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CITY OF NORWALK
PLANNING COMMISSION
June 16, 2020

PRESENT: Fran DiMeglio, Chair; Brian Baxendale; Mike Mushak; Tammy Langalis; Nora King; Mary Peniston

STAFF: Steve Kleppin; Bryan Baker

OTHERS: Alan Lo; MIchael Losasso; Lisa Yates; Atty Dave Waters

I. CALL TO ORDER

Ms. DiMeglio called the meeting to order at 6:34 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. DISCUSSION AND/OR DECISION

A. 8-24 Referral - Building Management - Renovation of Jefferson School including gymnasium addition, bus loop and parking lot modifications - Report and Recommended Action

Mr. Lo began by noting that the architecture firm and the design team were also on Zoom, waiting to make a presentation. He explained that the project would be a renovation to new and would be good for the next 20-25 years. He explained the reimbursement from the state as well. He said that currently there were 10 portable classrooms at this school. He also said that some schools would have to be combined while the Jefferson School was being renovated for the next 2 years. He said that it would have to go before the Zoning Commission and then the state. He noted that the renovation should be started in spring of 2021 and completed in 2023. He also explained the traffic and bus loop.

Mr. Losasso began the presentation with explaining the site development. He showed the commissioners a slide presentation with an aerial version of the property. He noted that the school population was mostly walkers. He gave a brief history of the property which has been a school since the late 1960s. He explained the gymnasium and lower classrooms. He then showed them the existing property survey as well as what the modifications would be. He also explained the new bus loop off of Grandview Avenue. It would help the traffic in the area. There would also be a new parent drop off. He also discussed the amenities which included new sidewalks, and solar panels on the building and on site.

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There was a discussion about the solar energy panels which the city would lease. The roof project would most likely happen but the on site carport with solar panels may not.

Mr. Losasso then discussed the water retention system which would be on site. Ms. Yates continued the presentation with the proposed elevations. She showed them the roof screening and the solar arrays. She explained that the site would be gated while school is in session. She showed them the playgrounds. Shealso showed them the plans for the inside of the building. Administration and lower grades would be on the first floor. She also showed them the other floors in the building.

There was a discussion about the lower grades access to the playgrounds. There was then a discussion about the size and location of the playgrounds especially with the guidelines for social distancing. This led to a discussion about the funding for the schools and whether it would change due to social distancing requirements. Mr. Lo explained that it had not changed since grant applications had been filed last year. He also noted that these applications had not been revised because it was unclear what the future would hold. He noted that the statutes did not allow for another story. He also discussed teacher’s contracts. He said that otherwise this project could be put on hold.

There was a discussion about the separation of the bus loop and parent drop off, considering the grade of the area. Mr. Mushak said that he thought the residents in the area would be happy with the project’s design. There was a discussion about the garden that was in the plans. There was currently a garden on the site. There was also a discussion about the additional classrooms that are being added, as well as changes to the library. It would be a maker space as well as a library.

Mr. Lo noted that the population for the Jefferson School would be lowered from 500 to 420. He explained that some of the population would go to Ponus.

At this point, Ms. DiMeglio read the resolution into the record.

***** MS. DIMEGLIO MOVED: BE IT RESOLVED** by the Norwalk Planning Commission that the 8-24 referral made by Building Management for the renovation of Jefferson School including a gymnasium addition, bus loop and parking lot modifications be **APPROVED** for to the following reasons:

1. To implement the Plan of Conservation and Development goal to implement “*The Modern Schools for a Growing City plan provides new and renovated schools to alleviate overcrowding and better serve students”* (Chapter 5: A Community Committed to Life-Long Education, pg. 84); and

2. To implement the Plan of Conservation and Development action to *“Support sustained maintenance and renovation of all schools”* (Chapter 5: A Community Committed to Life-Long Education, pg. 92); and

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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; Nora King; Mary Peniston approved.
No one opposed.
No one abstained.

B. Zoning Commission referral - #1-20M - Merritt Station Norwalk, LLC et all - 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 – For distribution and discussion only: action at July 21 meeting and C. Zoning Commission referral - #2-20R - Merritt Station Norwalk, LLC et all - Proposed amendments to add a new definition for Executive Office Development Park and to permit the new use in the Executive Office zone and related technical amendments – For distribution and discussion only: action at July 21 meeting and D. Zoning Commission referral - #2-20SPR - Merritt Station Norwalk, LLC et all - 67, 69, 79, 87, 111, 117, 129, 135, 155, 156 & 201 Glover Avenue and 2 Oakwood Ave – Site plan review of proposed Master Plan for Executive Office Development Park – For distribution and discussion only: action at July 21 meeting

Mr. Kleppin briefly explained the 3 applications for the commissioners. He noted that since this is a large application, the Planning Commission may not vote on all of it at once. The Zoning Commission would vote on it later in the summer. There was a discussion about the boundary of the project.

Atty Waters began the presentation by orienting the commissioners as to the location of the project on an aerial map. He explained what is currently in the area including condominiums and office space. He also explained that the application was trying to create a community and connectivity for the residents who could live and work in the area. He then discussed the zone changes that were being requested. He also discussed that many of the residents that are in the applicant's current buildings in that area work in Merritt 7 offices. There were physical barriers of the Norwalk River and the Metro-North railroad.

