

**CITY OF NORWALK
ECONOMIC AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE
REGULAR MEETING
FEBRUARY 1, 2024**

ATTENDANCE: Joshua Goldstein; Chair; Heather Dunn; James Frayer; Jalen Sead;
Barbara Smyth; Lisa Shanahan; Darlene Young (7:08 p.m.)

OTHERS: Jessica Vonashek, Chief of Economic and Community Development
Sabrina Godeski, Director of Business Development and Tourism
Garrett Bolella, Transportation, Mobility and Parking Assistant Director;
James Travers, Hannah Brockhaus, Michael Morehouse, FHI; Diane Cece,
Greg Pacielli, Bike/Walk Committee; Bill Ireland, Building Official;
Stephen Ivan, Redevelopment Housing Development Project Manager

CALL TO ORDER

Mr. Goldstein called the meeting to order at 7:02 p.m.

ROLL CALL

Mr. Goldstein called the roll and announced that there was a quorum present.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Mr. Goldstein gave a brief overview of the rules for Public Comment.

Ms. Diane Cece of Olmstead Place greeted the Committee. She said that her comments relates to the neighborhood and asked if there would be a recap of the Transportation, Mobility and Parking project report. She asked for an update from Mr. Travers on the East Norwalk residential parking passes. This was not mentioned in the 2023 department review and has come up in the POCD report and repeatedly in other meetings. She said that she was disappointed that this was not addressed.

Ms. Cece said that it was time for the Olmstead Place “Don’t Block the Box” hash mark painting. She said there was an agreement for a post implementation audit on accident rates at that intersection. Enforcement is very difficult there but people are still interested in knowing the results of the audit. She said that the project status was either coming up or overdue as a post audit.

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

I. ADMINISTRATION

A. Approval of the Minutes of January 4, 2024 meeting.

**** MS. DUNN MOVED THE MINUTES OF THE JANUARY 4, 2024 MEETING.**

**** THE MOTION TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE JANUARY 4, 2024 MEETING AS SUBMITTED PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

Council President Young joined the meeting at 7:08 p.m.

II. NEW BUSINESS

Mr. Goldstein said that while there was an update from Transportation, Mobility and Parking (TMP), Mr. Stephen Ivan from the Norwalk Redevelopment Agency was present to give a very brief overview of the Community Development Block Grants (CDBG) funding and process.

Mr. Ivan said that the CDBG were scheduled for the March 7th ECD meeting. The Committee members will be receiving a brief email outlining the process, key dates and a summary of the broad categories. After that, the Redevelopment staff will work with the ECD Committee to develop recommendations for the subrecipients' funding that is annually supplied by HUD. The Redevelopment Agency is responsible for overseeing the distribution and use of those funds through the Annual Action Plan. He said that he would be happy to answer any of the Committee's questions.

Mr. Goldstein said that the Committee members would be receiving copies of the information books in the coming weeks. Mr. Ivan said that digital copies will be sent to all the Committee Members but if anyone wants a hard copy, a binder with the information will be supplied.

A. TRANSPORTATION, MOBILITY, AND PARKING

• Complete Streets discussion

Mr. Goldstein said that the Committee would be receiving the physical copies upon request. Digital copies will be sent to

Mr. Bolella, the Assistant Director for Transportation MP, greeted the Committee. He said that Mr. Michael Morehouse from FHI, the lead consultant on the project, would be presenting a proposed policy and Mr. Bolella said that they hoped to present this project to the Council for approval.

Mr. Morehouse then narrated a PowerPoint slide deck on Complete Streets. He spoke about how the City could create Complete Streets that are comfortable and safe for all ages, all abilities and all modes.

Mr. Morehouse explained that over time, the streets moved from being available to all modes of travel to primarily for cars. Sidewalk gained impediments so that people could no longer walk side by side. Curbside spaces can be used for parking, for bike lanes or for outside dining. This curbside space is often referred to as “Flex Space”.

Norwalk is being recognized as one of the best small cities to live in. Mr. Morehouse said that he had spoken to many new residents who felt Norwalk was perfect for their life style. The Planning and Engineering Departments has been making major strides in address dangerous intersections and increasing bike lanes. He also noted that the City had set some goals in the 2019 POCD.

Mr. Morehouse said that they would have to set a legal foundation for policy and implement an integration plan in terms of street design and modification. Engagement is also important by keeping the public informed.

Mr. Morehouse then displayed two maps, one that should functional street maps and a map showing the complete streets. The functional streets principally serve to funnel residents to where they have to go and are biased towards automobiles. Complete Streets give the designers more flexibility by establishing a vision to show the typology. He went on to give the details of the various steps for laying out what a road should look like and which design tools are used.

