

**CITY OF NORWALK
REDEVELOPMENT AGENCY
REGULAR MEETING
OCTOBER 11, 2016**

ATTENDANCE: Felix R. Serrano, Chairman; Commissioners Lori Torrano, Lisa Cooper, LaTanya Langley and Tome Devine

AGENCY COUNSEL: Marc Grenier, Esq.

STAFF: Timothy T. Sheehan, Executive Director; John Slovak, Comptroller, Timothy J. Carney, Housing Development Project Manager, Elizabeth Stocker, Director of Economic Development

OTHERS: William Collins, Steve Cecil, Douglas Adams, GGP; Robert Jakubik, GGP; William Hennessey, Esq., Members of the Press

CALL TO ORDER

Acting Chairman Torrano called the meeting to order at 5:37 P.M.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

No one came forward to speak.

I. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

A. September 27, 2016 Regular Meeting

**** MR. DEVINE MOVED TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE SEPTEMBER 27, 2016 SPECIAL MEETING OF THE NORWALK REDEVELOPMENT AGENCY.**

**** MS. TORRANO SECONDED.**

**** THE MOTION PASSED.**

II. FINANCE

Mr. Slovak reported on the Statement of Revenues and Expenditures for August 31, 2016 as follows:

- Operating Fund 100 had actual revenues of \$278,642 versus budgeted revenues of \$284,705 for a \$6,064 revenue deficit.
- Actual operating expenditures are \$233,315 versus a budget of \$270,333 resulting in a \$37,018 favorable expenditure variance.
- There is an actual operating surplus of \$45,327 versus a budgeted operating surplus of \$14,373 resulting in a \$30,954 favorable net operating variance.

**** MS. TORRANO MOVED TO APPROVE THE FINANCE REPORT AS PRESENTED.**

**** MR. DEVINE SECONDED.**

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

III. BUSINESS

B. LOAN PORTFOLIO

1. Quarterly Report

Mr. Carney noted that Connecticut Housing Investment Fund (CHIF) recently changed its name to Capital for Change (C4C). Staff continues to address the delinquent loans and has set up payment schedules to bring them current. As reported last time, it was discovered that seven of the land leases were in arrears totaling \$27,000 but were not picked up by CHIF's software because there was no principal involved. Letters were sent to the borrowers, and the total at this time is approximately \$22,000. CHIF's software still cannot address the problem, so he has been entering everything to do with land leases manually. He went through the individual borrowers on the Delinquent List and discussed the status of each. He pointed out that only one is in foreclosure. He said he continues to work with C4C, the borrowers and Agency counsel to identify problems and discuss how they can be corrected.

Attorney Grenier pointed out that a lot of the loans were made to assist people to buy homes or rehab their homes in emergency situations. A lot of them were done prior to 2008 and many are second and third mortgages, so given the current financial situation a lot of people find themselves in, it is difficult. Mr. Carney has done a good job with CHIF in getting the loans under control and getting a better understanding of what the borrowers' financial abilities are to pay. If it were not for the Agency's assistance, these people would not have gotten the benefit of home ownership or been able to do certain things to their homes, and he thinks having better contact with CHIF and with the borrowers and getting a better handle on the loans is starting to pay some dividends.

(Mr. Serrano joined the meeting at 5:51 p.m.)

Mr. Carney said as to the corporate loans, one of the problems is there is no set policy on what to do with these loans. They are trying to work out a satisfactory arrangement with Chocopologie at which time they will bring it to the Commissioners for approval. Wine Search is making weekly payments and are catching up.

Mr. Sheehan said, looking at the Delinquent Summary in the aggregate, there are a total of 106 loans with a principal balance of 4.7 million dollars, and they are talking about \$168,479 roughly being between 30 to 90 days overdue, which is 3% of the total portfolio, so in terms of what is delinquent and given the special purpose of the loans for affordable housing and people that were low to moderate income that took on these loan obligations, he thinks the portfolio in its aggregate is actually in pretty good shape.

C. LOAN MODIFICATION

1. Approve modification of loan and mortgage at 23 Hyatt Avenue
2. Authorize Chairman, Felix Serrano, to execute loan and mortgage modification at 23 Hyatt Avenue

Mr. Carney said in 2007 Nick and Maria Kiriazidis got a residential rehab loan from the Agency and a few years later they divorced. Nick Kiriazidis has since refinanced his first mortgage so that Maria could be taken off and they are both requesting that the Agency does a loan modification to take Maria off its loan because it is affecting her credit. They

underwrote the loan again with just Nick on it and it does very well. He is self-employed and has expanded his business and is doing well.

