, as well as the nearby high school. Ms. Langalis thought they should preserve the historical structures in the area. She also suggested that traffic would increase with a change to 2 family zoning. She also made a suggestion as to where to add 2 family zoning.

The next area to discuss was the South Norwalk area, near Dr. Martin Luther King Boulevard. Mr. Kleppin said it was similar to the proposed CD-4 zone in terms of density. He then discussed the proposed change to zoning, noting that increasing the density would not be inconsistent with what is happening in this area. There was a discussion about the maximum lot width especially since there are historic homes in the area. Mr. Kleppin said that he would come back to a discussion about maximum lot width.

The next area was off New Canaan Avenue. Mr. Kleppin said that north of Vail he would like to remain in the B zone. He made further suggestions for the area as well. The last area was Wolfpit. Mr. Kleppin said the area had developed a bit differently from other areas. He then discussed the proposed changes. There was a discussion about possible outcomes for some plots in this area.

Mr. Schulman asked if this was an acceptable starting point for the map. Most of the commissioners agreed, with room for improvements. Mr. Mushak did not think that Norwalk was growing like Stamford and that it had a rate of growth of 6.5%. He was concerned about driving out the middle class and lower income families. He thought the staff did a good job about bringing zones into compliance. He hoped that ENNA was pleased with the middle housing that some of the upzoning would provide. He also thought the ADU law would provide density and should be given a chance. He thought it was unfortunate that the Reed-Putnam neighborhood was lost but said again that Norwalk should not grow like Stamford.

Mr. Roina said he had made it known in prior meetings that he was against upzoning but that he commended the staff for their work on this revised map. He said everything was very clear now.

Ms. Wells agreed this was a good starting point and that some upzoning was necessary.

Ms. Jordan-Byron said that this was a good starting point. She suggested that if the neighborhoods were growing Norwalk would need more local businesses to support them. Some businesses that would be able to do that were dry cleaners, shoe repair shops, and small retail.

Mr. Schulman asked about adding two more meetings in September which would be every Wednesday. He would like to address other issues in the proposed zoning regulations. He suggested limiting the meetings to two hours so that commissioners could watch the videos if they could not attend. He thought they could move the process forward this way. He did have a concern about religious holidays in September. Mr. Kleppin noted that at the regular meetings there would not be enough time for the discussions on the proposed zoning regulations. He said that he would add special meetings if the commissioners wanted.

IV. COMMENTS OF DIRECTOR

Mr. Kleppin had no other comments.

V. COMMENTS OF COMMISSIONERS

Mr. Roina volunteered to go to the Common Council to strengthen the aquifer regulations. He thought that the area would be the last industrial area in Norwalk. He also had concerns about the materials being put into the Norwalk River. Mr. Schulman suggested waiting to hear from Ms. Cherichetti. Mr. Bryce and Ms. Langalis volunteered to work with Mr. Roina.

Ms. Tabachneck had questions related to the ADU regulations. Since they are required to be owner occupied, she wondered if the same requirement could be imposed on 2 family homes. Mr. Kleppin said he did not think so but he would confirm it. She also asked when the affordable housing study would start. Mr. Kleppin said that it would wrap in 2024 and that they might be able to add the recommendations to the proposed zoning regulations.

VI. ADJOURNMENT

Ms. Jordan-Byron made a Motion to Adjourn.

Mr. Kantor seconded.

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

No one opposed.

No one abstained.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:23 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Diana Palmentiero