He then displayed a slide showing the key points for establishing a policy including making Complete Streets a priority, institutionalizing CS across all departments, providing clear guidance to the City Staff and external organizations, creates accountability and public feedback mechanisms among others. He also reviewed the three different means of implementing the policies, such as Executive Order, policy or ordinance along with a chart showing case studies and Best Practice, including Vision Zero goals.

The company hopes to do a temporary project at the intersection of North Main and Ann Street using paint and flexible bollard that would allow street side dining in the spring.

Ms. Shanahan said that the presentation was very good and they laid the basis for why the ordinance was needed in Norwalk. Discussion followed.

Mr. Goldstein asked for a timeline that was more firm than theoretical. Mr. Morehouse said that they would be meeting with the advisory group to make sure the integration plan is something that everyone can live with. They hope to wrap up the design phase in the next few months. They would like to have a firm set of draft materials by the summer. In the future, they may have to make updates every few years. Discussion followed.

Mr. Sead asked if the group had met with the fire department, police department and EMS about these ideas. Ms. Brockhaus said that in the initial phases, they had spoken to the various department including DPW about the various concepts. Mr. Morehouse said that the recommendations were not prescriptive and the design was still in the hands of the designers. They are giving the City a better set of tools for programing the public right of way.

Ms. Dunn said that the UPS trucks were everywhere and as someone who uses a bike for transportation, she wished to know if this had been addressed. Mr. Morehouse said that one of the things that they are trying to include is all modes of transportation. Ms. Brockhaus said that these concerns about loading and unloading zones should be included in discussions with the designers. Mr. Morehouse said that most bike accidents happen at curb cuts and intersections. There is

Mr. Goldstein said that it sounded like they were on the right time and would be checking in with them in the next few months.

Mr. Goldstein said that Mr. Ireland was on the call to discuss the role of the Building Department.

• Transportation, Mobility, and Parking project updates.

Mr. Goldstein displayed the annual report from Transportation, Mobility, and Parking. Mr. Travers said that the report reflects the work that was done last year. He said this was also a resource for the Committee about that the Transportation, Mobility, and Parking sees as their mission. Last year, they submitted a grant request for \$40 million dollars. They are trying to create an effect across all the transportation modes such as traffic signals. Norwalk is the first City in the State to adopt adaptive traffic signal technology. Previously, the lights were just on a timing switch, but now the signals will learn the ebb and flow of traffic and hopefully reduce vehicle emissions.

He spoke about how the Wall Street project morphed into a major \$27 million dollar construction project. The City has \$19 million secured and they are looking to do a ground breaking in April, along with securing another amount of grant funding to make the project primarily grant funded.

Mr. Travers said that he thought there were looking forward to a ribbon cutting on a major project in the coming weeks. He also spoke about some community grant meetings that will take place on Hospital Hill. Mr. Travers said that there had been a sidewalk project that had not materialized for many years, but now the project is moving forward. Utility poles are being moved, drainage plans are being created and the permit requests have been filed with the State. He said that often if the City has a plan, the funding source can be identified. The Highland Avenue staircase has been completed. There are weekly meetings with DPW to make sure they are working in coordination with the Department on bike lanes. The group also works closely with the CT DOT about the 150 traffic signals in the City, 90 of the signals are managed by the City and the remaining 60 are the State's, but the lights do not communicate to one another.

Mr. Bolella said that they are receiving one to two requests a day, including filling sidewalk ramps, replacement of signs, and smaller design projects. Some projects are merged into Capital

Projects and addressed over time. There is also development review underway for proposed projects.

Mr. Travers said that they were working through the final selection for the Route 1 study, which is a major transportation hub and a destination for big box stores and other retailers. Two million in funding has been secured from the Parking Authority for improvements at the Yankee Doodle Garage. New pay stations has been installed and consistent signage has been installed at the train stations.

He said that they were measuring the number of miles of sidewalks and where the crashes occur. While Norwalk's number was relatively flat, the goal is to have zero. The streets that have the highest number of cars will have the highest number of crashes, but there are streets with the lower number of vehicles, but a higher number of crashes, which is why Hospital Hill was selected for improvement.

Ms. Smyth commended Mr. Travers on his grant writing ability. This is the kind of work that will transform the City. Mr. Travers said that he had a great team and that work depends on the Council's support.

Mr. Frayer asked said that the report was phenomenal. He wished to know if they could sustain the same level of grant awards. Mr. Travers said that this administration has put forward more transportation awards than others. He said that there has been some very visible projects but they have also been busy with background planning like Seaview Avenue. Discussion followed.

