

**CITY OF NORWALK
PLANNING COMMITTEE OF THE COMMON COUNCIL
REGULAR MEETING
JANUARY 7, 2016**

ATTENDANCE: John Kydes, Chair; John Igneri. Tom Livingston, Faye Bowman, (7:00 p.m.), Travis Simms (7:00 p.m.)

OTHERS: Tim Sheehan, Redevelopment Director; Tami Strauss, Community Development Planning Director Susan Sweitzer, Senior Development Project Manager; Council Member Bruce Kimmel; Jackie Lightfield, Norwalk 2.0; Emily Innes, Cecil Group; Ms. Jeannette Archer-Simons, Open Door Shelter Executive Director; Arthur Greenblatt, Vesta Corporation; Peter Saverine, STAR Director of Philanthropy; Ms. Denise L Cesareo, ElderHouse Executive Director; Mr. Marcus Boyer, Norwalk Housing Authority Construction Project Manager; Mr. Bob White, Hilltop Homes President; Ms. Novelette Peterkin, Carver Foundation Executive Director; Ms. Amy Perry, Carver Center Administrative Manager; Ms. Johnny Malloy, Liberation Program; Ms. Ceci Maher, Person-to-Person Executive Director; Mr. John "Dolo" Regin, SoNo Entertainment and Recording Studio; Mellodye "Sweets" Ragin, SoNo Entertainment and Recording Studio; Ms. Elizabeth Murdock, Family and Children's Agency; Dr. Gail Melanson, the Clinical Director and Interim Executive Director of the Child Guidance Center of Mid-Fairfield County; Mr. Anthony Crisci, Triangle Community Center Executive Director; Mayor Harry Rilling; Ms. Akisha Cassermere, Breakthrough Options for Families, Inc. President; Mr. Tristam, Breakthrough Options for Families, Inc.; Ms. Laura Epstein, Senior Services Coordinating Council; Mr. Sean O'Brien, Homefront Executive Director; Ms. Rachelle Kucera-Maher, Domestic Violence Crisis Center

CALL TO ORDER

Mr. Kydes called the meeting to order at 6:36 p.m. A quorum was not present.

I. APPROVAL OF MINUTES OF DECEMBER 3, 2015 REGULAR MEETING

**** MR. IGNERI MOVED THE MINUTES OF THE DECEMBER 3, 2015 MEETING.**

(There was not a quorum. Therefore, this item was tabled.)

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Ms. Jackie Lightfield said that she would like to make her usual statement regarding her recommendation that someone from the Planning and Zoning staff should be present at this meeting. With all the construction going on, there will be many road closures that will happen next fall. These closures will impact not only the normal traffic but also the school bus routes. The City should start planning now rather than next fall.

II. BUSINESS

A. RESPONSIBLE DEVELOPMENT AND TOD GRANT

1. Authorize submission of grant application for the TOD Housing Pilot Program.

Ms. Sweitzer came forward to speak about the application and said that the TOD program application requires a Council resolution for approval. She updated the Committee about the two deed restricted properties, which are nearing completion.

Mr. Kydes said that he liked this program a great deal. Mr. Sheehan said that this would increase the affordable housing stock. Mr. Kydes said that if there was no quorum available before the end of the meeting, he would move this to the Council.

B. TRANSIT ORIENTATED DEVELOPMENT

1. Overview of TOD Plan by Cecil Group

Mr. Sheehan said that the Council has authorized the Redevelopment Agency to merge four TOD (Transit Orientated Development) plans into one new plan. The four original plans were somewhat dated and there were a number of Zoning regulations that accompanied them.

Ms. Emily Innes from the Cecil Group came forward and spoke about the TOD around the South Norwalk Train Station. She then narrated a PowerPoint summary of the upcoming February presentation on TOD. There was a great deal of public input and the steering committee then contacted various business owners in the area about this. The points include Transit Oriented Development center on, pedestrian friendly streets, public transit and lower parking density. The creation of more jobs in the area and various other topics are included. The presentations were multi-lingual in order to reach out to the community. The goals for the neighborhoods is having pedestrian friendly streets and inviting local businesses and new businesses into the area is also critical. The plan incorporates steps to make the area safe and increase diversity in housing and cultures. The circulation of the vehicles and the safety and security of the residents are also included in the strategies.

