

CITY OF NORWALK
PLANNING COMMISSION - SPECIAL MEETING
August 24, 2020

PRESENT: Fran DiMeglio, Chair; Brian Baxendale; Mike Mushak; Tammy Langalis; Mary Peniston; Tamara Shockley; John Lesko and Steven Ferguson (left earlier due to a power outage)

STAFF: Steve Kleppin; Bryan Baker

OTHERS: Mike DiScala; Diane Lauricella; Diane CeCe; Megan McNeill; Jim Papadopolous (sp); Vicki Roos; Cheryl Warner; Frank Siano; Jessie McCardy; Anna Tabachneck; Tracy Barclay; Sarah Hunter; Lou Garcia; Kimberly Bastoni; Ken Prince; Patricia Prince; Lisa Prince; Luisa D'Allacco; Justin Fargone; Vicki Roos; Stephanie Bennetty; Mimi Chang; Mike Yeosock;

I. CALL TO ORDER

Ms. DiMeglio called the meeting to order at 6:37 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. Ms. DiMeglio said that she would allow new speakers for the public hearing and that everyone should state their name and address. There would be no anonymous speakers. Anyone who had spoken at the last public hearing would be allowed to speak again but not before those who had not spoken yet.

III. PUBLIC HEARING

**A. Proposed Amendments to the Citywide Plan (POCD) – East Norwalk TOD Plan:
Second of two public hearings to receive public comment**

Mr. Kleppin gave a brief overview of the East Norwalk TOD Plan (the "Plan"). He discussed the current zoning as well as the proposed zoning. He discussed the current uses, some of which detracted from the area. He also discussed the density and how this could affect traffic. Some parts of the Plan would come back for review to the Planning Commission when starting with the Zoning Commission. There was a discussion about the height of buildings by some members of the public.

Ms. DiMeglio said that the public would not have a time limit, but that comments should be limited to the Plan. She also noted that some comments from the public were that the meeting should be held in person but Ms. DiMeglio said that cases had begun to rise in Connecticut. There was a discussion about whether there was a typo on one of the slides.

Mike DiScala, Maywood Road, thanked the staff and commissioners for a well-thought out Plan. He then said that his business, MF DiScala and Company, did not flip properties but owned and managed them. He then explained what mixed use properties meant to him. He believed they needed to create

activity in this area to bring people back, especially for a sense of community. He discussed the Head of the Harbor project. He also discussed his vision for East Norwalk

Diane Lauricella, 97 West Norwalk Rd., said that she had lived in East Norwalk for less than a year. She noticed that it had not changed over the years. She said that she had thought the Plan was well thought out. She did have some suggestions. She thought that some of the public's concerns had not been addressed in the Plan. She asked that the sustainability portion should be required. She also asked for a sustainability plan for the city. She then explained some federal programs that the City of Bridgeport had obtained. She also had comments about the density and agreed with Mr. DiScala that there should be more people in the area. She also suggested changes to the accessory apartment zoning regulations.

Diane CeCe, Olmstead Place, noted some people may not be at the meeting because the Zoom link was not working correctly. There was also a discussion about the public commenting again at this public hearing. She said that she was speaking on behalf of the East Norwalk Neighborhood Association (ENNA). They were submitting a separate analysis which she then made comments upon. They felt the Plan increased density and wanted to keep it to an additional 500 units. They had many points which she noted and asked that the city compromise with ENNA and that they should extend the time to advance the Plan.

Ms. DiMeglio said she would hold the public hearing open until the close of business the next day.

Megan McNeill, 31 Betts Place, said that although on the board of ENNA but was making her comment as a citizen. She said that she moved to East Norwalk several years ago and had become a part of the Plan's process. She thought that the community had been listened to but that had not been the case. She said that she is not entirely opposed to the Plan. She said that the Zoning Department and consultants had been professional. There was a discussion about the amount of public notice and awareness there had been. Mr. Kleppin said it was difficult with the quarantine as well as lack of staff who could post on social media.

Jim Papadopolous (sp) said that he had been a resident of East Norwalk for over 40 years. He had concerns about the density and risked the walkability of the area. He did not agree with the construction of more units.

Vicki Russ, 17 Pine Hill Avenue, had concerns about the Wells Fargo site and the Mill Pond. She knew that traffic was an issue and had concerns about the amount of traffic lights in the area. She had concerns about the infrastructure.

Cheryl Warner, Cole Avenue and a resident of East Norwalk, said that she had been attending ENNA since its inception. She discussed the amenities the Plan would allow. She had concerns about the height requirements. She thought it might be best to see how the traffic was from 230 East Avenue. Mr. Kleppin addressed her concerns about how this affected the POCD.