Atty Waters then explained the proposed Master Plan which included parking garages, supportive retail, and residential units. However, he also explained that a building could be converted to an office or a hotel if it was necessary based on market conditions. He then discussed the renovations to the Merritt 7 train station which would include connectivity to the Merritt 7 office buildings. He also explained the proposed Town Square and focal point of the development. He explained additional conditions throughout the neighborhood to help with connectivity especially to the train station. He also explained additional green spaces. He discussed why they had decided to do a Master Plan. Each building would require site plan review. He noted that all of the Merritt 7 buildings had been approved through site plan review. He noted that the applicant would not be using public funding. There would be significant funding from the applicant, city and state for traffic improvements. He explained that the applicant had worked on this project for a couple of years and did consider the Plan of Conservation and Development.

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Atty Waters then showed them a 3D version of the plans and discussed the heights of the proposed buildings. He also discussed the parking spaces which were commuter parking. They had negotiated with the state to create parking for commuters that was within a parking garage. He also discussed the open spaces that residents can use in the area. It is not just for those living in these residential buildings. He explained how the Master Plan would be recorded on the Norwalk Land Records. He noted the construction schedule of the site, if it approved.

There was a discussion about the Town Square for the complex which would be for the public. There was also a discussion about how to get the residents out of the building to use the open space, including yoga. There was then a discussion about Harbor Point in Stamford as well as whether those residents were using the train or still had vehicles. There was also a discussion about the residents of the Curve which is the community on Glover Ave. Atty Waters noted there were many from FactSet and Datto. There was a hope that with additional residents there would be a greater demand for use of the train at the Merritt 7 station. He noted that in Harbor Point many residents used the train station.

There was a discussion about the number of students that would enter the public school system with this project. There was also a discussion about the financing of projects in the area. Atty Waters explained that his company has done similar projects so they know what works. They understand this would be a 10 year project. The unit mix could change. There was also a discussion about having a smaller Master Plan. Atty Waters thought it would be a better idea to look at the area holistically and not proper planning. Atty Waters also suggested some ideas of flexibility by having some hotel rooms in a residential building for guests coming to visit. He noted that one does not want to lock themselves into one design.

There was a concern about the additional density in the area and the traffic there. Atty Waters noted that each project would have to go through a site plan review which would include a traffic study. He also said that the applicant would not have to pay for 100% of traffic improvements but would have to pay some of it. There was support for this project in Hartford since it was an economic generator for Norwalk and the state. There was a discussion about traffic circles. Atty Waters again noted that the projects would have to have a traffic analysis, whether there was a Master Plan or not.

There was a discussion about the current condominiums in the area and the open space available. There was also a discussion about how many more residents would be added to the Norwalk population as well as what elementary schools the children would go to. Mr. Kleppin was asked to find this out. There was a discussion about making Glover Avenue wider to four lanes but Atty Waters said that bike lanes would be added. There was a discussion about retail at the base of some of these buildings.

There was a discussion about next steps for these applications which Mr. Kleppin went over. He noted that the CT Department of Transportation would be presenting the area traffic projects which he would advise the commissioners about. He noted that the Planning commissioners may not have to vote on it until July or August. There was a question about the height of the buildings at Harbor Point. Mr. Kleppin noted there would be a 3D model of the project and Merritt 7 buildings.

After Atty Waters left the meeting, there was a discussion about having a smaller Master Plan for the project. There were concerns about the population and school age children in the area. Mr. Kleppin noted that the public would want to have input on this project.

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IV. DISCUSSION OF OTHER ITEMS

A. East Norwalk TOD plan update

Mr. Baxendale began by explaining that many residents had been a part of the planning process. The next stage would begin on July 1. Mr. Kleppin said that the public presentation would be on July 1, in the evening and then the following day. He also noted that some East Avenue residents were not in favor of the density. There was a discussion about the height. There would be a maritime feel to the area. The presentation would be on Zoom. City Hall would not be open for public meetings for the remainder of 2020. Mr. Kleppin thought there would be more people viewing the presentation through Zoom.

B. Industrial Zones Study update

Mr. Kleppin noted that Ms. Langalis was also on this committee. The consultant would receive the contract and there was hope that work would start after July 1. The one year moratorium had been approved by the Zoning Commission.

V. APPROVAL OF MINUTES: May 12, 2020

***** MS. KING MOVED** to accept the **May 12, 2020** Planning Commission minutes with changes..

Ms. Langalis seconded.

Brian Baxendale; Mike Mushak; Tammy Langalis; Nora King; Mary Peniston approved.

No one opposed.

Fran DiMeglio abstained.

VI. COMMENTS OF DIRECTOR

Mr. Kleppin said that the Pinnacle project was still moving forward but that the applicant had 2 tenants that they were reconsidering.

VII. COMMENTS OF COMMISSIONERS

Ms. DiMeglio said that she was happy to be back and to be careful with the Coronavirus.

VIII. ADJOURNMENT

Ms. Langalis made a Motion to Adjourn.

Mr. Mushak seconded.

Fran DiMeglio; Brian Baxendale; Mike Mushak; Tammy Langalis; Nora King; Mary Peniston approved.

No one opposed.

No one abstained.

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The meeting was adjourned at 8:38 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Diana Palmentiero