

**CITY OF NORWALK
ECONOMIC AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE
OF THE COMMON COUNCIL
REGULAR MEETING
DECEMBER 7, 2023**

ATTENDANCE: Joshua Goldstein, Chair; Heather Dunn; James Frayer; Jalin T. Sead Sr.; Margaret (Lisa) Shanahan; Barbara Smyth; Darlene Young

STAFF: Sabrina Godeski

OTHERS: Steve Kleppin, Dept. of planning and zoning;
Brian Bidolli, Norwalk Redevelopment Agency;
Garrett Bolella, Transportation, Mobility, and Parking

CALL TO ORDER

Mr. Goldstein called the meeting to order at 7:06 p.m. A quorum was present.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There was no one from the public who wished to address the Committee at this time.

I. ADMINISTRATION

A. Approval of the Minutes of November 2, 2023 meeting.

****MS. SMYTH MOTIONED TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE NOVEMBER 2, 2023 MEETING.**

****THE MOTION WAS APPROVED WITH THE AMENDMENT OF ADDING JIM FRAYER TO THE ATTENDANCE OF THE NOVEMBER 2, 2023 MEETING WITH TWO (2) IN FAVOR (BARBARA SMYTH AND JIM FRAYER) AND THREE (3) ABSTAINED (HEATHER DUNN, JALIN SEAD, AND JOSHUA GOLDSTEIN)**

II. NEW BUSINESS

A. TRANSPORTATION MOBILITY, AND PARKING

1. Authorize the Mayor, Harry W. Riling to execute an agreement between the City of Norwalk and the Connecticut Department of Transportation (CTDOC) to receive \$800,000 in 2023 Community Connectivity Grant Construction Funding related to the Hospital Hill Village Safety enhancements.

****MS. SHANAHAN MOTIONED TO APPROVE ITEM A OF NEW BUSINESS.**

Mr. Bolella spoke this to accept a grant of \$800,00 to make improvements at the intersection of Stewarts Avenue, Stevens Street, Magnolia Avenue, and Philips Street; it is a traffic circle that is very problematic. The proposal will enhance local business including streetscape improvements and a community parking lot. The Norwalk application was one of the highest ranked out of all applications submitted, one of the seventeen to get the funding, and one of few selected to get the full \$800,000 amount. This would be Mr.Bolella's third connectivity project; the city of Norwalk is currently wrapping up the largest bike lanes on any state route. They are looking to start the project this summer with contracts currently in bid and a community meeting to take place this January.

Ms. Smyth commented that the intersection has been pretty dangerous for pedestrians and she is thrilled this is moving forward. She commended Mr. Bolella and Mr. Frayer is bringing in grants that improve mobility. Ms. Shanahan doubles the comment.

Mr. Sead thanks them for the work that is being done. He added he actually grew up in the area, and his mother is still in the area. He knows a few business and community members are very excited for the plans.

Mr. Goldstein added Mr. Bolella was being modest about the application, it was actually ranked the highest out of all applications.

Mr. Frayer mentioned the most important thing is that it's getting all done for free.

****THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

B. BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT & TOURISM

1. Authorize the Mayor, Harry W. Rilling, to execute a contract with Rough Edge Collection Inc. for the completion of the Monroe Street Underpass Mural in an amount not to exceed \$50,000.

ACCOUNT: 0922-3760-5777

0923-3760-5777

****MR. FRAYER MOTIONED TO APPROVE NEW BUSINESS ITEM B.**

Ms. Godeski shared that the designs were seen by this committee around a year and half ago, and the state was undergoing a process to update their process for art work on their property. The project is set to be on the Monroe street underpass, they got a lot of response from artists, which was narrowed down to three and the Arts and Cultural Commission voted to accept M.J and Joshlin Delawyer. The cost includes getting the equipment, travel for the artist as they are from California, and installing the art work. They are in the process of waiting for a response from the state but there is good news with the easement being approved to install the artwork. The state only has concerns with the installment on the trossel itself, which is an additional part of the project they are asking for but willing to remove that additional.

Ms. Dunn asked what would be the community engagement aspect to the project. Ms. Godeski responded with every installation they host a neighborhood clean up with the community members and when artists are from out of state they like the artist to speak and present the plans to the community.

Ms. Dunn asked if there was an educational component in the budget? Ms. Godeski replied there is an invoice for every component and it is included in their budget. Ms. Dunn asked about how many hours it is all together? Ms. Godeski said it depends, usually the clean up is one to two hours, the art speak is usually an hour and the installation is weather dependent but it should be completed within a week.