- ** MS. TORRANO MOVED TO APPROVE THE MODIFICATION OF THE LOAN AND MORTGAGE AT 23 HYATT AVENUE TO REMOVE MARIA KIRIAZIDIS AND INCLUDE ONLY NIKOS (NICK) KIRIAZIDIS, AND FURTHER MOVED TO AUTHORIZE THE CHAIRMAN, FELIX SERRANO, TO EXECUTE THE LOAN AND MORTGAGE MODIFICATION AT 23 HYATT AVENUE.**
- ** MR. DEVINE SECONDED.**
- ** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

A. REED PUTNAM URBAN RENEWAL PLAN AREA

1. SoNo Collection review of proposed signage plan, project modifications and status of the sustainability design review

Mr. Sheehan said Steve Cecil from the Cecil Group has been actively involved with the GGP Development Team in reviewing the signage, the proposed modifications and the sustainability design associated with the SoNo Collection, and will discuss his initial sense of these three areas.

Steve Cecil said GGP has provided an Exterior Signage Manual, which is the guidance document from the zoning standpoint for the project and provides a certain level of information in terms of size, location and nature of signage. They expect to see more information as it is developed, such as materials and the way the signs are lit, and they will be reviewing that. In general, the signage program for the SoNo Collection seems appropriate in terms of scale, character, messaging and composition. They have created a hierarchy of signage that locates the signs in appropriate locations with the identity of the project, anchor identification, major tenant signage, street-level tenancy, and wayfinding. They will have the hotel signage at some point when the identity of that signage occurs.

There are two types of signs, but the one type of sign that is contemporary and very different from what most people encounter are electronic messaging panels, and if properly done, they can add a sense of vitality. There are regulations for this kind of signage and they have to fit within the CTDOT guidelines, and they are awaiting a little more information about that and that will be part of the formal review.

The signage plan anticipates wall murals and wallscape signs that will create a sense of interest and vitality for the exterior of the project, and should be something that catches your eye and modifies your view of what the walls should be, and they should be pretty large in order to achieve that. These are large facades. There are going to be some revisions in the drawings because of some revisions in the design, but overall they are very supportive of the signage program.

One of the things they have talked about with the design team for GGP is directional signage and wayfinding signage, and of course the messaging has to be correct. Linking that in from a design standpoint with the wayfinding program is something that has been discussed and coordination occurring. And finally there is a level of signage that has to do with getting in and out of the parking garage and maneuvering the traffic, etc., and that is a package of signage that will be developed as the final transportation plans move ahead.

Ms. Torrano asked about the view of signage from North Water Street. Mr. Cecil said they had wanted to have some kind of architectural expression and a sense of where North Water Street is as that is a gateway to and from other parts of town, and there was a lot of work to recess that portion of the façade and open it up and put a bridge across, so the idea was to have a grouped series of signs that draw your eye in from a distance. You sense that there is something different going on at that point. There are four signs at the lower portion, which were placed there so they can be seen from the Danbury Line. Mr. Adams said those four signs will be static panels and wall signs.

Mr. Cecil said on the east elevation, how the signs appear at nighttime is really important. You want the ground level to be vital, active, making sense at that level, so they will be taking a look at it so that it is properly balanced overall.

Ms. Torrano said it sounds like there is some real life with the illumination of the signs back there, and it looks great.

Mr. Cecil said there are a series of proposed changes to the project that they have been in discussion about. First of all, there is some reconfiguration of floor plans that have massing implications, and one of the main things the Commissioners are charged with is making sure that the massing of the project makes sense relative to the plan. Most of the changes have had to do from a pragmatic standpoint with creating more leasable area on the interior of the mall. The monumental staircase which provides entrance to the mall at the corner of West Avenue and North Water Street has been removed and replaced with a smaller staircase that enters the first level right at the glassy elevator core and looks much more open and transparent and provides better connectivity to the street, and they are able to bring out a storefront along the sidewalk edge.

They have proposed to eliminate the skylight on the top of the atrium and replace it with a feature that would include lighting which you don't get at night with a skylight. They also realigned the clerestory, which allows light into the top level of the mall, and all of those changes make quite a bit of sense from their perspective.

They have refined some of the footprints of the landscaping along the roof level and several other points along the way, but are still well within the percentages for public realm space. The water feature on the corner has been changed to a different kind of water feature.

Mr. Sheehan noted that the water feature that was proposed was interactive and it was determined that there were a number of issues associated with that, one being bathrooms, the other being what if these people who are in the water decide that they want to go into the mall or into the stores, so there is a water feature proposed but it is not an interactive water feature.

