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CITY OF NORWALK
PLANNING COMMISSION
May 12, 2020

PRESENT: Nora King, acting as Chair; Mary Peniston; Brian Baxendale; Mike Mushak; Tammy Langalis; Steven Ferguson (after roll call)

STAFF: Steve Kleppin; Bryan Baker

OTHERS: Tom Hamilton; Barbara Meyer-Mitchell; Ralph Valenzisi; Henry Dachowitz; Jessica Casey; Atty Darin Callahan

I. CALL TO ORDER

Ms. King called the meeting to order at 6:05 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. Special Appropriation - Board of Education - Special capital appropriation of $1,642,470 to provide e-tablet computers for students and teachers in grades K through 8 - Report & Recommended Action

Tom Hamilton began the presentation by thanking the Planning Commission for allowing them to speak and introduced others who would be speaking. The Board of Education (BOE) has been challenged by the pandemic. Over the last several years the BOE had been moving toward having a device for each student but it had not been completed when the pandemic began. He explained that this appropriation would fund the BOE so they could make available a device for each student from the youngest to the oldest grades. He noted how many Chromebooks and Dell tablets would be provided for students as well as for teachers. It would help for the last few weeks of school as well as for summer school. He said they were expecting that schools might be closed or changed in the fall. He also discussed the possibility of a second wave of the Coronavirus so they would like to be prepared with devices for all children and teachers.

Barbara Meyer-Mitchell described the rationale for this appropriation. She noted that at the beginning of the quarantine, the K-2 children had relied on packets which was not cost effective and hard to get to them. This one size fits all did not work for children. This technology would be critical for them to prepare for the fall.

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There was a discussion about the use of the packets and the use of a curriculum for the younger grades. Since learning was difficult for them as it was currently being done, it was noted that there was software that could help them.

Ralph Valenzisi said that they knew there was a problem with the younger children. He explained that the technology had to work for both the student and the parents. It was discussed how they could make it flexible for all. He also explained the different programs and apps that would be used. There was a discussion about how they would be paid for. Mr. Valenzisi noted that the teaching model was changing and that teachers would be supported. There would be weekly sessions for teachers to see the software, learn it and incorporate it into their curriculum. They would get the professional development that they needed. He thought the teachers had successfully pivoted with the programs that had been provided to them over the last few years.

There was also a discussion about refreshing the Chromebooks which Mr. Valenzisi said should be every 4 years. He noted that Altice had connected the Internet to the laptops for free. Ms. Meyer-Mitchell noted that they needed an equitable model for all students in Norwalk.

There was a discussion about whether Norwalk was ahead of other school systems in the way that Norwalk is filling the gap that was needed. There were also questions about how many computers are being bought as well as what would happen if students moved out of the district with the laptop. There was a discussion about what would happen when a device broke. Mr. Valenzisi noted that now that everyone will have a laptop they can work on programming.

There was a discussion about how much younger children would be on the laptop. Some thought it was not appropriate for them to be on-line all the time. There was also a discussion about how much interaction there was between teachers and students on-line. Ms. Meyer-Mitchell noted that there was typing programs being rolled out to the students.

Mr. Valenzisi responded to the questions about loss and support for the Chromebooks. He noted that there would be a 4 year life span for them and there would also be a warranty purchased. He also said that if there is a problem with a Chromebook, parents can exchange them for a new one. He explained the process of that, as well as what would happen if they left the district. There was also a discussion about whether any other parts of the appropriation would be a capital expense or operating expense.

There was a discussion about tracking the computers if someone has left their premises as well as if certain software programs are being used. There was also a discussion about the tech support for the equipment. Mr. Valenzisi noted that there would be on-line tech support as well as hardware tech support. He noted that hours would start next week for software support. He noted that the amount requested in the appropriation was necessary to complete the program of having a device for every student in the district. They would like to continue the model over the next few years. Mr. Hamilton noted that there would be a need to refresh the laptops over the next few years.

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***** MS. PENISTON MOVED: BE IT RESOLVED** by the Norwalk Planning Commission that the Special Capital Appropriation request made by the City's Board of Education for the funding of $1,642,470 to provide e-tablet computers for students and teachers in grades K through 8 be **APPROVED** subject to the following reasons:

1. To implement the Plan of Conservation and Development goal to make "The Norwalk public school system is the most successful city school system in Connecticut, with students exceeding state average achievement and high-need students having the smallest achievement gap” (Chapter 5, pg. 270); and
2. To implement the Plan of Conservation and Development policy to "Continue to support the NPS Strategic Plan to improve system performance” (Chapter 5, pg. 271); and

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

Mr. Baxendale seconded.

Ms. King read the resolution into the record. Mr. Dachowitz explained how the Finance Department had increased the amount.

Nora King; Mary Peniston; Brian Baxendale; Mike Mushak; Tammy Langalis; Steven Ferguson approved.
No one opposed.
No one abstained.

B. 8-24 Referral - Temporary Right of Entry and Access Agreement over 30 Monroe Street - Report and Recommended Action

Mr. Ferguson began the presentation and introduced Jessica Casey. She apologized that the information had been late but they had not been aware of the meeting's date change. She noted that the original application had been approved in 2018 by the Zoning Commission. The applicant needed to access the city's property so they were requesting a temporary right of access in order to continue construction. She said they had been working with various departments on the agreement. They will seek compensation for a permanent easement, but not the temporary right of entry. She discussed the streetscape improvements which would be provided by the applicant. She also discussed where the staging would occur.

