CITY OF NORWALK
PLANNING COMMITTEE OF THE COMMON COUNCIL
REGULAR MEETING
MARCH 2, 2017

ATTENDANCE: John Kydes, Chair; Shannon O'Toole-Giandurco, Doug Hempstead, Tom Livingston, John Igneri, Faye Bowman, Travis Simms

STAFF: Tami Strauss, Community Development Planning Director; Elizabeth Stocker, Economic Development Director

OTHERS: Warren Peña, South Norwalk Community Center; Katherine Villanueva, the SoNoCC Chief Operating Officer; Ms. Mellodye "Sweets" Ragin, SoNo Entertainment and Recording Studio; Donut Ragin, SoNo Entertainment and Recording Studio; Peter Propp, Northeast Community Innovation Corporation.

CALL TO ORDER.

Mr. Kydes called the meeting to order at 6:43 p.m.

ROLL CALL

Mr. Kydes called the roll. A quorum was present.

PUBLIC HEARING
Regarding Draft PY 43 Annual Action Plan.

Mr. Kydes opened the public hearing on the Draft PY 43 Annual Action Plan at 6:44 p.m.

Mr. Warren Peña from the South Norwalk Community Center (SoNoCC) came forward to address the Committee. He thanked the Committee for their support in the past. He said that there had been a tremendous amount of renovations going on in the building in the past three years including the addition of three classrooms and five new bathrooms, one of which is handicapped accessible. There were also some remodeling of two other bathrooms, the atrium and the addition of a reception area.

Mr. Peña said that there had been a number of questions about the building and reminded everyone that they had applied for grant funding three times in the past five years. The last two grant cycles, they did not request funding. He apologized for the fact that there was no one present at the February meeting. Mr. Peña explained that he was out of town on business and that Ms. Villanueva, the SoNoCC Chief Operating Officer, had been out of the office because of illness.

Mr. Peña said that he wanted to clarify some misunderstandings. The SoNoCC is currently occupying some space on the second floor temporarily because of the construction work going on. Once the work is completed downstairs, the SoNoCC offices will move back downstairs again. The second floor will be available for the City to use.

He added that once the City settles the bankruptcy situation, the SoNoCC and the City will be co-owners of the building and have use of the second floor.

Currently the request is for working on the reception area to install a seating area. This would be important in understanding the pulse of the building and also add four administrative offices. This will reconfigure the area and make it friendly and a warmer environment for the constituents that they serve.

He asked that the Committee reconsider the request because this is the last phase of the work that has to be done on the building.

Ms. Villanueva came forward to speak about the various programs that the SoNoCC offers, including housing applications, translation services, 12 step programs, reading programs, ESL programs and summer programs for children. There is also the ability to provide space for the community to hold events there.

Mr. Livingston said that he and Mr. Igneri had stopped by the Center and had been impressed by the level of activity that was going on there. He said that he particularly appreciated the tax program.

Mr. Hempstead asked if there was a materials vs. labor breakdown. He mentioned that there were still uncertainties with NEON and the bankruptcy. Having the new classrooms is a positive thing, but the bankruptcy issue has dragged out for 2 1/2 years.

Mr. Peña said that he would like to update everyone on the bankruptcy issue. He went on to say that there had been many talks with the YMCA utilizing the second floor and he believed it would go to an RPF. Regarding the bankruptcy situation, there has been a tentative settlement agreement with the bankruptcy trustee for a year and a half. The City needs to act on this within the next month, otherwise the settlement will not go through. If the agreement is confirmed, SoNoCC will be co-owners of the building with the City. Mr. Peña said that he believed that the agreement would work out.

Mr. Kydes said that the agreement was for a partnership for the entire building. Mr. Peña agreed and said that historically, the SoNoCC was operating on the first floor and NEON had the second floor. He then gave an overview of the history and said that while the Y was the only serious group that was considering the second floor, the new operating agreement would allow for the second floor tenant to have access to the first floor classrooms while the SoNoCC could have use of the second floor conference room as needed.

Mr. Kydes thanked Mr. Peña and Ms. Villanueva for their presentation.

Ms. Mellodye "Sweets" Ragin of the ChoZen Few Entertainment L.I.F.T Digital Music program came forward to address the Committee with her partner, Donut. She thanked everyone for their past help. She said that they desperately needed funding this year because the LIFT Program just gained traction with the community. The NAACP just awarded the LIFT Program the Entertainment of the Year award. Ms. Ragin said that the LIFT program had trained the student who presented the award in many of the technical issues. The request was for 20 students, but they would be happy with any funding they received. For 10 years, the group managed to present the program using their own funding and their own equipment but they need financial assistance.

