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**CITY OF NORWALK
ECONOMIC AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE
OF THE COMMON COUNCIL
REGULAR MEETING – VIA TELECONFERENCE
JANUARY 4, 2024**

ATTENDANCE: Joshua Goldstein; Chair; Heather Dunn; James Frayer; Jalen Sead; Lisa Shanahan; Barbara Smyth; Darlene Young

STAFF: Jessica Vonashek, Chief of Economic and Community Development
Sabrina Godeski, Director of Business Development and Tourism

OTHERS: Brian Bidolli, Executive Director, Norwalk Redevelopment Agency;
Nora Niedzielski Eichner; Johan Lopez and Djuan Wiggins, Common Council members

CALL TO ORDER

Mr. Goldstein called the meeting to order at 7:05 p.m.

City of Norwalk
Economic And Community Development Committee
of The Common Council
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ROLL CALL

Mr. Goldstein called the Roll as indicated above.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There were no members of the public present who wished to comment this evening.

I. ADMINISTRATION

A. Approval of the Minutes of December 7, 2023 meeting.

Mr. Goldstein said that at the last meeting, he indicated there would be department updates this evening; however, the Committee members will hear the updates at the February meeting.

**** MR. SEAD MOVED TO ACCEPT THE MINUTES AS PRESENTED**
**** MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY**

II. NEW BUSINESS

A. ECONOMIC AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

1. South Norwalk Investment and MLK Corridor Initiative updates.

Ms. Vonashek expressed her thanks to the members of the Common Council, the Norwalk Redevelopment Agency, the residents of District B and the members of the MLK Initiative. She explained that the MLK Corridor Initiative is the result of the work of many. She shared her screen and began the presentation by reviewing the history of the MLK Corridor that began with the Freedom Faith Collaborative in 2017.

Working with the community a set of priorities was created and then Senator Duff helped secure a \$3 million grant from the DECD for the MLK Corridor.

Ms. Vonashek presented a map of the MLK corridor geography showing where work will take place. She said they talked to different departments regarding what the public wanted. A goal was to identify environmental investments, including tree planting, fence replacement, brownfield remediation and playground improvements. She noted that over 134 trees were planted in the MLK Corridor.

Ms. Vonashek continued her presentation and reviewed the support provided to businesses, including the storefront improvement program, the covid business assistance program, the business development center and special events. She added that over 75% of the funding being given out will go to women and minority owned businesses. Ms. Vonashek added that Mr. Daniels' department worked with local non-profits.

Ms. Vonashek reviewed roadway safety improvements, with an equitable approach to the use of the roadway system. She said they are focusing Citywide on pedestrian and cyclist safety. Mr. Travers will present this item at next month's meeting.

Ms. Vonashek reviewed the education component and described the goal to support education advancement in the South Norwalk community. She reviewed slides that described the housing initiatives. The goal is to support residents that include both owners and renters in making home improvements that promote a healthy and safe environment.

Ms. Vonashek explained that since 2017, more than \$179 million in local, state and federal funding has been committed to the South Norwalk Community MLK initiative geography. She talked about the mural installations and said they are thinking about doing a community mural along the chain link fence across the Ely Avenue train tracks.

Ms. Vonashek said she will mail the slides after the meeting. She noted that \$179 million has been committed to this initiative.

Mr. Frayer said this was a very impressive presentation. He asked how tis rates with other taxing districts as far as the investment. Ms. Vonashek said that if you take out the South Norwalk School, and Meadow Gardens, that leaves about \$60 million. She said South Norwalk is larger because they have been focusing on drawing in funding. Also the MLK Corridor does not have a lot of trees.

Ms. Vonashek said that South Norwalk is unique because of the land use decisions that have been made. Each of the neighborhoods has seen higher progress such as sidewalks in Rowayton and the new train station along Route 7. The urban core is getting a lot of attention due to the grants they are able to secure.

Ms. Smyth recognized the work done by Ms. Vonashek, Mr. Bidolli and Ms. Young. She added that after decades of neglect this focus is crucial to the community. Ms. Young gave credit to Mr. Bruce Morrow, former State Representative and said that of the seven MLK Corridors in CT, Norwalk's is the largest. She added that he obtained a \$1 million investment for the Columbus construction, which is significant for those residents. She expressed her thanks to the Clergy, residents and members of the NAACP.

Ms. Young said there is a lot of work that has to be done. South Norwalk has been divested from funding for a long time, but they are at a point where changes are being made.

B. REDEVELOPMENT AGENCY

** MS. SMYTH MOVED TO Transfer \$150,000 of GGP funding from account number 510000-5796-GGP08 to the Redevelopment Agency for the completion of the South Norwalk Community Plan.
ACCT: 510000-5796-GGP08

Mr. Bidolli reviewed the project and said an advisory committee was created to focus on community need. The consultant is tasked with how to best integrate the areas around the South Norwalk train station. This request for \$150,000 is to fund the study.

Mr. Bidolli reviewed the scope and geography of the area. The new South Norwalk School will be the center point. They will work with the community to find out what they want and try to develop a list of what will have the biggest impact for social equity.

Mr. Bidolli said this request is a change order of the existing plan. This should be a nine – 12 month project. Mr. Goldstein said it seems to be a challenge to have the South Norwalk School as the center based on the industrial properties surrounding the school site. Mr. Bidoli said it is complex and he does not have answers now.

Ms. Vonashek said they worked closely with the community, but were unable to get what they wanted regarding the industrial use, specifically the contractor yards. Ms. Young asked if the map included Bouton Street. Ms. Vonashek said the geography included Bouton Street.

Ms. Smyth said it was incumbent upon them to make the South Norwalk School the best it can be. She added that it is important work and commended Mr. Bidolli for engaging the community.

Mr. Sead highlighted the importance of the work. He said he grew up in South Norwalk and all of his life, people talked about how South Norwalk was forgotten. He said it was important that the people who endured this are not forgotten. People are moving out of Norwalk because of the impact of development.

Mr. Bidolli said the reason they brought on an economic impact firm was to have a better understanding of why people are leaving Norwalk. He said he wants to get it right.

Ms. Young said they need to find a way to incentivize landlords to control rent costs and make improvements to their homes.

Ms. Niedzielski Eichner said she was happy to see the goal of one-to-one ratio of affordable to market rate housing.

**** MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY**

III. OLD BUSINESS

There was no old business discussed this evening.

ADJOURNMENT

**** MS. SHANAHAN MOVED TO ADJOURN**

**** MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY**

There was no further business, and the meeting was unanimously adjourned at 8:17 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Rosemarie Lombardi
Telesco Secretarial Services