CITY OF NORWALK
PLANNING COMMISSION - SPECIAL MEETING
September 1, 2020

PRESENT: Fran DiMeglio, Chair; Brian Baxendale; Mike Mushak; Tammy Langalis; Mary Peniston; Tamara Shockley; John Lesko; Steve Ferguson

STAFF: Steve Kleppin; Bryan Baker

OTHERS: Atty David Waters

I. CALL TO ORDER

Ms. DiMeglio called the meeting to order at 6:35 p.m.

II. ROLL CALL

Mr. Kleppin called the roll. It should be noted that this meeting was held on Zoom.com with all participants calling in, separately. At this point in the meeting, Mr. Lesko could not hear the audio of the meeting.

III. DISCUSSION AND/OR DECISION

A. Zoning Commission referral - #1-20M - Merritt Station Norwalk, LLC et al - 67, 69, 79, 87, 111, 117, 129, 135, 155, 156 & 201 Glover Avenue and 2 Oakwood Ave - Proposed change to the zoning map from AAA Residence and Business #2 zone to entirely Executive Office zone – Report and recommended action and B. Zoning Commission referral - #2-20R - Merritt Station Norwalk, LLC et al - Proposed amendments to revise definition for Development Park; to revise the Executive Office zone to permit a new Master Plan approval process by Special Permit and to increase height and FAR, to revise parking requirements for multifamily developments and related technical amendments – Report and recommended action

Atty Waters began the presentation by discussing items that had been presented to the Zoning Commission. He showed them the ramifications of the zone changes which included building heights. He noted the heights of the Merritt 7 buildings. He explained that the buildings were similar heights. He also showed them the Massing Plan as well as modeling of what it would look like. He also showed them Google Earth maps which showed the vegetation in the area which was not owned by the applicant. In one of the pictures, he showed them what was the height currently allowed and what was being proposed for the buildings. There were outlines of buildings of the Curb. He also showed perspectives looking at the train station, which was scheduled to be renovated. Construction is commencing and should be completed in the 1st quarter of 2022. He also noted that 20% of the property would be open to the public. Areas of the roof not used for recreation amenities must be a “green” roof or solar ready. Atty Waters noted that some questions from the Zoning Commission would be updated and the Planning Commission would receive them the following day.

There was a discussion about the green space and what activities would be offered. Atty Waters described what could be there but noted that since this was the Master Plan, there were no set plans at

the moment. There was also a discussion about the market for the residential units, and whether it would be to employees of Merritt 7. There was also a discussion about the total number of units. Atty Waters noted that he did not have the current but it would be approximately 1300 units. There was also a discussion about the density and whether there were any similar areas in Norwalk. Atty Waters said that he would get that information to the commissioners. There was a discussion about office space considering the impact of COVID-19. There was also a discussion about the properties that are proposed under the Master Plan. Atty Waters said that all are owned by the applicant. There was a discussion about whether the student population would increase or decrease. Atty Waters that another expert would speak at the public hearing about this topic. Several commissioners noted that they were happy with the presentation.

Atty Waters made comments on the Master Plan and why it was important to have one. There was a further discussion about the density and how this would be a community in Norwalk. There was also a discussion about amenities and whether those would shut down businesses on Main Avenue. The crosswalks on Main Avenue were also discussed. Atty Waters that the applicant would have to make traffic improvements with state approval. There was a discussion about Grist Mill because it has no sidewalks. There was also a discussion about having the parking available to other neighborhoods to help property values. Atty Waters noted that now would be a good time to put pressure on the state Department of Transportation (DOT) to fix the problems on Grist Mill. There was a discussion about the density that is currently allowed under the regulations as well as what would be allowed under the new regulations.

C. Action on proposed amendments to the Citywide Plan (POCD) - East Norwalk TOD Plan (TOD Plan)

Ms. DiMeglio noted that the TOD Plan was now with the Common Council and would hold a public hearing. It would then come back to the Planning Commission with comments for an adoption hearing. She asked the commissioners for further comments.