The funding will be used to produce a Public Service Announcement (PSA). Last year, the PSA was on non-violence and the previous year it was on Distracted Driving and Texting. This year, the focus would be "Identically Different", which would highlight the commonality between groups that may be diverse. It is important with all the political issues to remind people that we are all still one group. The video was premiered at the South Norwalk Movie Theater at the end of the summer. Some of them are also on the SoNo Entertainment.com program Facebook page.

Ms. Ragin then spoke about the NAACP Entertainment Award they recently received for the work that they did in the Community with the LIFT Program and other outreaches such as the May 27th fund raising Father/Daughter dinner at Stepping Stones. Last summer, they were able to have a LIFT carnival for the first time. She mentioned that they were able to go to Newtown to make the students there smile. She mentioned the possibility of having a Ferris wheel along the Norwalk River.

Ms. Ragin then spoke about Jessica Washington, who is now able to work in the fashion industry in New York. She got her start through the LIFT program and additional information about Ms. Washington is on the website.

Ms. Bowman asked if they would be willing to accept some limited funding. Ms. Ragin said that they would. If they have to scale back the program, they will see what they can do. She said that she just wanted to keep the community smiling about the projects.

Mr. Hempstead asked for clarification on the previous projects. Ms. Ragin said that one was called "One Bullet, Nine Lives" and "Distracted Texting and Driving". Donut said that if anyone present was interested in acting in any of the videos, they would be welcomed. The Norwalk Police Department assisted in one of the videos.

Mr. Livingston asked how many students were participating in the program. Ms. Ragin said that there were a solid 20 students. They are hoping to expand the program.

Mr. Kydes asked if the funding would be used to produce the video and the students would be participating in the video. Ms. Ragin said that this was so. It is important to see everyone on the big movie screen because their family and friends will be watching. This is done during the afterschool and during the summer. Donut said that they were talking to various groups about developing an after school program, but it is primarily done during the summer months of July and August. The program was designed to keep the kids occupied during the summer. They also work with the parents to encourage the students to come. Mr. Simms pointed out that the students are learning the ins and outs of the various tasks. Ms. Ragin said that they have placed students with the Palace Theater as a Public Assistant (P.A.) for the day.

Mr. Kydes asked what the ages of the students were. Ms. Ragin said that they ranged from 6 years old through high school. The goal is to encourage people to be more responsible and to make sure the older students realize the younger ones are looking up to them.

Mr. Kydes thanked Ms. Ragin for their presentation.

**** MR. HEMPSTEAD MOVED TO CLOSE THE PUBLIC HEARING.**
**** THE MOTION TO CLOSE THE PUBLIC HEARING PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

The public hearing closed at 7:15 p.m.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

January 26, 2017 Regular Minutes

**** MR. KYDES MOVED THE MINUTES OF JANUARY 26, 2017.**
**** THE MOTION TO APPROVE THE JANUARY 26, 2017 REGULAR MINUTES PASSED WITH FIVE IN FAVOR (KYDES, IGNERI, LIVINGSTON, O'TOOLE-GIANDURCO AND SIMMS) AND TWO ABSTENTIONS (BOWMAN AND HEMPSTEAD).**

January 30, 2017 Regular Meeting

The following correction was noted:

Page 1, under **ATTENDANCE**: please change "Sharon O'Toole-Giandurco" to "Shannon O'Toole-Giandurco"

Mr. Hempstead requested that these minutes be tabled to verify his attendance at the meeting.

**** MR. KYDES MOVED TO TABLE THE JANUARY 30, 2017 REGULAR MINUTES.**
**** THE MOTION TO TABLE THE JANUARY 30, 2017 REGULAR MINUTES PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

February 2, 2017 Regular Meeting

**** MR. KYDES MOVED THE MINUTES OF FEBRUARY 2, 2017 REGULAR MEETING.**
**** THE MOTION TO APPROVE THE JANUARY 26, 2017 REGULAR MINUTES PASSED WITH SIX IN FAVOR (BOWMAN, HEMPSTEAD, KYDES, IGNERI, LIVINGSTON, O'TOOLE-GIANDURCO AND) AND ONE ABSTENTIONS (SIMMS).**

BUSINESS.

