

**CITY OF NORWALK
REDEVELOPMENT AGENCY
SPECIAL MEETING
JUNE 13, 2017**

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

AGENCY COUNSEL: Joseph DiSilva, Esq.

STAFF: Timothy T. Sheehan, Executive Director; John Slovak, Comptroller; Susan Sweitzer, Senior Project Manager, Tami Strauss, Director of Community Development Planning; Elizabeth Stocker, Director of Economic Development

OTHERS: William Collins, Eric Rains

CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Serrano called the Special Meeting to order at 5:34 PM

ROLL CALL

Chairman Serrano noted that a quorum was present.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

No one came forward to speak.

I. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

A. May 24, 2017 Special Meeting

**** CHAIRMAN SERRANO MOVED TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE MAY 24, 2017 SPECIAL MEETING OF THE NORWALK REDEVELOPMENT AGENCY.**

**** MS. TORRANO SECONDED.**

**** THE MOTION PASSED (MS. LANGLEY ABSTAINED).**

B. May 31, 2017 Special Meeting

**** MS. TORRANO MOVED TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE MAY 31, 2017 SPECIAL MEETING OF THE NORWALK REDEVELOPMENT AGENCY.**

**** MR. DEVINE SECONDED.**

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

II. FINANCE

A. NRA Statement of Revenues and Expenditures for year-to-date April 30, 2017

Mr. Slovak reported on the Financial Statements as follows:

- Operating Fund 100 had revenues of \$1,369,034 versus budgeted revenues of \$1,423,527 with \$54,493 of revenues not drawn down.
- Actual operating expenditures are \$1,317,582 versus a budget of \$1,416,341 resulting in

- a \$98,758 favorable expenditure variance.
- There is an actual operating surplus of \$51,451 versus a budgeted operating surplus of \$7,186 resulting in a \$44,265 favorable net operating variance.

**** MS. LANGLEY MOVED TO APPROVE THE FINANCIAL STATEMENT AS PRESENTED.**

**** MS. TORRANO SECONDED.**

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

B. Redevelopment Agency Operating Budget FY18

Mr. Slovak said the budget was presented last month and is for approval this month to be effective July 1.

**** MS. TORRANO MOVED TO APPROVE THE REDEVELOPMENT AGENCY OPERATING BUDGET FY18.**

**** MS. LANGLEY SECONDED.**

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

III. BUSINESS

WASHINGTON STREET PLAZA

1. Update and Approve appropriation request of \$300,000 from Fund 500

Ms. Sweitzer said the Agency has been working with a number of community members on improvements to 50 Washington Street Plaza Park, and Eric Rains, Landscape Architect, is there to present the Preliminary Design Concept that was submitted for approval to the Council Recreation and Parks Committee and the Common Council for authorization to move forward in May 2017.

Mr. Rains said one of the first things they talked about was the grade change from Washington and North Main Streets, which presents some obstacles to the use of the park, so to provide more flexibility, the high point was lowered and the grades on the opposite end were maintained, and that was probably the most dramatic change they made to the park. Another way that the park is sort of subdivided is there is a relatively large area at the elevation of the first floor surrounded by many lineal feet of steps, and it doesn't really serve a purpose. So again they felt by lowering that, it gave a delineation between the park and 50 Washington, and then there will be a retaining wall at the elevated part and a set of steps there, and on either side of what aligns with the center of 50 Washington will be lawn with a concrete walkway. They are treating the grass more like an athletic field that gets a lot of use and has to be cared for, and they need to prepare the soil so that it recovers faster and will not require the current level of maintenance. There will be sprinkler systems, which again plays into the recovery.

There is a project going on along Washington Street that actually makes the park a little bigger, which is a good thing, but the downside is that it leaves the existing trees kind of in the middle of the space, so they felt that it would be better to replace those trees on the edges. As Susan mentioned, they have had neighborhood meetings and have rolled input into the original concepts from those meetings. In the original concept the lawn actually went farther, but people felt that it would serve the park better if there were still some pavement and maybe a water

fountain that people can walk up to. In the original scheme they contemplated a water wall that would spill from an upper trough down a sort of textured surface into a lower trough, and they haven't really talked it through in great depth, but they are wondering if there is a need for both, and if one is enough, which one should it be.

There is a main electric service that comes into the park and there is an existing fountain basin, so it probably makes sense to utilize that existing feed. The intention is to provide enough power so that an event in the park would have adequate services, i.e., electricity and water.

Mr. Sheehan said the thought process is that the front walkway would be programmable space for performances and things like that as well as the corner piece at Washington and North Main. Mr. Rains said they want everything to serve multiple purposes, and felt that having the pavement there serves the park in many ways. You can have a smaller event on one side or a larger event on the other side, or an even larger event that goes the whole length, so the goal is having as much flexibility as possible.