Mr. Cecil said they were looking at the quality of the public realm spaces and evaluating them separately. They really do want to have high quality, vital spaces and have provided a number of locations and were quite concerned that the corners of the project be high quality places. One of the revisions that was made was adding retail above the sculpture garden which will be perched right at the northwest corner along West Avenue and will be highly visible from the outside. The idea is to provide a space that is different from the interior atriums you find in malls and connects the interior with the outside, which is something that is difficult to do. That

transparency at that northwest corner, when you're looking up into it, is extremely important and they have been studying and discussing different ways that they can accomplish that, so that remains a consideration from their standpoint.

As to the major issues that have been a concern, the first is the potential change in the material on the jewel boxes, the significant exterior pieces, and as of the first submittal they were pursuing an approach that would change it to an EIFS system, which is a fiberglass reinforced exterior material that is commonly used. It is very inexpensive compared to other sorts of material that are typically used, and they were surprised by that change and they let them know that, and where it stands now is they will bring back the brick material at most of the locations. Nordstroms will have its own façade, which is going to be a high quality material, and Bloomingdales will have a façade that fits within their language materials. The one location that they still would like to use EIFS is at the boxes along the interstate edge where there is a façade element that is really for all intents and purposes only visible from the highway. If the front facades are really great and are visibly a higher quality, a simple background panel like an EIFS on the back side would probably be okay, but he wants to see the materials.

The east façade was designed to be a series of vertical slats to screen the scale and character of the big parking garage, and the architects came up with a very inventive idea of expressing a kind of a frame. The slats have a color and reflectivity on the side and they are set at different heights so that they aren't just all repetitive. You get a sense of a curve working through it, and as you move you get a different effect. He thinks it is a very clever idea, and they recognize that it is an expensive way to deal with putting something up in front of a parking garage, but he thinks that people will really note this and identify it with this project, and it is going to be good.

The only other piece that has been a significant matter of discussion is the way to treat the areas in between the jewel boxes. The mall has these inward facing retail tenants with a well-lit central spine, but from the outside those facades and the shapes can be pretty dull and they wanted to break that up with a series of sort of solid looking boxes, which they call jewel boxes, which will be different colors, different angles, different treatment, but in between they are going to plug that into the mall that is behind, so they have put a false façade on it, and they worked with them in terms of how they will look at nighttime and during the daytime to give a sense that you have some space back there, but there really isn't. They have offered several different ways of doing this, and he needs to know a little more about the material and what will provide the best sense of scaling and quality to meet the Commission's design guidelines.

Ms. Torrano said one thing she thought had been great about the design of the mall is that it didn't have that boxy feel, but by using the EIFS and reducing the vertical panels it feels like they are going backwards with all the care that was taken to soften the back and conceal the harshness of the parking garage.

Mr. Adams said the tubes are actually rectangles that go up and are not evenly spaced, it is a design pattern, and they have gone through and refined the pattern and are trying to find the optimal effect, and they think that a 20% reduction will work for the frame. The renderings they are looking at are not professional renderings. They are something their architects have produced to give Mr. Cecil an indication where they are headed.

Mr. Sheehan said one of the great things about the collaboration on this is that the design team has been spectacular to work with. They have taken helpful criticism and come back each time with an improvement, and the give and take back and forth has been fantastic. Each time they have had issues that they clearly don't like something, the team has taken that and understood and tried to make it better.

Ms. Torrano said it sounds really interesting, but her concern isn't just how it looks from the exterior. If she is in the mall she wants to feel like she can get out easily and go down to SoNo and enjoy what SoNo has, but then get back into the mall to get her car, and that there is a fluidity to the whole thing.

Mr. Cecil said he thinks they paid a lot of attention to North Water Street and making sure that there was a walkway that goes along the Pine Street Extension because a lot of people will find it easy to go to a sidewalk to go where they want to go, and the way the hotel is set up to have the pickup and drop-off and lobby areas along that edge, he thinks they tried to make that as good as it can be. They have raised major concerns about material changes and what the implications are, and the language about the jewel box and the way it's rendered, and he thinks so far so good, but they have to make sure and watch everything as it goes ahead and check it.

Mr. Sheehan said they believe that there is enough here to give it a greenlight to advance in terms of what they have as guidelines. They are hopeful that this will be back before the Commissioners next month for approval and they should have finalized versions of what they have seen this evening.

Mr. Cecil said they have also requested more complete material boards, but they still have to put some judgment on it because when you see a little square thing that is so big, you have to try to visualize what it is like when it's 60' tall.

IV. NEW BUSINESS

None.

V. OLD BUSINESS

None.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further Old or New Business, upon motion Ms. Torrano, seconded by Mr. Devine, the meeting was adjourned at 7:15 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Karen Pacchiana