Frank Siano, of Second Avenue, said that he agreed with other speakers. He thought that the Plan looked great on paper but that there was no medium ground. He did not think the residents wanted this Plan.

Jessie McCardy, 10 Branford (sp) Avenue, said that she lived near the Wells Fargo site. She said that she did not feel that the residents' concerns had been addressed.

Anna Tabachneck, Myrtle Street, spoke in support of the Plan. She said that many people that attended public hearings were those that were against the Plan. She appreciated that the projects would not be extreme.

Tracy Barclay, Cove Avenue, did not want them to think that everyone was against the Plan but some residents were skeptical of it. She did want to see impact from other construction and cut through traffic from that. She also spoke about the promenade. She also asked for a delay in approval. Mr. Kleppin explained about how the promenade could work but that thorough engineering would be made at a later date

Sarah Hunter, Scofield Place, spoke on her own behalf, said that she thought there was too much development and that residents' voices were not being heard. To address her concerns, Mr. Kleppin explained the meeting process with residents. He also said they hoped the traffic would improve in the area.

There were written questions through Zoom which Mr. Baker read and Mr. Kleppin answered.

Lou Garcia asked about the height and FAR. Mr. Kleppin said that what was there now was not working.

Kimberly Bastoni supported ENNA and thought that there was overdevelopment. She wanted to delay making a decision on the Plan for 1 year. Mr. Kleppin said that it was up to the Planning Commission to make that decision.

Ken Prince, Fenwick Place, asked about restoring the marsh on the Wells Fargo site. Mr. Kleppin said that the drainage would be improved under the Plan.

Kimberly Bastoni asked about the percentage of East Norwalk residents attended those meetings.

Patricia Prince asked if Mr. DiScala had any interests in developing some of these parcels. Mr. Kleppin said that he had an interest in the Wells Fargo property.

Tracy Barclay had comments about the Oversight Committee's outreach.

Lisa Prince had comments about the wildlife in the Mill Pond.

Luisa D'Allacco had comments about the density and that their comments were not being listened to by the consultants.

Diane CeCe said that East Norwalk had been around for 100 years and why couldn't they wait 6 months to 1 year. Mr. Kleppin noted that they had been working on this for a while. Mr. Baxendale, a member of the Oversight Committee, also addressed these concerns.

Justin Fargone asked if an analysis had been done about the increased density on infrastructure. Mr. Kleppin explained how an application went through the review process before it goes to the Zoning Commission.

Lou Garcia did not agree with Mr. Kleppin's remarks about the increase in height.

Vicki Roos thought that the Plan had not changed much since the beginning.

Diane CeCe asked if emails would be read into the record but Mr. Kleppin said they were a part of the record.

Stephanie Bennetty, 71 Osborne Avenue, said she was an architect and focused on green architecture. She noted that she had lived abroad and would like to see bike lanes. She thought they should eliminate some traffic lights. She also thought that the additional height could incorporate green space or amenities.

Mr. Mushak also discussed roundabouts but addressed the residents' concerns about the Mill Pond. There was a discussion about runoff of chemicals from lawns and specifically the runoff from the driveway into Mill Pond.

Mimi Chang, Raymond Terrace, had comments about traffic analysis which Mr. Kleppin addressed.

At this point, Ms. DiMeglio closed the public hearing to further comments and the commissioners took a 5 min. recess. They returned at 9:02 pm.

IV. DISCUSSION AND/OR DECISION

A. Action on Item III. A. - Consideration of further POCD amendments, and/or Plan amendments

Ms. DiMeglio said that written public comments would be open until the close of business the following day. There was a discussion about the total number of total units to be built out. Mr. Kleppin explained how it was calculated. There was a clarification about some misinformation that had been spread. Many residents had said that they did not want East Norwalk to look like Stamford with high rises. There was a suggestion about having a FAQ for residents that addressed some of the questions that had been raised at these public hearings. Some residents had felt they were not being heard and their questions not being answered. There was a discussion about whether Mr. Kleppin should write an Op-Ed in the newspapers.

B. 8-24 Referral - #xx – Transportation Mobility and Parking – Norwalk River Valley Trail construction connection from Union Park to New Canaan Ave – Report and recommended action

Mike Yeosock began the presentation by explaining that this part of the trail would connect from Union Park to New Canaan Avenue. He also explained the funding and is not asking for more from the city. They are beginning to bid out the project in the next month.

