

CITY OF NORWALK
PLANNING & ZONING COMMISSION MINUTES
SPECIAL MEETING
March 2, 2023

PRESENT: Louis Schulman, Chair; Richard Roina; Mike Mushak; Nick Kantor; Galen Wells; Hector Pachas; Ana Tabachneck; Darius Williams; Jacquen Jordan-Byron; Tammy Langalis (arrived at 6:30 pm)

STAFF: Steven Kleppin; Bryan Baker; Tammy Maldonado

OTHERS: Atty Adam Blank; Colin Grotheer; Mike Mitchell; Robert Grzywacz; Vince Hynes; Matt Popp; Matt Edvardsen; Greg DelRio; Marissa Tarallo; Gloria Gouveia; Alex Knopp; Patrick Shannon; Jill Delaney; Jim Anderson; Paul Chenard; Richard Bonenfant; Lynnelle Jones; Lou Garcia; Mimi Chang; Roberta DiBisceglie;

Jesse

Buccolo

I. CALL TO ORDER

Mr. Schulman called the meeting to order at 6:05 p.m. It should be noted that this meeting was held both on Zoom.com with participants calling in, separately and at the Common Council Chambers, 125 East Avenue.

II. ROLL CALL

Mr. Kleppin called the roll. Mr. Mushak asked that 2 social media posts be submitted into the record.

Mr. Schulman noted that there is a statutory clock once an application is received so this public hearing could not be postponed. He also explained that this is not a political process but an administrative process. He also noted that there had been inappropriate remarks about the Planning & Zoning Department staff as well as the commissioners. He asked that the comments be directed to the application. They would take a short recess at 9 pm. He explained the rules of public hearings.

III. PUBLIC HEARINGS

a. #2022-24 SP/CAM – Mill Pond Holdings, LLC – 1 Cemetery Street (District 3, Block 42, Lot 27) – Construction of a 77-unit mixed-use development within two (2) buildings, 98 parking spaces and other on-site and off-site improvements

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Mr. Schulman opened the public hearing.

Atty Adam Blank began the presentation, noted this was a hybrid meeting and had decided to present remotely. He then introduced the project team, some of which were at the Common Council Chambers. He oriented the commissioners as to the location of the property on an aerial map. He then showed them the site plans including several architectural designs. He then discussed the special permit uses. He also discussed the third party design review which recommended that it be approved. He also explained the grant process for the TOD plan in December 2017. He then discussed community participation in 2019. He noted that TOD regulations had been passed by the city.

Mr. Schulman asked that any commissioners on the Zoom part of the webinar, should let him know that they had questions.

Colin Grotheer, the architect on the project, continued the presentation by orienting the commissioner as to the location of the site. He showed them aerial maps from over 70 years ago. He then showed them pictures of existing building conditions, existing Mill Pond conditions and Fenwick Place. He then discussed the proposed site plans which included residential, workforce units, office and retail units. He noted how they had decided on architectural designs. He also discussed the peer review and tried to incorporate that into their designs. He then discussed the varying materials that would be used. He explained that sometimes it is difficult to show the materials electronically and they could submit actual materials, if necessary. Mr. Grotheer then discussed the refined vernacular which included different styles. He showed them the views on East Avenue. He discussed community benefits including new sidewalks, street trees, public courtyard, public parking, bicycle lanes, flood compliant construction, etc. There were also redevelopment opportunities and increased walkability.

There was a discussion about East Avenue and how to access the market. He also showed them the street by the historic cemetery, where larger sidewalks would be added for pedestrians. It was noted that the civil engineer would discuss the infrastructure. He showed them additional renderings of some of the buildings. There was a discussion of whether there were accessible options. He also showed them renderings as to the scale of the buildings, as well as the individual floor plans. He also discussed the parking and loading spaces in the buildings.

There was a discussion about the average height on Cemetery Street, as well as a sloping streetscape.

At this point, there was a discussion as to whether Mr. Grzywacz should present. However, he had also reviewed the landscape plan so it was decided he would present after the landscape plan.

Mike Mitchell, the landscape architect, continued the presentation. He showed them the landscaping plan as well as the curb line. There was potential for a boardwalk in the future. The applicant would provide an easement to the city. He discussed the integrations of the rain gardens. He also discussed the tree plantings and lighting to be provided. There was a discussion about how much seating there would be in the public space. There was a discussion as to where there were public and private spaces. There was also a discussion about the shadows from the buildings.

Robert Grzywacz said that the buildings could not be seen as much as one would think. He said that there is not much more that had to be done to complete the project.

There was a discussion about the applications responses to Mr. Grzywacz comments. Atty Blank showed them a chart as to which comments were acceptable for the zoning permit. He also showed them a chart about the amenity points for infrastructure and sustainability. There was a discussion about LEED certification. Mr. Grotheer said that they had not gone into the project with that in mind. There was also a discussion about the solar panels on the building. They would generate about 50% energy from them. The lighting would be LED and full cut-off, which would reduce light pollution. There is also a discussion about the amenity points which Atty Blank noted could be changed through the regulations. However, he noted that this regulation had recently been adopted.

Vince Hynes, the engineer on the project, continued the presentation by showing the site plan. He gave an overview of the civil engineering. He then discussed the site visibility for vehicles entering and exiting the property. Curb cuts would be reduced. There was a discussion about Cemetery Street going from two lanes to one lane, causing congestion. Mr. Hynes discussed the catch basins on the site. The impervious coverage would be reduced. He showed them the site plans with the utilities on site. He noted the approvals the applicant had received from WPCA.