Mr. Kimmel asked about the zoning changes for the area. Ms. Innes said that there were still some open questions and these would be discussed in February. Mr. Sheehan said that the changes had been forwarded to the Mayor's Task Force and these changes have been advanced out of the Task Force Committee with the Task Force's comments. They have not been forwarded to the full Zoning Commission. Mr. Kimmel asked what the next steps would be in the process. Mr. Sheehan said that the Committee had been fully briefed on the Redevelopment Plan and the Master Plan. This will be discussed in February and March. Ms. Innes said that while the Executive Summary was included in the information, the entire plan was available on the website.

C. COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT BLOCK GRANT (CDBG)

1. Presentation of CDBG Application for Program Year 42

Mr. Kydes said that each group would have 3 minutes to speak. He announced the groups according to their location in the Committee's binder.

#16 Open Door Shelter – Elevator, HVAC and Fire Suppression System for SoNo Life Center.

Ms. Archer-Simons, the Executive Director, came forward and introduced her team: Mr. Corky Stewart, the ODS Board Chair; Mr. Frank Concepcion, the ODS Director of Operations; and Mr. Larry White, the development consultant. The staff were present in case there were technical questions on the HVAC or fire suppression system. She said that the group has been getting ready to retrofit the historic building at 2 Merritt Street. The drawings are 90% completed. The fundraising is underway. Local support is critical for State and Federal assistance. This request is for \$250,000 for housing on the second floor for the mechanicals in the interior portion of the building. There will be 16 units of supportive housing units with 3 ADA units. The first floor will have a medical center open to the community and will also provide a job training program.

Mr. Livingston asked about the amount. Ms. Archer-Simons said that the total project was 6 million dollars and that they were leveraging the funds. The request was for approximately 5% of the project. She listed the other funding sources that were being applied for, including tax credits and private donations.

18 – Cedar Court Senior Housing, LLC – Cedar Court Rehabilitation.

Cedar Court - Vesta Corporation - Mr. Arthur Greenblatt of Vesta Corporation came forward to speak about the Cedar Court Senior Housing Complex. He introduced Mr. Curtis Law, the executive director of the Norwalk Housing Authority (NHA) along with Rosette Timkey, a long term Cedar Court resident. Mr. Greenblatt explained that the NHA and Vesta Corp. partnered to purchase the Cedar Court facility in October. Both organizations have a key goal of preserving affordable housing. There are plans to renovate 6 million dollars in the facility, including new HVAC systems, roofs, and better

windows. Elevators will be installed in some of the buildings and the vast majority of the units will become handicapped accessible. The plan also includes new hot water heaters and renovations of 8 units to be ADA units.

Mr. Simms and Ms. Bowman joined the meeting at 7:00 p.m.

He then outlined the details of the roof replacement, which will include replacement of all materials down to the subroofing.

#17 STAR – Teaching Greenhouse.

Mr. Peter Saverine, the Director of Philanthropy at STAR, came forward to speak about STAR and said that the group has been present in Norwalk since 1952. He requested funding for a teaching greenhouse that will provide structured occupational therapy. The clients are often medically fragile. The population they serve continues to grow. The workshop program will be terminated nationwide and the gardening program will be substituted. It will allow the clients to expand socially and increase the interaction with people in the community. The vegetables produced will be used in the group home and in the cafeteria.

#14 ElderHouse – Automatic Restroom Doors.

Ms. Denise L Cesareo, the ElderHouse Executive Director, came forward to greet the Committee. She said that ElderHouse provides daytime care for the elderly and this request was for a push button door for the restrooms for the clients who often used wheelchairs or walkers. 70% of the clients have mobility issues requiring a cane, a walker or a wheelchair.

20 Norwalk Housing Authority – Roodner Court Chimney.

Mr. Marcus Boyer came forward and said that Roodner Court previously had a central boiler heating plant and the 120 foot chimney at the central building that had not been in use for over 30 years. The insurance company has requested that the chimney be demolished since there are deep cracks in the chimney and the student computer center is located right there. The NHA is requesting some financial assistance in meeting this unexpected expense. Environmental testing has been done on the chimney when the computer center was created. The NHA has been planning on replacing roofs and parking lots. This was an unexpected expense. Any amount would be helpful.

#21 Rowayton Senior Housing Corporation – Hilltop Homes Windows.

