

**COMMON COUNCIL & PLANNING AND ZONING COMMISSION
SPECIAL JOINT MEETING
NORWALK, CONNECTICUT**

**JANUARY 30, 2025
VIA ZOOM**

ALL COMMON COUNCIL ACTIONS TAKEN AT THIS MEETING TO APPROVE EXPENDITURES AND CONTRACTS OR TO ACCEPT BIDS AND OTHER PROPOSALS REQUIRING THE EXPENDITURE OF CITY FUNDS ARE SUBJECT TO THE AVAILABILITY OF FUNDS

To allow public access, anyone may access a meeting by telephone and/or Zoom, or a recording in the City of Norwalk YouTube channel. Specific instructions and links can be found at norwalkct.gov/meetings.

Members of the public may call in to participate. Callers will not be able to see the meeting participants. All participants will be muted upon entering the meeting. To speak, dial *9 on the phone and you will be called on by the host of the meeting during the public comment section. All speakers must state their name and address. Comments must be on a topic on the agenda, and are limited to three minutes. Anyone disrupting the orderly conduct of the meeting, including by using threatening, hateful, or sexually-explicit language, will be removed. Please find the information using the link above.

Members of the public who wish to provide "live comments" may also use the Zoom meeting platform. All participants will be muted upon entering the meeting. To speak, click the "raise your hand indicator" and you will be called by the host of the meeting during the public comment section. All speakers must state their name and address. Comments must be on a topic on the agenda, and are limited to three minutes. Anyone disrupting the orderly conduct of the meeting, including by using threatening, hateful, or sexually-explicit language, will be removed. Please find the information using the link above.

Members of the public who wish to provide public comment are encouraged to submit those via email in advance of the meeting. For these comments to be included into the record, they must be submitted by 12:00 p.m. the day of the meeting. Please email Irene Dixon at idxon@norwalkct.gov with the subject line "Public Comment" to provide written public comment prior to the meeting.

Mayor Rilling called the meeting to order at 7:01 p.m.

I. ROLL CALL

Ms. Dixon called the Roll as follows:

Council at Large:	Mr. Gregory Burnett	Mr. Joshua Goldstein
	Mr. Johan Lopez	Ms. Nora Niedzielski Eichner
	Ms. Barbara Smyth	

District A: Mr. Jalin Sead

District B:

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District C: Ms. Nicole Eaddy Ms. Anne Wennerstrand
District D: Ms. Heather Dunn Mr. Douglas W. Sutton
District E: Mr. James Frayer

At Roll Call there were eleven (11) Common Councilmembers present and four (4) absent (Ms. Ayers, Mr. Wiggins, Ms. Young and Ms. Shanahan). A Quorum was present.

Also present were Mayor, Harry Rilling; City Clerk, Irene Dixon and Corporation Counsel, Mario Coppola.

Ms. Wells called the Roll for the Planning and Zoning Commission as follows:

Jacquen Jordan-Bryon Nicholas Kantor
Diana Lenkowsky Louis Shulman
Ana Tabachneck Gaelen Wells
Darius Williams

Also present: Steven Kleppin, Director of Planning & Zoning and Michelle Andrzejewski, Senior Planner, Planning and Zoning

II. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Public participation comments are not verbatim and represent a summarization of statements unless otherwise noted. Speakers are Norwalk residents unless otherwise noted.

Ms. Diane Keefe read her prepared testimony. She said the process needs to be less restrictive to create affordable housing and ADUs (Accessory Dwelling Units). She said the Monroe Street senior housing complex should add additional units. Ms. Keefe said she was opposed to taking open spaces, but suggested that City owned properties should be converted to City parks. She said that affordable housing near transportation hubs is vitally important. Ms. Keefe suggested a tax abatement for landlords with ADUs who follow certain criteria.

III. NORWALK AFFORDABLE HOUSING PLAN PRESENTATION + Q&A

A. Draft Affordable Housing Action Plan & Appendices

Ms. Andrzejewski, shared her screen and reviewed the plan that was included in the meeting packet.

Question were fielded following the presentation.