Several commissioners said that they supported the request. There was a discussion about why this was coming to them long after it had been approved. There was also a discussion about Railroad Place becoming a road or public right of way. There was a discussion as to why there was no compensation for the temporary right of access. There was also a discussion as to why the temporary right of access was necessary at the location being requested. Ms. Casey explained how the foundation would be poured with the necessary equipment.

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Atty Callahan also explained how the city was handling the easement agreement. The temporary right of access was like a license. He also noted that there would be temporary easements. There was a discussion about additional parking requested by the applicant. Mr. Kleppin continued with an explanation of the different phases of the project. There was a discussion about the density and how these buildings near the train station will be in high demand.

Although she was not in attendance, there was an issue from Ms. DiMeglio about the memo that was sent to the Planning Commission. Ms. Casey said that it was the same memo that has been sent to the Public Works Committee which included the term of the agreement, indemnification and insurance. The memo had seemed to be in simple terms but Ms. Casey said that was not the intention. It had been written with the intention of being transparent.

Ms. Casey said that the permanent easement would be more complicated. This request was not as complicated. There was a discussion about the compensation for the easement. Atty Callahan noted who was doing the appraisal for the city which was paid for by the developer. The temporary right of access would be for 6 months. There was a discussion about the use of the property for staging. The city’s property abuts this property.

Ms. King read the resolution into the record.

***** MR. MUSHAK MOVED: BE IT RESOLVED** by the Norwalk Planning Commission that the 8-24 referral made by the City’s Economic and Community Development Office for Mayor Rilling to enter into a Temporary Right of Access and Entry Agreement over 30 Monroe Street be **APPROVED** subject to the following reasons:

1. To implement the Plan of Conservation and Development goal to “*Improve and maintain Norwalk’s attractiveness as a business location and as a place to live for employees”* (Chapter 3: Prosperity & Opportunity, pg. 54); and
2. To implement the Plan of Conservation and Development action to *“Continue implementation of transit-oriented development (TOD) and a range of mixed-use opportunities for sustainable live/work/play communities in the city”* (Chapter 3: Prosperity & Opportunity, pg. 57); and
3. To implement the Plan of Conservation and Development goal to *“Continue to encourage the development of vibrant transit-oriented districts within walking distance of the South Norwalk, East Norwalk, and Merritt 7 train stations. Housing near transit is important for Norwalk’s economic development and revitalization goals”* (Chapter 4: Housing Choice & Healthy Lifestyles, pg. 76); and

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

Mr. Baxendale seconded.
Nora King; Mary Peniston; Steven Ferguson; Brian Baxendale; Mike Mushak; Tammy Langalis approved.
No one opposed.
No one abstained.

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Ms. Casey thanked the commissioners for passing this project, saying it would be good for the city.

IV. DISCUSSION OF OTHER ITEMS

A. Update on Norwalk River Valley Trail from Mike Yeosock - Mr. Yeosock noted that a lease agreement had been approved several months prior. The Phase 1 survey has been completed and said it was low risk. The work is being done above ground and not much excavation. Corporation Counsel wanted the commissioners to be aware of the survey results. There was a discussion about trucks in the area which are parked on Riverside Drive. The commissioners did not have any other questions about this.

B. East Norwalk TOD plan update

Mr. Baxendale said that there is one more meeting before the public's input is required. Mr. Kleppin said that the last meeting of the committee would be on May 18 before it was back to the Planning Commission in June.

C. Industrial Zones Study update

Mr. Kleppin noted that a consultant had been picked. The contract had to be approved. He said that the study should take 1 year.

V. APPROVAL OF MINUTES: April 21, 2020

***** MS. PENISTON MOVED** to accept the **April 21, 2020** Planning Commission minutes with one clarification.

Mr. Ferguson seconded.
Nora King; Mary Peniston; Steven Ferguson; Brian Baxendale; Mike Mushak; Tammy Langalis approved.
No one opposed.
No one abstained.

VI. COMMENTS OF DIRECTOR

There were no comments from Mr. Kleppin.

VII. COMMENTS OF COMMISSIONERS

Mr. Ferguson asked for an update of the POKO project. Mr. Kleppin said there was nothing new to report. Corporation Counsel has been speaking with them.

There was also a discussion about movie theaters and the mall. Ms. Casey, who was still on the Zoom call, said that she had spoken with the mall which mentioned that they had a re-

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open plan. There would be meeting the following day. They have outlets around the country so that they have been studying them. She also noted that there had been working with the Zoning Department about re-opening restaurants and what that would look like. They have spoken with restaurants to see how they can help them. There was a suggestion to close some roads to allow restaurants to use those areas especially Washington Street. There would be coordination needed from the cityside. There was a discussion about the restaurant that is on the main level of the mall and how to help the mall.

The commissioners sent their best wishes to Fran DiMeglio.

VIII. ADJOURNMENT

Ms. Peniston made a Motion to Adjourn.
Mr. Ferguson seconded.
Nora King; Mary Peniston; Steven Ferguson; Brian Baxendale; Mike Mushak; Tammy Langalis approved.
No one opposed.
No one abstained.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:02 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Diana Palmentiero