

CITY OF NORWALK
PLANNING COMMISSION
August 18, 2020

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

STAFF: Steve Kleppin; Bryan Baker

OTHERS: Emily Innes; Ana Tabanacheck; Cleo; Lisa; Dev Desai; Robert DiBescglie;
Cheryl Ward; Diana Paladino; Scott; Lou Garcia; Patricia Prince; Jim O'Hara;
Carol Miller;

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.

III. PUBLIC HEARING

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

Mr. Kleppin began the presentation regarding the East Norwalk TOD Plan (TOD). He also noted that there would be questions from the Commissioners as well as comments from the public. He then showed them a PowerPoint presentation of the ½ mile radius around the East Norwalk Train station which is the study area. He gave a brief history of how the study had begun. He noted that it had started about 4 years ago. Other areas of the city had been studied but East Norwalk had not.

Emily Innes, the lead planner of Harriman which was the consulting company that worked on this plan continued the presentation. She explained how the vision and goals had been written with input from the community. It included quality of life vision and fostering community engagement. This plan would be coordinating with other plans that the city was working on including the completed POCD.

Mr. Kleppin continued with a description of the village district which allowed the Zoning Commission to have design guidelines. He also discussed a facade improvement program which could help the affordable housing in this area. There was also a discussion about the Department of Public Works garage being moved so that the land could be repurposed. However, there is no other spot in the city that has been discussed to move it to. He also said that the plan recommended that after this process the city should consider a new Liberty Square Village District. He also discussed a promenade on Seaview Avenue. There was also a recommendation for Cove Avenue to become a village district. He also noted a couple of other rezoning some smaller areas.

Ms. Innes then discussed 2 rezoning areas. There would be a change of the I-1 Zone to allow residential in this zone. She then discussed the Fit Studies by explaining what it is. She then discussed the proposed East Norwalk Village TOD zone which included uses that should be added and what should be removed. She also discussed special permits on larger developments and the dimensional standards as well as amenity points. She explained the point system in more detail. She discussed the design guidelines and included pictures of other towns that had implemented similar guidelines. She explained how they had drafted the guidelines which would include some for buildings, storefronts and landscape and parking. She also discussed the village furniture including bike racks, seating, and trash bins.

Mr. Kleppin also discussed transportation connections. He also noted that Zoning regulations and design guidelines would start with the Zoning Commission and be referred back to the Planning Commission at a later date. The commissioners did not have further questions.

There was a discussion about how many members of the public were going to speak on this topic. Mr. Kleppin then noted that there were written comments on the Zoom chat. The commissioners decided to have Mr. Kleppin address them first before addressing the call-in speakers.

Ana Tabanacheck asked about street improvements in the area. Cleo asked about the Wells Fargo Bank but Mr. Kleppin noted that this site was not part of the plan but would probably be re-developed at some time. Lisa had questions about traffic patterns which Mr. Kleppin said they were aware of the problems. Dev Desai asked about sustainability guidelines which Mr. Kleppin said there are incentives for it in the TOD. Robert DiBescglie asked about the promenade and how the city would handle the noise so that residents could enjoy quiet enjoyment in the area. Cheryl Ward asked if the city had looked at similar plans in other towns. Diana Paladino asked if there was a Phase 2 of the project. Scott asked about parking at the train station which Mr. Kleppin addressed. Scott also asked about wider sidewalks on East Avenue. There was a question about Planning staff answering questions in this format. Mr. Kleppin said that the same format would be used at the following public hearing. There was also a discussion about walking, biking as well as using public transportation. There was a question about tax impacts of zoning changes. Lisa asked about livability when building heights would be increased as well as density. Dev Desai asked about a sidewalk underneath the railroad tracks. Mr. Kleppin noted that the city had to wait for the CT DOT to make the improvements. Ana Tabanacheck also asked about keeping her address private which Mr. Kleppin reminded her that was public information if she sent it to him.