Ms. Torrano asked if any thought had been given to other material besides concrete for the walkway, because the concrete feels harsh. Mr. Rains said there are great things that can be done with concrete in how it is finished. Even adding tinting to some of it, they could actually accomplish stripes so that you get some rhythm and it looks like more than just a concrete sidewalk. The sidewalk was made as wide as it is because they have to provide ADA access.

As to the lighting, there are building lights. The stairs would have lighting built into them, and it could be as simple as the handrails having light. And the street project that will occur has new lighting in that as well. They would like to have the lighting as integrated as possible and not put on pole lights that are intrusive.

Mr. Collins asked about the existing sculpture. Mr. Sheehan said they would be looking to integrate lighting in the area where the sculpture is because it is such an important piece. He noted that the Eisner piece is a little bit out of scale for the upper area, so they probably are going to relocate that piece, and one of the thoughts is potentially relocating that to the Art Park. Ms. Sweitzer noted that the City owns the Nokian piece, it does not own the Eisner piece, so it could leave at any time.

**** MS. TORRANO MOVED TO AUTHORIZE THE ALLOCATION OF \$300,000
FROM FUND 500 TO FILL THE FUNDING GAP FOR THE CONSTRUCTION
OF IMPROVEMENTS TO WASHINGTON STREET PLAZA
** MR. DEVINE SECONDED.
** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY**

SONO WHARF MASTER PLAN

1. Approve Amendment to Stantec Waterfront
Contract and approve appropriation of \$33,500 from Fund 500

Ms. Sweitzer said the Agency has been working with Stantec on the Harbor Loop Trail for a number of years and had visited the Maritime link about three or four years ago and began a discussion with various permitting bodies to determine whether a boardwalk link system would be feasible, which would come back on land after having come down from the Heritage Park system and then along the Maritime Aquarium. The project design was put on hold when the

State started its conversations about the bridge replacement project. Since that time, the bridge design has been developed and also the decision has been finalized that the IMAX Theater will be coming down and the site would be an easement area for the State. The Harbor link connection now has to be revised, and what is before them is the opportunity to amend the Stantec contract to look at developing a masterplan for the whole site rather than just working with the bits and pieces that they have been working with. Stantec is going to do a community consensus and come up with a number of options for a preliminary design. They have been working with their environmental group and their engineers on parts of the Harbor Loop Trail and they have the capacity to deliver back to us the kinds of technical information we would need to make choices on the waterfront.

Mr. Sheehan said the important thing is to have a plan that is ready for implementation when the State basically leaves the site. The IMAX Theater is no longer going to exist and there is going to be a 40' restricted easement area that the DOT is going to keep. To leave that corner dead is going to be a real problem if they don't have a clear understanding of what they want to do, so they need to get through a masterplan, have the components of what is going to be on the site fully understood and get the financing to do it, and now is the appropriate time to get the planning work underway.

**** MR. DEVINE MOVED TO AUTHORIZE THE STANTEC SCOPE AND CONTRACT AMENDMENT 1 / NORTH WATER STREET PARCEL / IMAX THEATER SITE DESIGN STUDY (PHASE I) IN THE AMOUNT OF \$33,500, THE FUNDS TO BE ENCUMBERED FROM FUND 500; AND AUTHORIZE THE REDEVELOPMENT AGENCY EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR TO EXECUTE ALL RELATED CONTRACT DOCUMENTS.**

**** MR. TORANO SECONDED.**

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY**

WALK BRIDGE

1. Update

Ms. Stocker said there are two projects that are preliminary to the Walk Bridge replacement, the Danbury Dock Yards and CP243, which have been approved as categorically excluded, and they are now moving ahead to be sure that funding is in place. The contract will be awarded in August and another public hearing will be held in September, which will be the kickoff for those two projects.

As to the Walk Bridge project, they hope to have the Environmental Assessment completed this summer and advance the project to construction. In the meantime, they have finished their 30% design plans for the bridge type, which is basically a lift bridge that will have four tracks. There are actually going to be two separate bridges that will be next to each other, two tracks each, which will allow for minimal disruptions to the train service.

They have been holding Design Advisory Committee meetings, which the Mayor had started and includes people from the area, the City's team, the Redevelopment team, the Arts Commission representative, Historic folks/ David Westmoreland, Eric Rains and Bruce Beinfeld, and a couple of business people from the community. Last week they talked about the top of the bridge that holds the mechanical equipment and were given three different options for designs and the Committee will decide on one of the designs based on the input and feedback.