Ms. Smyth asked if both designs will be used. Ms. Godeski responded yes, each design will be on each side of the bridge. Ms. Smyth added they are beautiful.

Mr. Sead likes the design but would like to know why they went with an artist from outside of Norwalk. Ms. Godeski responded they did a call for artists in Norwalk who mimic their processes and they didn't get any applications from locals.

****THE MOTION WAS PASSED WITH FIVE (5) IN FAVOR (JAMES FRAYER, BARBARA SMYTH, JUSTIN SEAD, MARGARET SHANHAN, AND JOSHUA GOLDSTEIN) AND TWO (2) OPPOSED (DARLENE YOUNG AND HEATHER DUNN).**

Chairman Godeski wanted each department to speak on the project updates of the various projects going on.

2. Business Development and Tourism project updates.

Ms. Godeski shared her department is tasked with drawing small businesses, helping existing businesses, bringing traffic to Norwalk in ways of tourism. The department also oversees art and cultural commissions. They had been working on the storefront improvement program, with the commission paying 80% and the business paying the 20% to help businesses pay or improve signage, outdoor seating and streetscape. The program has gotten really popular, originally starting with a 50/50 split and with the 80/20 match they get an outstanding amount of applications. Some of the project has been completed in the Downtown and South Norwalk area but it is not targeted towards one area. Just a year ago the council approved the HEBA program, it is a 0% microloan, essentially works as a gofundme account, the business owner can be loaned up to \$15,000. Once the donations make up the amount of money needed the business owner is allowed to spend the funds from a PayPal account. The underwriting is done with a separate vendor so once the business pays back the money it builds their business credit. The last program in the Norwalk Innovation Initiative, this year they had \$85,000 to award from capital and ARPA funds. The program essentially works like a shark tank, the participants must show a business plan, pitch, and be ready to execute their plan. They do not have a set grant amount for recipients, if they favor a business they will give them more. They opened the Business development center next to the library which is based on appointments. Additionally they host all the Halloween and other events to support local business and bring people into the city. On the Art commission side they have the Monroe street mural, Eli Avenue fence coming up soon, which is a community driven project; they also are tackling the West Ave project for the design.

Mr. Goldstein mentioned the last two events were massive hits and the event coordinator did a great job.

Mr. Frayers asked how often do they have the presentations for the innovation fund. Ms. Godeski replied the program just started but their goal is to have one each quarter depending on the funding available. The application phase is open for the second round and it will close at the end of February, the shark tank process will occur in March, and the awarding will take place in April. Once the money pool is solidified, when the budget season comes the goal is to break down the funds to host four times a year. Mr. Frayer said how much money do they give away and Ms. Godeski replied they requested \$250,000 in the capital budget to host the 4 phases of the project. They started with \$185,000 and the remainder will host the second phase for this year.

C. REDEVELOPMENT AGENCY

1. Redevelopment Agency and Project updates.

Mr. Bidolli introduced himself and mentioned the department is a quasi public agency which was created in the 50's to help with redevelopment; their jurisdiction is the urban core, around SONO and West Ave area. The first project is around the SONO train station, they did a comprehensive plan and study of the area regarding the interest of development. A public private partnership came about with Spinnaker real estate partners at 1517 Chestnut Street, the city cut a deal to sell 60 surface parking spaces making way for a larger development pad, mixed use property, and unlocking grant funding. They recently received a 6 million grant from the state for area infrastructure, a million of that amount with the Columbus Court which is an existing condo building for rehabilitation. They just finished the roof and siding of Columbus. Public meetings will be happening soon regarding the infrastructure plans, one occurring on the 18th of December. They are also ready to bid on the underground utility work on Chestnut Street. In the coming month there will be environmental remediation work, they received a \$2 million dollar grant from the state and Federal Environmental Protection Agency to clean up the brownfield contamination on the site.

Ms. Smyth asked to speak on the community engagement Mr. Bidolli has had with the residents of Norwalk. Mr. Bidolli added he has hosted many meeting with the community and different groups; they established a community advisory committee for the project to craft this brand and show what the community wanted to mitigate the area when going to the state.

Ms. Sead asked how long it is going to take for true affordable housing to be in those areas. Mr. Bidolli added the state grant programs are pushing for affordable housing and with the funding they got, it allowed the income band for this development to decrease from 80% SMI to 50% AMI. From a redevelopment perspective, they also have a facade program that helps affordable housing with their maintenance and rehabilitation to preserve locations.

Mr. Frayer asked to explain what is the mechanism to drive the AMI lower, isn't it a state mandated number they need to adhere to. Ms. Bidolli responded what's mandated locally is in the zoning code

which relates to 10% to 80% SMI typically. In terms of driving them down is the grants they find to finance the gap that occurs when developers provide affordable housing.