Lou Garcia, 15 Bond Street, explained that he was an architect and lived in Norwalk for 50 years. He thought that most of TOD was done well but there were problems with it. One problem was with parking especially since everyone in suburbia used cars. He also noted that East Avenue was narrow but that it would be widened by the state. He would concentrate on this corridor. He then discussed the Floor Area Ratio (FAR) proposed in the TOD. He noted that developers would look to maximize this so they could make a profit. More units would be developed and more parking would be required for them. He also discussed the amenities as well as the special permits. He was concerned about the developers and traffic congestion. He then gave suggestions on how to fix these problems.

Mr. Kleppin asked to respond to the parking issues. He said that there was a minimum parking standard. He also discussed the narrowness of the parcels and noted that there is shared parking throughout the city. Ms. Innes also talked about the parking and the fit studies.

Diana Paladino, 1 Naple Street, had been concerned about increases in traffic on Winfield, especially since she lives there and has small children.

Patricia Prince had concerns about the 87 units proposed on the Wells Fargo site. She was also concerned about the wetlands in the area. Mr. Kleppin noted that there was no application in his office at this time.

Dev Desai, 11 Sycamore Street, said that they should set the bar high on sustainability. When one does those targets will be met, but if not, then people will do the bare minimum. She thought it should make it a requirement. She thanked the commissioners for their work on the project.

Mr. Kleppin noted that Ms. DiMeglio was having phone problems and was not Zoom. He asked Mr. Mushak to take over running the meeting until she could return. There was a further discussion about the sidewalks on East Avenue.

Patricia Prince had concerns about the Mill Pond and traffic. Mr. Kleppin asked about clarification as to where she would like more information. He then showed a map to help. He noted that there was traffic around Gregory Blvd and that many ideas would be considered.

Jim O'Hara, Pitt Street, said that he had concerns about the flooding on Fitz Street and whether there was a plan for it. Mr. Kleppin noted that the CT DOT was well aware of it since they will be re-doing the train station bridge.

At this point, Mr. Kleppin noted that Ms. DiMeglio had returned to the Zoom meeting. He told her that he had taken some comments while she had been unavailable.

Cheryl Ward noted that East Norwalk was a cut through for Westport to South Norwalk. Mr. Kleppin noted that road improvements could help mitigate the traffic problem. Mr. Mushak noted that the staff was speaking this evening since the TOD was coming from the city. There was a discussion about destination businesses.

Carol Miller had questions about tax increases but Mr. Kleppin said there was not a specific tax study to answer that.

Lisa had questions about the traffic from the beachside to the highway since it was so difficult. She said that residents drove to Darien to get on I-95. There was a discussion about plans to address the problems at Exit 16.

There was a discussion about input the design standards since it seemed like they would all look the same.

The hearing would be closed to additional comments and resume on Monday, August 24. There was a discussion about the Planning Commission agenda that evening. It was decided that public comments be handled first and then the commissioners would discuss other applications. The application for North 7 would be handled on a separate night. There was a discussion about how to view tonight's presentation if the public would like to review it before commenting on Monday.

IV. APPROVAL OF MINUTES: June 16, 2020 and July 21, 2020

The commissioners decided to review them at the next Planning Commission meeting on August 24, 2020.

V. COMMENTS OF DIRECTOR

Mr. Kleppin gave a brief overview of the Zoning regulations study.

VI. COMMENTS OF COMMISSIONERS

Ms. Langalis said that she agreed with the gentleman who was concerned about the development on the Wells Fargo site. Mr. Baxendale was wondering how this application was happening. Mr. Kleppin said that the application had been reviewed but sent back comments which were significant. He thought they would not re-submit until sometime in September. There was a discussion about the renderings that had been submitted since it did not seem to show what was actually in the area. This application would not be before the Planning Commission so they are allowed to speak of it in the context of the TOD.

VII. ADJOURNMENT

Ms. Langalis made a Motion to Adjourn.

Mr. Baxendale 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 9:01 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Diana Palmentiero