Mr. Bob Eydt, the president of the Hilltop Homes, came forward to speak about the replacement of windows at Hilltop Homes. They have 24 units for seniors with an average income of less than \$20,000. In 2010 they received a grant from the State to start

replacing approximately half of the windows in the facility. This request is for financial assistance to complete the window replacement to make the facility more energy efficient.

#13 Carver Foundation of Norwalk, Inc. – HVAC Replacement.

Ms. Novelette Peterkin, the Executive Director and Ms. Amy Perry, the Administrative Manager, came forward to speak about the various programs at the Carver Center. They are the largest provider of after school programs in Norwalk. The HVAC system needs to be replaced. The estimate was twice as much as originally budgeted. The Center was extremely surprised that the cost of the project was so high, so they contacted the Redevelopment Agency for permission to break the project into two phases. The first phase was completed on the second floor and the technology center.

Mr. Livingston asked if this was just an upgrade to the system. He was told that the system is antiquated and that the Center ends up spending money trying to patch it up.

Ms. Bowman asked if they had secured the matching funds. She was told that the staff had secured some matching funding

#8 Liberation Programs – Case Management Services.

Ms. Johnny Malloy came forward and spoke about the 18 units at Ginny's House for families. The residents and their children were chronically homeless prior to moving into the facility. One family was living in their car and now they have a permanent home with the case manager to help move the family forward. The case manager helps the residents navigate their individual challenges. Ms. Malloy listed the various jobs that the clients have acquired.

Mr. Livingston asked if this was for staffing. Ms. Malloy said that it was. When the original budget was created, the level of service was lower. Many of the activities that the program provides for the residents cost more than originally anticipated.

#9 Person-to-Person - Emergency Assistance.

Ms. Ceci Maher, the Executive Director, came forward and explained that Person-to-Person had taken over from Christian Community Action in 2012. Christian Community Action provided about \$25,000 to Norwalk residents. In the past year, Person-to-Person was able to distribute \$156,000 to Norwalk residents to assist with security deposits, or utility bills along with providing other unique needs that would bring the total to over \$200,000. The request is for \$35,000, \$4,000 of which will go to providing security deposits and the remainder to be used to supplement the heating, rent or utility bills. Ms. Maher then listed financial support that the program provides for its clients.

Mr. Livingston asked if the security deposits are returned to the program. Ms. Maher said that there was a loan program, but most of the time, the deposit was not returned because when a family moved from one location to a new one, they need the money for the new security deposit.

#10 ChoZen Few - LIFT (Learning Is Fun Too) - Peer Pressure.

Mr. John "Dolo" Regin and Ms. Mellodye "Sweets" Ragin of SoNo Entertainment and Recording Studio came forward to speak about their program. The couple explained that they are community activists of fine arts in Norwalk. They produce public service announcements (PSA) through the LIFT (Learning Is Fun Too) Program. Many people have never seen a recording studio. Recently, they produced a PSA on distracted driving. The original plan was to do only one PSA, but the kids were so excited and came up with so many ideas on distracted driving, the group ended up producing four PSAs.

Mr. Simms said that he had seen the studio. Mr. Ragin said that they had done a TV program on public access also and that they had broadcasted it in the SoNo theaters.

Ms. Bowman complimented Mr. and Ms. Regin on their program. Mr. Regin said that the commercials can be viewed at <http://www.sonotainment.com>.

#11 – Family and Children’s Agency – Project REWARD

Ms. Elizabeth Murdock, the Director of Behavioral House at the Family and Children’s Agency came forward to speak about Project REWARD, which is focused on women with behavioral and drug issues. There are two levels of care provided. There is also child care provided. A staff psychiatrist is available and the program runs at about break even. The program addresses the history of trauma from sexual abuse, child abuse, domestic abuse and a variety of other sources that leads to substance abuse. The substance abuse cannot be treated without addressing the underlying issues.

Mr. Kydes asked how long the program lasts. In-patient programs run about 12 weeks. Outpatient treatment continues as long as needed.

#3 - Child Guidance Center of Mid-Fairfield – Parenting Skills Group.

Dr. Gail Melanson, the Clinical Director and Interim Executive Director of the Child Guidance Center of Mid-Fairfield County came forward to speak about the request for funding for parent groups, each of which run about 10 weeks and are offered for Spanish speaking parents. These groups are run by bi-lingual clinicians. The Center provides services for children from birth through age 19. Many of the parent groups are already running but there is a need for more groups. The Center is also looking at possibly adding some physical activities such as rock-climbing and canoeing for the children who would not normally have opportunities to experience these activities.