Mr. Dunn asked about the electrical going underground on Elizabeth Street, are they coordinated in that. Mr. Bidolli responded that it is a DPW project, they are not involved in that project.

Mr. Frayer added they typically do construction and road work all at the same time to cut down time and get things done on one shot. Ms. Dunn mentioned she was just concerned from the standpoint of the traffic, police and emergencies that can occur.

Ms. Young thanked Mr. Bidolli for going out in the community as he went above the standards and thinks South Norwalk does need redevelopment and hopes it is coordinated well and done before schools are open to make things smoother for everyone.

Ms. Smyth added they should take a look at the walkbridge presentation and Public Works committee because it is important now and the work is coming together.

Ms. Young mentioned they can host a bigger meeting on a community level. Mr. Goldstein added they can work with CT DOT as they are managing the construction projects. Ms. Godeski mentioned they host a business meeting four times a year, and at the last meeting they invited the walk bridge organization, CT DOT is working WSP to do communication and community outreach, they presented to businesses owners and everyone in the room. These projects are impacting the city but its not city owned, these organizations can present to the community and committees.

Ms. Dunn asked if there is any geofencing available, they are currently on a school and Meadow Gardens. It would be nice for residents to be updated on transit. Ms. Goldstein mentioned this is all great things to coordinate and respond to.

Ms. Bidolli mentioned with the residential program they are working on, they have 25 projects in the hopper, the applicants have been notified - there is a lot of interest and support for the program. The next project is the underground utility work at 467 West Avenue which is in support of the Pinnacle development project that should be completed in the next couple months. They received \$5 million dollars for the particular area. The harbor loop trail received \$6 million dollars in support of Senator Duff and the state delegation, as an urban act funding to improvements of the property adjacent 140 and 148 East Avenue. The climate action plan is led by the ADHOC sustainability committee, currently pending; the presentation should happen in January. The Web Street lot is actively continuing negotiations, they have done a lot of work redefining the mediation plan. They received \$2 million dollars from the state, \$2 million dollars the EPA, currently working towards a \$5.5 million remediation cost, the environmental consultant is working on the pre-development. They have done public, tenant and business outreach. After the public outreach they went back to the negotiating table with the development and met a mutual understanding that they wouldn't meet the community needs due the adjacent property owner constraints. They moved forward with a second pre-qualified vendor, spincer. In order to reach the community

development objectives, it was very challenging when the parcel was only relegated to the public parcel. They are in active negotiations seeking to do a presentation once things are more finalized.

D. PLANNING AND ZONING

1. Planning and Zoning project updates.

Mr. Kleppin, the director of planning and zoning shared the zoning regulations rewrite is at the finish line, the planning and zoning commission closed the public hearing last night and will close for written comment tomorrow at 10 a.m. The commission will meet next Wednesday and Thursday to discuss correspondence. One concern from the public would be the floodplain regulations and the second concern regarding the recent amendments to the Manresa project coming from the neighbors. He believes the confusion that the plans are proposals but they are really approving the language that will allow them to submit a plan. There are a lot of environmental issues on the site so big portions cannot be developed, they would like to do a conservation on the property to cluster single and duplex styled properties that will be up for sale. They would like to see a trail incorporated around the perimeter of the property for public access with areas to water access. The north of the property is contaminated wetlands and they would like to build a boardwalk to enhance the trail and public access. Points that need to be made are traffic and infrastructure as that potentially will be underwater in the future at high intervals. They will not be proceeding with anything for a minimum of 5 years, DOT is using that for staging of the walkbridge. Assuming the regulations are passed next week, they will be effective sometime in February, consultants will need to make edits on what the commission agrees, confirm corrections, then publish maps and so forth. The commission is looking to loosen up the parking regulations, there was a lot of public comment regarding standards around the transit areas. Having many parking requirements tends to increase the development cost which causes the rents to go higher.

Ms. Young asked what do you mean by loosening up the parking. Mr. Kleppin mentioned the parking standards are formulas and ratios, so for a multifamily property requires a base standard of 1.3 parking spaces per unit, with the new regulations it can go down to 1 space per unit.

Ms. Young asked if that will impact parking on the street. Mr. Kleppin added street parking is regulated by the city and these regulations are related to public property.

Mr. Kleppin mentioned the affordable housing act, they have a consulting group, AKRF working on getting feedback from the community. That plan should be completed mid late 2024, it will feed into different levels of affordability that are required. Planning and Zoning regulations deal with the workforce level, the affordable housing plan identifies all the different demographics, groups of different needs then comes up with programs and regulations to achieve needs.