Ms. Dunn asked about the residential parking pass. Mr. Travers said that the Parking Authority only can manage the metered parking spaces. He explained that they have been working on a baseline for this issue and a policy to manage it. Ms. Dunn asked what kind of roadmap would be available for the residents. The ordinance would have to be amended to allow the Parking Authority to address this. It is a complicated issue since there are residences that don't have driveways. They will have to continue to work with the Council to change the ordinance. Discussion followed about signage, sign pollution and managing curb side.

Ms. Dunn said that there were residents who live in multifamily buildings and they own multiple cars, which take up the parking. When people park too close to the corner, drivers take more risks because they are frustrated.

Council President Young asked about commercial trucks parking on residential streets. Mr. Travers said that it was complex issue because landscaping trucks are someone's livelihood. He said they need to work with the Police Department and find out what the best practices are. Council President Young said that these problems happen in densely populated areas. Mr. Sead said that this was also a problem in District A. Mr. Travers said that outside of the metered areas, the only ability to ticket rests with the Police Department. Discussion followed.

Mr. Travers said that there was an on-going need to address issues. He said that they have been working on systematically issues and they will continue to do so. Council President Young said that since Mr. Travers and his team have been listening when she contacts them about problems.

B. BUILDING AND CODE ENFORCEMENT

1. Building and Code Enforcement updates.

Mr. Ireland said that that he was the Chief Building Inspector for the City of Norwalk. He said that his department was responsible for enforcing the current and past building codes to insure that there is code compliance for all construction projects. This encompasses new construction and renovations including electrical, plumbing, heating installations and major repairs. Currently, the Department has issues 2,735 permits. The Department has generated revenue of \$2,430,000. The project revenue is \$3,300,000. He added that they expect to substantially exceed that amount.

The current projects underway include Pinnacle on West Avenue, the West Cedar Street Oak Grove Residential Project, Wegman's store on Connecticut Avenue, Monroe Street residential unit project, the Lockwood Mathews Mansion renovation project, and the Fullen Road Senior Residential Project. There are also a number of renovations at various businesses and additions to private residences along with new swimming pools. He also listed a number of recently completed projections including Newtown Avenue residences, Aiken Street and the Cranbury School renovations. Phase 1 of the Knight Street project has been completed and Phase 2 of that project is currently underway.

The Norwalk High School Plan Review has been completed and the SoNo School plan will be reviewed before they submit it to the State. A plan for a 50 unit development at 17 Isaac Street has been completed as part of the 61 Wall Street project. Demolition permits for the YMCA residential project have been filed. Target will be moving into the former Walmart location on Connecticut Avenue.

Mr. Ireland then explained that they have unsafe structures in Norwalk and he is the Chair of the Condemnation Board. The Board makes recommendations to the owners or orders potential demolitions. These decisions are supported by the Health Department, the Fire Marshal and the Zoning Department.

Mr. Ireland also responds to fire calls 24/7 when needed and this includes accidents where cars strike buildings.

Blight is also part of the departments responsibilities. The staff assesses the properties and follow State statutes to enforce the law. Currently, they have collected over \$500,000 in fine fees which is used to help remedy the properties as they go along.

Mr. Ireland is also the ADA Officer for the City and the School District. This means he reviews all new and existing buildings for compliance.

Mr. Ireland said that the future goals include streamlining the permitting process. This has been done with the trade permits and minor building permits. Implementing an online application system in the future is also being discussed. Customer Service is a priority and the staff tries to get back to everyone promptly, but that is not always possible. They try to perform inspections as quickly as possible .

Code Compliance is dictated by the State but the ordinances are also part of the Department's building code and regulation enforcement. The Fire Marshal's Office provides regular site inspections but the Building Department provides a monthly state approved education class for designers, contractors and the public at the Norwalk Inn for the last 13 years. Participants pay for their lunch, but the presentation is free. The Department also participates in the OSHA safety standards to ensure safety for the residents.

The staff promotes community engagement and talk to residents when they are in the field. Professional development and training is ongoing. Mr. Ireland presents the Mayor with an annual Financial Report and Demolition reports.

Mr. Goldstein said that he visited the Building Department and it is quite something else. There are many projects underway and Mr. Ireland and his team are providing immense value to the City. Council President Young thanked Mr. Ireland for all his hard work. Mr. Sead said that he works with propane and that the Building Department is very responsive and quicker than many of the surrounding towns and cities.

III. OLD BUSINESS

The next meeting will be the CDBG meeting which will be held virtually. That meeting will begin at 6:00 p.m. because each of the presenters have a few minutes to present.

ADJOURNMENT

**** MS. DUNN MOVED TO ADJOURN.**

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

The meeting adjourned at 9:06 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

S. L. Soltes
Telesco Secretarial Services

City Of Norwalk
Economic And Community Development Committee
Regular Meeting
February 1, 2024