#11 - Triangle Community Center – Case Management.

Mr. Anthony Crisci, the Executive Director of the Triangle Community Center, came forward and said that the Triangle Community Center was the only community center for the gay and transgender communities.

Mayor Rilling joined the meeting at 7:33 p.m.

The Center is the only program in the area, they see people from all over the state. The Center has been in Norwalk since 1990 and now has grown to offer 25 programs. In 2015, the Center hired a full time social worker, but the need for a case manager has become apparent. Many of the clients come to the center because they feel unsafe elsewhere.

#2 Breakthrough Options for Families, Inc. – College Edge Program.

Ms. Akisha Cassermere, the President of Breakthrough Options for Families, Inc. came forward to speak about the various programs that the group offers the low income population. It is a tax-exempt program that has been up and running since 2007. The program provides mentors for at risk children in Norwalk and are working to reduce the child abuse in the City. They serve about 200 people per year. Ms. Cassermere said that she would personally supervise all the aspects of the grant and any disbursement of funding from the grant. The program is small, but they are growing.

The College Edge Program exposes the clients to various colleges that they might not consider otherwise.

Mr. Tristam came forward to speak about the students who learned how to qualify for the college courses and take the SATs. This is from a series of workshops and lectures to help the students choose the best schools for themselves. It builds confidence for the students to see themselves as college students. It is important to match the students with appropriate colleges.

Mr. Kydes asked about the ages of the students. Mr. Tristan said that the program focuses on the juniors who are about 16 years old. They would meet once a week to start working on SATs and learn about the various colleges. The staff also works with the students to find scholarships to finance the degree.

Mr. Livingston asked about the Carver Center. Mr. Tristam said that the Carver Center has a one night boot camp while this program spans over a period of time. When there is only a one shot deal, if the students can't make it, they have lost the opportunity.

Mr. Kimmel asked where the students come from. Mr. Tristam said that the students are recommended by the guidance counselors from McMahon and NHS.

Ms. Bowman said that there were other points of access that the program should be aware of, such as churches and other programs. Mr. Tristam said that he would welcome any and all referrals.

#15 Norwalk Senior Center – Restroom Renovations.

Ms. Beatrix Winter came forward to speak about the Norwalk Senior Center and the various clients the Center serves. She said that the request was to upgrade the bathrooms in the Roosevelt School. The toilets are very low to the ground because they were installed when the school was built. They were designed for first graders and are very low. The clients have difficulty dealing with the low toilets. The partitions, which are original, are rusting out since the building was built in the 1930's. The request is for \$92,000 to renovate two large bathrooms that are in a heavily trafficked area.

Ms. Bowman asked about the \$46,000. Ms. Winter explained that the program realizes that there was competition for the money, so they would be willing to accept a smaller amount and just renovate one bathroom now.

#10 - Senior Services Coordinating Council – Financial and Physical Safety.

Ms. Laura Epstein, the representative, came forward to speak about the recent increase of scams targeting the senior population. She explained that the goal is to create a program to train seniors to avoid fraud and scams, and also offer home safety inspections. The program will also assist by setting up informational meetings with police, fire and health officials to educate the seniors on what support services are available.

#24 Norwalk 2.0 – Freese Park Master Plan.

Ms. Jackie Lightfield spoke about Freese Park. The request is for \$30,000 for a plan for the park. The Department of Recreation and Parks is supporting this. However the park is less than 2 acres and is often overlooked. Five years ago, the City did have a plan for all the parks.

Mr. Kimmel asked for an example of the type of events that would be available at the park. Ms. Lightfield spoke about a walkway that was designed when the Avalon apartment building was constructed, but there was no plan on how to provide additional connectivity. Having a Master Plan to address the park as a whole rather than doing piecemeal projects would be better.

Mr. Kimmel asked how the project would work. Ms. Lightfield said that the City would have to adopt the Master Plan and then provide funding before it is implemented.