Mr. Baxendale began with some opening remarks about the East Norwalk area. He explained the major intentions of the TOD Plan especially in connection with the train station. Some areas are underutilized or not utilized at all. He noted that with 2.5 story heights, not much has happened. He thought it was a well thought out plan. There should be increased density and vibrancy which he was in favor of.

Mr. Mushak said he was in support of the TOD Plan since it represents opportunity for citizens. It would allow people to live in the building that they use for boutique manufacturing. He understood that people were concerned about the density but that it usually did not happen. He lived in an area of Norwalk that had higher density. He also noted that there are some people that had concerns about bike lanes in the past few years that were not happy with this one. He said he was in favor of the plan.

Mr. Lesko thought that East Norwalk was a bit depressing. He also mentioned that young people, like his children, would like to live in this revitalized area. He said that the train station should be used to bring more people into the area. He thought it would be better to be ahead of the projects and would support the project.

Mr. Ferguson spoke in support of the project especially in widening the roads. He thought a small grocery store would be beneficial.

Ms. Shockley said she had reviewed the public hearings. Her problem with the TOD Plan overlooked the Hispanic and black residents. She was concerned about gentrification which would move those groups out of the area. She also addressed items in the TOD Plan. She said that she would have liked to have heard from small businesses on the TOD Plan and until she heard from these groups, she could not support it. Mr. Ferguson addressed some of her concerns. He noted that he had sat in on some of the community meetings but had not received much from those groups. Mr. Kleppin then addressed her concerns as well. He explained that businesses would be removed or relocated. He did not think there would be any displacement of residents either. Some commercial properties would have residential above them. Her concern was that the zoning would displace lower income residents if developers decided to build apartment buildings where single families were. There was a discussion about affordable housing. Ms. Shockley said she would like to hear concerns from others in the area that she had not heard from when she listened to the public hearing. There was a discussion about community outreach so that some groups would not be left out of these discussions.

Ms. Peniston had concerns about traffic and gentrification but overall was in favor of the TOD Plan. She would like to see a diverse community, both economically and ethnically, to enjoy East Norwalk.

Ms. Langalis said that when she listened to the public hearings there were some that didn't want to change East Norwalk very much and there were others who would. She was in support of facade improvements. She also thought there had been a lot of work on this plan and that the Planning and Zoning Department had reached out to many stakeholders. She noted that there would always be some who would not be interested in taking part of it.

Ms. DiMeglio, who lived in East Norwalk, had concerns about the current traffic situation. She had driven the area and tried to envision the different scenarios contemplated in the TOD Plan. She would like to see renderings which were more realistic than what were part of the plan.

There was a further discussion about density. Mr. Kleppin noted that projects would have to submit a traffic study. The city would also conduct a separate peer review of these traffic studies. There was a discussion about the in lieu of parking but Mr. Kleppin said that was in other areas of the city. There was a further discussion about the residential zones in the area. There was also a discussion about the Washington Village project and gentrification there. Mr. Mushak gave examples of diversification in his Golden Hill neighborhood. There was also discussion of the Osborne area which would remain a more affordable area.

Ms. DiMeglio said she did support the TOD Plan to go forward. There was a further discussion about the affordability protections. There would be facade improvements to protect some of the buildings in the area.

IV. DISCUSSION OF OTHER ITEMS

A. Industrial Zones Study update

Mr. Kleppin noted that Ms. Langalis was the representative on this committee. There would be the first meeting the following day.

V. APPROVAL OF MINUTES: August 24, 2020

Since some commissioners had not read the minutes, this item was postponed until the next meeting.

VI. COMMENTS OF DIRECTOR

The Director had no comments.

VII. COMMENTS OF COMMISSIONERS

The commissioners had no comments.

VIII. ADJOURNMENT

Mr. Mushak made a Motion to Adjourn.
Mr. Ferguson seconded.
Fran DiMeglio Brian Baxendale; Mike Mushak; Tammy Langalis; Mary Peniston; Tamara Shockley; John Lesko; Steve Ferguson approved.
No one opposed.
No one abstained.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:07 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Diana Palmentiero