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A member of the Planning and Zoning Commission said 40 South Main Street was missing from the report. He explained it is an SRO (single room occupancy) non profit that is deeply affordable. He said it has been in operation for 27 years and is one of the least expensive housing facilities in the City. He said that thanks to Mr. Burnett's intervention, they received COVID funding and also created a CDBG grant. He asked that 40 South Main Street be included in the final version of the report.

Ashley said that SRO buildings in that Zone are not allowed.

Mr. Goldstein said the report was very informative and asked about the recommendation regarding affordable housing property tax incentives. Ashley said this was something she heard about from the development communities.

Ms. Niedzielski Eichner said the *ad hoc* committee will continue and she hopes people will provide additional comments. This is the start of the conversation. She asked about senior housing and best models. Ashley said something they are seeing regionally is that people are over housed; however, there are no affordable places for them to move and it is expensive for them to stay where they are. New housing at all levels is needed. She said there are some programs geared toward senior affordable developments, but they are not being funded as much as housing geared toward family housing.

Mr. Frayer asked about incentives for tax abatements and subsidies. He said in Norwalk, tax subsidies are reducing the tax base. He asked how they can reconcile that and afford the expenses in the City if they give tax abatements and subsidies. Ashley said they have run those subsidies in other communities. In terms of tax abatements creating affordable housing, it needs some public stimulus. Mr. Frayer said he was concerned that the head of HUD said he was not in favor of spending a lot on affordable housing. Mr. Frayer asked what the chances were of increasing federal funding.

Ms. Smyth said she read in the narrative that Norwalk has some of the highest percentage of affordable housing in Fairfield County. She said that puts a burden on the City of Norwalk as well as the schools. Ashley said that helping WestCog advance those goals in surrounding communities is something they can do.

Ms. Niedzielski Eichner asked about models and examples for converting commercial properties to residential. Ashley said White Plains, NY is seeing a lot of these conversions and it is something to look at.

Ms. Niedzielski Eichner asked about examples of housing being built near big box stores. Ashley said there are a couple of examples of housing adjoining big box stores. Mr. Kleppin said they just got an extension for their GIS program so they can model new developments. Ashley said they looked at replica data that tells commuter patterns. She noted there is a sizable amount of people commuting to Norwalk from Stratford and Bridgeport.

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Mr. Lopez asked for clarification in the memo in the appendix. Ashley was asked if she could provide models that were successful for streamlining approval for moderate and affordable housing such as ADUs. She said there is a site in WI and New Rochelle, NY that have good models for streamlining approvals.

Ms. Tabachneck said Norwalk is a place that people come to work at lower wages and she would want to see Norwalk have a larger percentage of affordable housing. She added that by making them deed restricted will prevent them from becoming blighted. She said she hoped the model could be expanded to include the set aside. Ashley said that would require additional scope; each developer has their own factors.

A comment was made that a tax abatement does not have to be 100% of the tax from the site. Mr. Kleppin said they've started looking at ways to provide relief in the regulations. Mr. Frayer said he was not against tax abatement, but would love to see a graph or sliding scale see where the tipping point is. He said it was important to look at what can maximize the development and minimize the impact on the City's tax base. Ms. Wells said tax abatements do not last forever.

Mr. Sead expressed his thanks everyone involved. He said it is a good plan and it is time to get to work; something needs to be done and now is the time to do it.

Ms. Langalis asked where the tipping point is for Norwalk and at what time is the school system and infrastructure over burdened. Ashley said they did not look at the infrastructure capacity and that should be looked at by Planning and Zoning. They looked at the need within Norwalk and almost 14,000 households in Norwalk were cost burdened in 2022.

Ms. Smyth said she was able to find infrastructure data on the City's dashboard and from the data, there is plenty of room.

Mr. Kleppin said the next steps will be that any additional edits will be discussed with Ashley and the team.

Ms. Eaddy asked Mr. Burnett if he could add Ordinance into the report.

III. ADJOURNMENT

**** MR. LOPEZ MOVED TO ADJOURN
** MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY**

There was no further discussion, and the meeting was unanimously adjourned at 8:13 p.m.

ATTEST: _____
Irene Dixon, City Clerk