**** MR. HEMPSTEAD MOVED TO SUSPEND THE RULES TO ADD AN ITEM TO THE AGENDA.**
**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

Ms. Stocker, the Redevelopment Economic Development Director and Mr. Propp, the Chief Marketing Officer for the Stamford Innovation Center came forward to address the Committee.

Mr. Kydes said that there was a grant that Ms. Stocker and the Redevelopment Agency had been working on and this item was referred to the Committee.

Ms. Stocker thanked the Committee for adding this to the Committee agenda. She introduced Mr. Propp, who is working with the Northeast Community Innovation Corporation (NCIC) regarding an implementation grant for the City of Norwalk. She directed everyone's attention to the information packet and the copies of the previous planning grant that was awarded for formulating and discovering whether Norwalk has the infrastructure available to promote the State project. This project is coming through CT Next, which is the Innovation arm for CT Innovations. CT Innovations developed this program two years ago and the legislation passed in the spring of 2016.

Mr. Propp and his partner wish to submit an application for an implementation grant and this requires a support letter from the Mayor. In order to obtain this letter, it would require the Council's approval. There are no costs that are involved.

Mr. Livingston asked for clarification on the two grants. Ms. Stocker said that there were in fact, two grants involved. Mr. Propp explained that the State passed a bill in May or

June asking municipalities to submit a planning grant proposal. That is the grant proposal that was submitted and awarded. That is funding that is currently being used to assess the various opportunities, resources and capabilities for Norwalk.

Mr. Livingston asked if CT Innovations was involved. Mr. Propp said that they were the ones that granted the funds. Mr. Livingston asked if they would be involved in the future. Mr. Propp said they would be.

Mr. Livingston asked what the group planned to do with the funding if they received it. Mr. Propp said that they were in the process of deciding that because they were focused on a few different industries where they could see some start up ideas and the creation of jobs in Norwalk. Mr. Livingston asked if they would set up an incubator space. Mr. Propp said that it was a possibility and the Stamford Innovation Center had done this. If it works out, they will be generating interesting conversation about making downtown more exciting. Mr. Livingston said he was familiar with the concept through his work at Yale Entrepreneur Institute, and felt it was a wonderful idea.

Mr. Kydes asked Mr. Propp if they would be working in collaboration with the Redevelopment Agency. Mr. Propp said that they work together all the time. Mr. Kydes wished to know if the Agency would be presenting these projects for approval.

Ms. Bowman said that they had received the grant for planning. Mr. Propp said that they had. Ms. Bowman said that this meant there was some kind of plan in place. Mr. Propp said it was about gathering ideas and connecting people. Food and beverages have developed in Norwalk in the past and this is an area of interest. He said that they did not know what the plan was just yet but they were starting to work through it. The final plan is due on April 1st and they were developing the elements of the plan. One part of the process was to obtain a letter of support from the Mayor. Ms. Bowman said that the Committee would like to see the plan.

She then asked who would be part of the planning group. Mr. Propp said that as they developed the ideas, it would include people from the private sector, people from the public sector, people who have an interest in the various industries and also those interested in developing downtown. He said that he would be happy to share the information with them. Ms. Strauss clarified that the Committee wanted to see the plan before she voted to approve the letter of support.

Ms. Bowman said that there were a variety of people who had interests in South Norwalk, such as herself and Mr. Simms, but they don't have much information about this. Ms. Bowman said that she had questions about the five member steering committee, which she felt was too small. She also asked if there were tax breaks involved. She was told there were no taxes breaks involved.

Ms. Bowman said that the Committee needed to see the Plan and be kept informed. She said that the Committee may not agree with parts of the plan and gave an example of a recent problem with the Parking Authority. Mr. Propp said that a conversation would be great and that as more of the plan falls into place, it would become more clearly defined. Ms. Bowman said that she would be interested in seeing a draft.

Mr. Kydes said that it sounded like this had been going on for a while. Ms. Stocker said that the grant was only approved in October and CT Innovations just got involved in January. A draft application was submitted on March 1st. Ms. Stocker spoke about an "Idea Gym" at Stepping Stones that was held at Stepping Stones and was well attended. Mr. Propp said that the State wants the groups to be very excited about this program and mentioned that the Wall Street Theater may be involved.

Mr. Kydes asked if the group would be coming back to the City for funding to implement the plan. Mr. Propp said that there were not be any costs to the City. In the future, as they explore opportunities, it may change, but there is no financial obligation at this time.

Mr. Hempstead said that he would like some clarification. He asked who was involved in the group. Mr. Propp said that he was involved in a newly created non-profit corporation, the Northeast Community Innovation Corporation (NCIC), to do projects like this. He said that they had given the Mayor a quick presentation and suggested that the City become involved in this.