Ms. Stocker said there are a couple of things that are going to happen under the bridge. One of the things is the abutments are going to go back about 6', so that might bring in some more light. One of the concerns is they don't want the DOT to start using the area for storage of materials or parking their vehicles or closing it off, so they have got a lot of discussion to undertake regarding what happens there.

Mr. Sheehan said they have expanded the size of the overpass by about 6', so it is wider and has less light, which is a bit of an issue. Ms. Torrano said they worked very hard on lighting there to give people a feeling of safety, as that was always a concern because it felt so dark. Mr. Sheehan said this is the main pedestrian corridor between Washington Street and the Aquarium, and no matter who you are, if you walk under an underpass that is dark and a bit intimidating, that is not a desirable pedestrian experience. They have heard the concerns and have been very forceful about the issue, so design of that area is very critical for them, and he thinks they will hear from the Commissioners' standpoint that that's a big deal.

Ms. Stocker said they have been actively meeting with different groups, explaining the actual stages of the construction of the project, so it is getting to be a lot more understandable in terms of the way that the progression of the project will occur. Several meetings are also planned for the rest of this month and then they will be meeting with the legislators.

Ms. Torrano asked what monetary resources are going to be made available by the state and/or federal government for the businesses and the residents to mitigate the negative economic impact. Ms. Stocker said if they are taking the property that a business is located on, then that business will get relocation assistance, but there are no state or federal government resources in the mitigation plan to give relief to the local businesses.

Ms. Torrano noted that it is such a fragile area and is definitely going to be affected. She asked if they have gotten down to talking about what time of day they're going to be doing the prime construction work. Ms. Stocker said basically they are looking at 24/7 because of the fact there is this railroad that is going through there and they can't stop that traffic. Also, they are going to be relocating the electrical wires that are on those high towers, which EverSource is doing. They are going to go under the river, and it will take about 12 months for that process. They still have to go through the Siting Council to get all their permits.

Ms. Langley said wasn't there some conversation about money that would be appropriated to make the public aware of things. Ms. Stocker said part of the mitigation would be a communication plan, as it is really going to be important to communicate that Norwalk is open, you can circulate and you can get from one side of the river to the other at all times. They have been doing outreach and talking to the businesses so they know that it's coming, but she hasn't actually had a workshop or anything of that nature at this point. Ms. Torrano said it might be a good idea and something that they can do so they can offer some support.

Mr. Sheehan said he doesn't think that there are an awful lot of resources that they can bring to the table. The State's response with regards to business mitigation issues is basically that there is nothing statutorily that they could even operate under in terms of that type of assistance, so they have made it perfectly clear that that's just not on the table. And clearly you don't want to have a situation where you're building expectations with the businesses that something is there when it's not. Ms. Torrano said but they need to know that too.

FREESE PARK

1. Update

Ms. Strauss said they undertook a master planning process for a new and improved Freese Park about a year ago, which is a half acre park at the corner of Wall Street and Main Street in the Wall Street area. It is the largest open space in the current Wall Street Redevelopment area. There was a request from the public for a park plan to serve the current residents and also to attract future businesses and residents to the area. They have had four public meetings that about 100 people attended in total. They were very interested in what the park would look like and how it would best serve them. They had an online survey that got 63 responses, and the main themes that came back were river access and river views and a performance space and a place for people to sit and enjoy the music.

This is the fourth and final design, which was approved by the Recreation and Park Committee and the Common Council last month. There is more green space and there is a cantilevered stage over the river. They couldn't do river access as it is too steep and is not controlled by the City. There is new fencing along the river, and the plan squares off the intersection so that it is safer and provides a seating area where there are views down the river. It also allows for food trucks along the sidewalk and tables and chairs so you can sit and eat your food and watch the entertainment.

Their next steps are to have Stantec do bid documents and do construction drawings. They don't know what the budget is going to be, but there are going to need to be some compromises made. They are going to develop a landscaping plan for the esplanade across the river and next month she is going to talk to the First Taxing District to see if they are open to public access to Klondike Park and if they would be amenable to them looking at the feasibility of making that part of this overall plan.

In the construction documents, lighting is going to be incorporated. It is going to be more of a festival lighting, more of a down lighting, so that this place looks more attractive and unique from the rest of the street.

Chairman Serrano said it looks great, and they will keep them posted as they go along.

IV. NEW BUSINESS

None.

V. OLD BUSINESS

None.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further Old or New Business, upon motion of Ms. Langley and second of Ms. Torrano, the Norwalk Redevelopment Agency meeting was adjourned at 7:03 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Karen Pacchiana