Mr. Livingston asked how this would fit into the other projects that will be happening there. Mr. Sheehan said that over time, there has been an entire host of issues that the City has looked at piecemeal, such as the fencing and lighting. Ms. Lightfield said that the entire focus of Norwalk 2.0 was to get the City to look at the projects as a whole rather than a silo approach. Mr. Sheehan said that this program was supported by the Redevelopment Agency. The Redevelopment Agency is the only competition for funding in this category. Mr. Sheehan said that there has been interest in the park from the private sector. Ms. Lightfield said that Norwalk 2.0 is not interested in taking over the maintenance of the park. She went on to list all the events the group had made to the park. Mr. Sheehan pointed out that by having a Master Plan, it would avoid having a private donor dictate the placement of a stage or other items.

Ms. Bowman asked if they had permission to pursue this from the Recreation and Parks. Ms. Lightfield said that they had contacted Recreation and Parks and do have permission, which is included in the documentation.

#19 - Homefront Inc. – Home Revitalization (2 units)

Mr. Sean O'Brien, the Executive Director, came forward to speak about the program. He said that as a Norwalk born and raised resident, he did not need to worry about the roof over his head. In 1988, Americares worked on a number of homes in Norwalk. Now Homefront does that work. The group has repaired over 600 homes in Norwalk. The assistance is given to the residents who are current with taxes and can hold on to their homes. The group focuses on roof repairs, grab bars, wheelchair ramps, and ailing heating systems. The most common applicant is an older resident who needs some additional help. Most of the materials are donated and the volunteers work on the first Saturday in May.

Mr. Kydes asked about the income guidelines. Mr. O'Brien said that the income level would be \$35,000, but the average income is about \$25,000. This program is focused on residential homes rather than commercial buildings. The projects can be used to drum up community spirit.

Mr. Livingston asked if the houses have been chosen. Mr. O'Brien said that the funding would be for May 2017. The average number of requests is about 20. There are between 20-40 applications and the group is reviewing the needs with the skill sets of the volunteers. The volunteers raise about \$2,000 for the projects.

Ms. Bowman asked about the income guidelines. Mr. O'Brien said that when they separated from Americares, they were able to adjust the guidelines to be more flexible. This also allows the group to factor in family size because many grandparents are now taking in their grandchildren. The group works with the Building Department.

#6 Domestic Violence Crisis Center (DVCC) - SustainAbilityCT (iACT)

Ms. Rachelle Kucera-Maher then came forward to speak about the various services DVCC has offered to the residents. She added that Homefront had done the roof on the safe house. Many of the organizations had already helped DVCC in various capacities.

She spoke about the previous issue with dual domestic violence arrests and how former Police Chief Rilling helped to establish a Special Victims Unit to handle these cases and the number of cases dropped from around 30% to down into the single units.

The DVCC is working on a new program to provide economic assistance to the Hispanic/Latino community. The Number 1 reason that individuals stay in unhealthy relationships is because of financial constraints and the lack of affordable housing. The DVCC has been working on this and within the last seven months has been able to help some clients to either remain in or settle into permanent housing.

#5 Community Health Center – Dental Care for Seniors.

Ms. Amy Taylor came forward to speak about oral health for seniors. She said that the request was for funding to increase the access for the residents. There are two primary physicians along with a dentist and dental hygienist. They also provide children with free dental services.

#22 – Norwalk Redevelopment Agency – City Neighborhoods.

Ms. Strauss came forward to speak about the City Neighborhoods and the other various programs that the Redevelopment Agency provides including Choice Neighborhoods, a wayfinding program for the urban core and assessment and remediation of brownfields,

Mr. Livingston asked about the minimum request. Ms. Strauss explained that they ask for a percentage of the funding. Mr. Sheehan then gave an overview of how the funding works.

#25 - Norwalk Redevelopment Agency – CDBG Administration.

Ms. Strauss then gave a brief overview of the CDBG Administration costs.

Mr. Kydes said that the Committee was in a difficult spot in deciding the amounts for each of the applications. Ms. Strauss said that on February 4th, the staff would be recommending the various funding amounts. Once the public hearing is completed, the final recommendations would be forwarded to the Council for approval.

**1. Authorize submission of grant application for the TOD Housing
Pilot Program CONT'D**

**** MR. KYDES MOVED TO AUTHORIZE SUBMISSION OF GRANT
APPLICATION FOR THE TOD HOUSING PILOT PROGRAM.
** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

OLD BUSINESS

There was no old business to consider at this time.

NEW BUSINESS

There was no new business to consider at this time.

ADJOURNMENT

**** MR. SIMMS MOVED TO ADJOURN.
** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

The meeting adjourned at 8:33 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

S. L. Soltes
Telesco Secretarial Services