Ms. Young asked when putting the 10% affordable housing unit, what is the lifespan of the units. Mr. Kleppin in the beginning of the program there were a few units that had expired recently but it was a small amount, everything now is approved in perpetuity. Norwalk has 14% of its housing stock that

complies with the 83g statute, that doesn't necessarily mean they are affordable units because it works for workforce housing. They currently have two levels, 80% of state median income and 60% of state median income.

Ms. Young added she is happy to hear that, is there an opportunity to lower that percentage.

Mr. Kleppin mentioned that was a hot topic in 2019 from affordable housing, the 80% was the problem. Zoning will not be able to solve all these problems. The housing authority is adding more units and working with open doors on some projects and the affordable housing plan - it's going to take a complete local, state and federal plan to meet the different needs they have. They have shared a strategic management plan for the harbor following up on the industrial waterfront study. They have capital funds from last year to look at the nordon site, looking at it from an economic development standpoint, they were hoping for an application to occupy the whole building that the neighbors won't be opposed to. The city was awarded two grants this week, one was half a million dollars for sustainability related infrastructure. There is a lot of funding focusing on resilience and his office is focusing on coastal impact as it relates to vulnerable communities. Related to the CIRCA studies that are wrapping up now, next month they will be going out for an RFP on raising the intersection of Conquered and Day street to raise that from flood levels to keep dry access. The design phase should come out later this month or so. The first phases of the BLT project will be in front of the planning and zoning commission soon; the first phase as a master plan was approved a year ago, with their plans in they should be getting approved in January or February to begin the first phase construction. All other phases are contingent on road improvements, the first major improvement being Glover Avenue Bridge and the completion of the Merit seven interchanges. The last phase of the project cannot begin until road work is approved at Glover Avenue and Gristmill, Main Avenue intersection. The Wall Street permits must be out the door by Monday, hopefully should be done by tomorrow. The one Cemetery Street project in East Norwalk is currently in the demolition phase, starting construction in the spring. They want to work together with the DOT as they also have roadwork projects which would help circulation issues.

Ms. Dunn asked when the BLT project was mentioned, they spoke about a bike continuation to get across or under Gristmill, what's up with that. Mr. Kleppin replied that is the last phase of NRV, he doesn't know the actual status. The BLT has made improvements on their property up until that point.

Ms. Dunn asked so they can complete all the phases before doing that. Mr. Kleppin responded yes, the north seven project which is on the north side of the Glover actually has new trails that are coming in off of the NRV and a park between 2-3 acres. Ms. Dunn added her questions come from the connectivity to BLT to where Walmart is. Mr. Kleppin said that is a question for Jim Travers or Garrett.

Mr. Goldstein added this meeting was to get an update on some departments, next meeting they will be getting an update from TMP and Building Code Enforcement as there is a lot to cover from each department to do all at once.

Ms. Dunn asked if there are any requirements for them to do it in order to do another phase, what if they walk away doing the job appropriately. Mr. Kleppin added he believes they have met the obligations to make their improvements. Ms. Dunn added she has history with Harbor Point in Stamford and they didn't

follow through. Mr. Kleppin responded with the language they wrote for the new development they haven't started yet have specific details on what they can and can't do.

Mr. Sead added the 10% towards workforce and affordable housing, looking at the language and statutes - 10% is not the goal, it is the minimum. Neighboring towns and cities use that as the goal but it is the bare minimum, we should be raising or going over the minimum. Mr. Kleppin mentioned when the statute was created 10% was a rounded number, with the affordable housing studies they are actually coming with what their needs are. Ms. Young added they knew the need, it's just getting there; Mr. Kleppin mentioned the zoning rewrite with it being a long time or this possibility the first time of rewriting it, she asked if the need arises to make change is the document fluid. Mr. Kleppin said the last time the city did a comprehensive rewrite was 30 plus years ago. The regulations put together now compared to 30 years ago, they were small, very structured, and in response to someone wanting something. The city had no plans and where. In regards to housing you can create softer zoning or dense housing, you simply can't build land. As the city grows they can expand boundaries, they can reset and right size them like in the industrial zone study they tried to figure out where they have the zone now, how to reduce conflicts with residential neighborhoods and inappropriate use to area then phase them out.

III. OLD BUSINESS

There was no old business to discuss.

ADJOURNMENT

****MS. SMYTH MOTIONED ADJOURNMENT**

****MOTION WAS PASSED UNANIMOUSLY**

The meeting was adjourned at 8:26 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Vianca Rivera,
Telesco Secretarial Services