Matt Popp, a landscape architect, said they were asked to perform an environmental review. He showed them pictures of the current conditions. He explained how the study was done. He also showed them a list of coastal properties on the site. He then discussed the proposed plans and how the runoff would be treated. Native plants would be used. The project would improve water quality. The project would not have an adverse impact, however, he was asked whether there would be adverse impacts during construction. Mr. Popp said there were erosion controls and other ways that the site could be monitored at that time. There was a discussion about how the water is treated.

Mr. Popp said that there could be some impacts during construction but there were no endangered species that would be affected. There was a discussion as to whether if the project was smaller, it would have less impact. Mr. Popp said it would be an improvement in the conditions over what there was now, including the increase of green space. There was also a discussion about water testing during construction.

Matt Edvardsen was asked to speak about possible pollution on the site. He spoke about past incidents and they would conduct testing. Soil would be tested as well.

Greg DelRio, the traffic engineer on the project, continued the presentation with a brief overview of the project. He discussed Complete Streets as well as the circulation of the traffic as a result of the proposed changes. He showed them the site plans and discussed where traffic was coming from. At this point, there was some disruption from audience members, but Mr. DelRio continued. He then showed them Alternative 1 and discussed the trip generation in peak hours. Mr. Roina asked him to repeat a small portion of his presentation as he could not hear. He was asked to explain the numbers for trip generation. There was a discussion about parallel parking. There was also a discussion about having the entrance on Gregory Street rather than Cemetery Street.

Mr. DelRio then discussed Alternative 2. Atty Blank noted that Alternative 1 was the applicant's preferred, but Alternative 2 was proposed by the city. Both are being reviewed by the state's Department of Traffic. They are waiting for approval from the state. They have incorporated their comments and are awaiting their next round of feedback. He then showed them the traffic counts for Alternative 1 and 2.

Marissa Tarallo, the traffic consultant for the city, continued the presentation. She was asked to discuss the benefits of Cemetery Street being a one way street. She explained the current conditions on an aerial map. She explained why they did not need two lanes. She also explained the traffic calming measures. She said that she had focused on the main points. Mr. DelRio said that they expected the next round of comments from the state the following week.

Atty Blank said that East Norwalk Neighborhood Association (ENNA) had put together a form letter which they had provided to neighbors. He said he would like to comment on those points.

Mr. Schulman said they would take a 10 minute break. Ms. Wells suggested that they should alternate between those on Zoom and those in person. The meeting resumed at 9:30 pm. Mr. Schulman said it seemed clear that the public hearing would continue until 11 pm. It would then be reconvened on March 15, exclusively for this public hearing. He then explained the rules of the public hearing, asking people to be brief and what would not be tolerated.

Mr. Baker then explained how the members of the public who were on Zoom could access the public hearing to speak.

Gloria Gouveia, representing ENNA, noted that there was missing information from the application, including the lack of test holes. She had concerns about the rain gardens, and other technical issues. She thought the project was beautiful but not functional. She believed there was a height violation. She had many other concerns including open space, lack of inland wetland buffers. She made a comparison of this application to a previous application for an addition to a hotel in Norwalk. She also read comments from Marcy Ballint, DEEP. She said that FEMA read the permits for every project in Norwalk and believed this one could risk their premiums. The neighbors don't want this massive project

Alex Knopp, 35 Fifth Street, a former Mayor of Norwalk, said he was impressed with the commission's knowledge of the regulations. He supported TOD but that this application is problematic. He had issues with the traffic, the bonuses, the traffic counts, and awarding of the bonus points. He said that during his administration, there were many developers who had constructed quality projects. He was concerned about the mass of this project in East Norwalk.

Patrick Shannon, 36 Calf Pasture Beach Rd, said that he believed this project should be scaled back. He said that he had received a report last week. They had only received the traffic and environmental report last night.

Jill Delaney had concerns about the amount of vehicles and people that would be residing at this complex once completed.

Jim Anderson, 2 Oldwell Ct, said that he looks at the corner where this project would be built. He has seen numerous accidents, the backup of traffic from the beach and going to the beach, etc. He said it would be a hardship for his neighbors. He also had concerns about the construction as well as the evacuation of East Norwalk.

Paul Chenard spoke in support of the project. He thought it would turn East Norwalk into a destination. There would be restaurants, stores.

Richard Bonenfant, 17 Parkhill Ave, had questions about the dog park. He had concerns that the street would only be one lane, especially if there was an emergency.

Lynnelle Jones, 10 Point Road, said she had written to the Mayor, Planning and Zoning staff to ask that this application be postponed because the project was in a flood zone. Under state statute, the application must be reviewed by Harbor Management, which she said that the applicant did not have. It had been tabled at their meeting in September.

Lou Garcia, 15 Bond St, said that he did believe that this project was needed but it was too dense. He also believed that the developer could but did not want to because of economics. He had other comments about the traffic study, recreation areas, and the average grade. He thought it was wrong and the buildings were too tall.

Mimi Chang, 37 Raymond Terrace, spoke in opposition to the application and asked that the project be scaled back. She read a statement into the record.

Roberta DiBisceglie, 2 Osborne Ave, spoke in opposition to the application and asked them to deny the application. She believed the project was too large for the area.

At this time, Mr. Schulman said they would allow one more speaker and then resume on March 15, the next meeting.

Jesse Buccolo, Norwalk ACTS, said that there is a lot of traffic in East Norwalk. He asked why they needed on street parking and should only have 1 lane of traffic. He had concerns that the traffic counts were done in March.

There was a discussion about the scheduling for the next meeting. They would decide in an email when another special meeting would be scheduled.

IV. COMMENTS OF DIRECTOR

There were no comments from the Director.

V. COMMENTS OF COMMISSIONERS

There were no comments from the commissioners.

VI. ADJOURNMENT

Mr. Roina made a Motion to Adjourn.

Mr. Pachas seconded.

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

No one opposed.

No one abstained.

The meeting was adjourned at 10:58 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Diana Palmentiero

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