**** MS. DIMEGLIO MOVED: BE IT RESOLVED** by the Norwalk Planning Commission that the 8-24 referral made by Transportation, Mobility and Parking for the Norwalk River Valley Trail construction connection from Union Park to New Canaan Avenue be **APPROVED** for the following reasons:

1. To achieve the Plan of Conservation and Development goal to have the best city park and recreation system in Connecticut by implementing the action "*Give priority to completion of the Norwalk River Valley Trail*" (Chapter 7: Enhancing Open Space, Park, Trail & Recreation Systems, pg. 129); and

2. To achieve the Plan of Conservation and Development goal for Norwalk to have a comprehensive and balanced transportation system, with safety and multimodal accessibility the top priority of citywide transportation planning by implementing the action "*Maintain and enhance existing trails and footpaths*" (Chapter 10: Transportation & Mobility Networks, pg. 198); and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that notice of this action be forwarded to the Common Council.

Mr. Mushak seconded.

Fran DiMeglio; Brian Baxendale; Mike Mushak; Tammy Langalis; Mary Peniston; Tamara Shockley approved.

No one opposed.

No one abstained.

There was a discussion about connecting the NRVT at Glover Avenue into Wilton. Mr. Yeosock said that it was planned for the end of 2020.

C. 8-24 Referral - #xx – Transportation Mobility and Parking – Construction of ADA compliant City Hall Campus sidewalks – Report and recommended action

The commissioners did not have questions on this item. It was noted that a couple of commissioners, John Lesko and Steven Ferguson, were no longer on the Zoom call because they had lost power at their homes.

***** MS. DIMEGLIO MOVED: BE IT RESOLVED** by the Norwalk Planning Commission that the 8-24 referral made by Transportation, Mobility and Parking for the construction of ADA compliant City Hall Campus sidewalks be **APPROVED** for the following reasons:

1. To achieve the Plan of Conservation and Development goal for Norwalk to have a comprehensive and balanced transportation system, with safety and multimodal accessibility the top priority of citywide transportation planning by implementing the action "*Encourage pedestrian-friendly design features*" (Chapter 10: Transportation & Mobility Networks, pg. 198); and

2. To achieve the Plan of Conservation and Development goal for Norwalk to have a comprehensive and balanced transportation system, with safety and multimodal accessibility the top priority of citywide transportation planning by implementing the action "*Maintain and enhance existing trails and footpaths*" (Chapter 10: Transportation & Mobility Networks, pg. 198); and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that notice of this action be forwarded to the Common Council.

Mr. Baxendale seconded.

Fran DiMeglio; Brian Baxendale; Mike Mushak; Tammy Langalis; Mary Peniston; Tamara Shockley approved.
No one opposed.
No one abstained.

V. DISCUSSION OF OTHER ITEMS

A. 2021 Planning Commission meeting schedule

The Planning Commission would be able to vote on their 2021 calendar in November. Their meetings would be changed to the second Wednesday of every month.

B. Industrial Zones Study update

Mr. Kleppin said that he had sent out dates for a first meeting but none had been set yet.

C. Capital Budget schedule

Mr. Kleppin said that this schedule would be set once the 2021 Planning Commission schedule had been set.

VI. APPROVAL OF MINUTES: June 16, 2020, July 21, 2020 and August 18, 2020

***** MS. DIMEGLIO MOVED** to accept the **June 16, 2020** Planning Commission minutes.
Ms. Langalis seconded.

Fran DiMeglio; Brian Baxendale; Mike Mushak; Tammy Langalis; Mary Peniston approved.
No one opposed.
Tamara Shockley abstained.

***** MS. DIMEGLIO MOVED** to accept the **July 21, 2020** Planning Commission minutes.
Ms. Langalis seconded.

Fran DiMeglio; Brian Baxendale; Mike Mushak; Tammy Langalis; Mary Peniston approved.
No one opposed.
Tamara Shockley abstained.

***** MS. DIMEGLIO MOVED** to accept the **August 18, 2020** Planning Commission minutes.
Ms. Langalis seconded.

Fran DiMeglio; Brian Baxendale; Mike Mushak; Tammy Langalis; Mary Peniston approved.
No one opposed.
Tamara Shockley abstained.

VII. COMMENTS OF DIRECTOR

Mr. Kleppin suggested two dates for a special meeting on North 7 for either Tuesday, September 1 or September 2. The commissioners decided on September 2.

VIII. COMMENTS OF COMMISSIONERS

There was a discussion about when City Hall would be re-opening. Mr. Kleppin said that departments would be taking appointments.

Ms. DiMeglio said that Ms. Peniston would be serving on a committee for the area surrounding the South Norwalk Train station.

IX. ADJOURNMENT

Mr. Mushak made a Motion to Adjourn.

Ms. Langalis seconded.

Fran DiMeglio; Brian Baxendale; Mike Mushak; Tammy Langalis; Mary Peniston; Tamara Shockley approved.

No one opposed.

No one abstained.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:37 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Diana Palmentiero