CITY OF NORWALK
PLANNING & ZONING COMMISSION SPECIAL MEETING MINUTES
November 21, 2023

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

STAFF: Steve Kleppin; Bryan Baker

I. CALL TO ORDER

Mr. Schulman called the meeting to order at 6:04 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. Mr. Schulman explained how the meeting would be run with the Planning & Zoning Department staff would make a presentation. Attendees could send in questions and once the presentation was over, the questions would be addressed. He said that the commissioners would not be answering any of the questions.

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.

i. Preview of Recommended Changes prior to the December 5th and 6th Public Hearings.

Mr. Kleppin began the presentation by explaining what had been happening in the last few months. He explained that members of the public could ask questions through the Zoom chat. He then began his slide presentation with the project calendar which began in July 2021. He explained the consultants' role in the process. The draft of the regulations began to come together in late 2022/early 2023. The process included meeting with neighborhood groups, other boards and commissions, and public hearings in June. They have made changes since June and noted that there would be another set of public hearings before the commissioners review and vote to adopt the regulations on December 12 and 13. He noted that the city has not revised the regulations in over 30 years. They are outdated, complicated and unclear. It does not help with regulated and predictable growth.

Mr. Baker continued the presentation by explaining the four problems with the existing regulations. One was that there were 31 existing zones and reduced the number of zones. There are a lot of different interpretations of the existing regulations because there are no definitions. Staff has to then make a determination which could open the city up to lawsuits. The current regulations do not make it easy to plan the future of Norwalk since the regulations are 30 years old. They are complex and confusing. He said that the regulations should be concise and reference other sections. The existing regulations are Euclidian but the proposed regulations are form-based code. There are benefits to this type of code. The city will become more walkable which would be better for the environment. The number of zones has been cut in half. Pictures will be used in the new codes. He showed them the use tables, pictures of different types of buildings. He discussed the citywide goals including the consolidation of Route 1 and Main Avenue. Mr. Kleppin noted that this corridor would become more walkable and pedestrian friendly.

Mr. Baker noted other big picture changes, including regulating height, lighting, and sustainability measures on larger projects. Mr. Baker then described some of the revisions that had been changed after the public hearings in June. These included changes in nomenclature, and reduction of upzoning. He also discussed the updates to uses, limitations including wholesale distribution facilities being removed. He also showed them the proposed map and suggested that residents should check the map online for their residence. He said that there areas still proposed to be changed, including South Norwalk, East Norwalk.

Mr. Kleppin advised how residents could access all of the information that they are providing at this meeting. There would be hard copies around the city in libraries, etc. as well as links to it online. He showed them the links for comments/public letters and staff memos. These would be live for a few more weeks until the close of the public hearings in December. He discussed the logistics of those meetings by noting that the meetings would be hybrid, although in inclement weather, it would be on Zoom. He gave the public their email addresses if any one wanted to contact them. He noted that residents could add questions to the comments.

There was a discussion about the shape and size of the house, but not regulating the architecture of it. Mr. Baker noted that in mixed use zones, there would be some regulation of the architecture. There was also a discussion about tree removal.

At this point, Mr. Kleppin read questions that were submitted. He noted that there would be very limited hyperlinks in the codes. However, that would be fixed once the software is in house. It had not been in the budget when they first thought of this. There was a question about the cost of a printed copy of the regulations. Mr. Kleppin said he would think about it. There was also a discussion about increases in water dependent uses. The next questions were about the timing of the public hearings and when they would be closed for comments. There was a discussion about applications that were in process. Mr. Kleppin explained that the Planning & Zoning Department staff would be working with two sets of regulations for a few months because of the overlap in applications. Developers would have to determine which set of regulations would be more advantageous to their project.

There was a discussion about the editing to be done by the consultants which they had said could be completed by the end of December. Mr. Kleppin said the staff would need time to check their work. He also explained that there would be new permit forms, and front staff would be reviewing things that they had not prior to this. There was a discussion about the new owners of Manresa Island. Mr. Kleppin explained that the application would be a Master Plan similar to North Seven. There was a discussion about feedback from developers and the Chamber of Commerce. He noted that there were comments from them in writing. There was a discussion about the vote on this application. Mr. Baker said that it would be a simple majority. There was a discussion about an overlay drinking water conservation zone. Mr. Kleppin said that there would still be changes since the regulations would need to be changed. There would also be more climate action discussions in which this item could be addressed. There was a discussion about special permit standards. There was also a discussion about sustainability regulations which state regulations say should be reflected in building codes.

There was a discussion about converting an office building to residences. Developers are claiming that it is cost prohibitive and would prefer to build new. There was a discussion about public notification. There was a discussion about marine use and public access. It was noted that there will be more requirements for public notification. There was also a discussion about ground mount solar arrays.

Mr. Kleppin said that if there were any further comments they should be sent to Mr. Baker. He then noted that the application had been referred to other regulatory bodies and had received comments back from WestCog.

ii. Members of the public can submit written comments and questions utilizing the Zoom chat feature, which will be addressed at the meeting.

IV. COMMENTS OF DIRECTOR

Mr. Kleppin thanked the commissioners for the time they spent on this application.

V. COMMENTS OF COMMISSIONERS

Mr. Mushak wished everyone a Happy Thanksgiving. Mr. Schulman reminded everyone of the upcoming meetings. He was encouraging the commissioners to come into the meeting live. Dinner would be provided.

Ms. Tabachneck thanked the staff for handling this meeting in this manner. She then asked about residential parking permits. Mr. Kleppin said that he has had conversations with TMP. Mr. Schulman asked that this be placed on their agenda in January. Mr. Kleppin said that residents can reach out to their council representatives. Ms. Langalis noted that they could also call the customer service line so there would be a log of these calls. She also asked if the public thought that something needed to be tweaked, what would be the procedure. Mr. Williams asked if there was anything that the commission could do about the proliferation of vape shops.

VI. ADJOURNMENT

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

The meeting was adjourned at 7:31 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Diana Palmentiero