Mr. Hempstead asked if the previous grant funding was paying Mr. Propp to apply for the next grant. Mr. Propp said that the previously awarded grant they received was allowing them to apply for the grant funding for implementation of the plan under development. Discussion followed about those involved in developing this venture, including Ms. Bradley from the Norwalk Library, someone from Norwalk Community College, the theater, the Redevelopment Agency and others.

Mr. Hempstead asked if there was any information about the group. Ms. Stocker said it was in the information packet she handed out.

Mr. Hempstead said that NCIC was asking for a letter in order to apply for State grant funding. Ms. Stocker said that they were looking for the Council's support to apply for the Innovations grant for Norwalk. First, they issued Planning Grants. Twelve communities were awarded planning grants. The next stage is for implementation.

Mr. Hempstead asked how the individuals were chosen. Mr. Propp said that they were chosen because they were anchor institutions. Ms. Stocker added that CT Next set forth the requirements for choosing the steering members. It is a collaboration of the different groups.

Mr. Simms said that he would like clarification on the process that the small businesses who would need these services would be required to perform. Mr. Propp said that there would be an innovation program on March 30th, and the businesses were welcomed to attend. The legislative bill sets aside 25 million over the next five years for this program. The goal is for Norwalk to compete for this money.

Mr. Simms asked where the funding was for running the program or if NCIC was going to ask the City to provide space to run the program. Mr. Propp said that they were not asking for space at this time nor was it their intent to do so.

Mr. Igneri asked for simplification about planning. He then asked them to give an overview of what an innovation plan was. Mr. Propp said that five years ago, the State had created a Jobs Bill and out of that, the Innovation program started to help people create jobs. The State then focused on creating the investments in downtowns.

Ms. O'Toole-Giandurco asked if the Committee could get a copy of the draft that was submitted on March 1st. Mr. Propp said that he did not have it with him. The draft that was submitted was a technical draft and subject to change. He said that he would like to schedule a time to talk to the Committee about the basis entrepreneur concepts.

Mr. Livingston said that he had worked with CT Innovations and CT Next, so for him, it was a "no brainer". He said that he felt the City should jump at this, but understood that people were not familiar with the process and what was involved. He said that he was willing to work with CT Innovations to create a presentation that would answer the questions. This would help the City encourage businesses to start and develop.

Mr. Simms said that while it sounds nice, however, he pointed out that it sounded like the Redevelopment Agency was already entrenched with the program and were pushing the agenda. Mr. Simms said that he would like to see some transparency because this did not set a good precedence with the information coming in so late and the pressure to approve the plan without seeing it. He said that he would like to look at this more in depth and what the City would be on the hook for. Having a timeline for the grant application is not enough to just approve it. He said that he was apprehensive about this. While it might be cutting edge, he said that he would like more back up before he would give it his support.

Mr. Propp said that the deadline was April 1st, so for him, there was plenty of time, but for the Committee members it was different. However, without the letter, they would not be able to file. Ms. Stocker pointed out that the application was just released to them three weeks earlier and she just read the application herself last week. This is a very fast paced environment. Prior to that, the information was simply not available.

Mr. Simms said that the April 1st deadline was fast tracking the proposal. He then asked how far in advance did the group need the letter before the deadline. Ms. Stocker said that once the Council had approved it, the Mayor could sign the letter.

Mr. Hempstead pointed out that almost everyone on the Planning Committee were members of the Finance Committee. He suggested that the Planning Committee schedule a meeting before the Finance Committee on March 9th. Discussion followed.

Ms. Bowman pointed out that this was a implementation grant for a plan that they have not seen. She said that there are statements that a proposed plan is just a written draft and then when it comes before the Council for approval, it can't be changed because it is "in the plan". This is why the Committee members need to see the draft plan. She asked that it be emailed to the Committee so they can review it. Mr. Hempstead requested that they get a simple flowchart.

**** MR. HEMPSTEAD MOVED TO REQUEST THE CHAIRMAN TO SCHEDULE A SPECIAL MEETING FOR THE PLANNING COMMITTEE ON THURSDAY, MARCH 9, 2017 AT 6:30 P.M. IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBERS.**
**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

ADJOURNMENT

**** MS. O'TOOLE-GIANDURCO MOVED TO ADJOURN.**
**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

The meeting adjourned at 7:50 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

S. L. Soltes
Telesco Secretarial Services