

**DRAFT
CITY OF NORWALK
PLANNING COMMISSION
June 19, 2018**

PRESENT: Frances DiMeglio, Chair; Tammy Langalis; David Davidson; Mary Peniston; Brian Baxendale; Mike Mushak; Nora King (arrived at 7:32 p.m.)

STAFF: Steven Kleppin; Mike Wrinn

OTHERS: Susan Sweitzer; Tami Strauss; Tim Sheehan

I. CALL TO ORDER

Ms. DiMeglio called the meeting to order at 7:03 p.m.

II. ROLL CALL

Mr. Kleppin called the roll.

III. DISCUSSION AND/OR DECISION

a) Action item on 8-24 Review – Ryan Park Improvements

Susan Sweitzer of the Redevelopment Agency discussed the park plan developments. She said there was a large amount of public input. She said it was a straight forward plan. It would be funded by state grants and grants from the Department of Housing and Urban Development. There would also be remediation which would be funded by the EPA after fuel tanks were found. There was a discussion about the timeline for getting the project done. Lead based soil was also found. The plans were ready for bid and would get out in the next few weeks. There were also storm drainage issues. Ms. Sweitzer said it should be completed by the end of the year with some plantings done in the spring of 2019. There was also a discussion about sign-offs for the remediation from the state. There was also a discussion of the last timeline from 2017. She noted that the bid requests were sent out but that the bids were too high. They then separated out projects and received revised bids which were much improved. There was also a discussion about the congestion in that area due to multiple projects being done in the area at the same time. There was also a discussion about waiting for the remediation to be completed. She did not think that it mattered. There was a discussion about the bathrooms at this property. Currently there are Port-A-Potties at the park. Mr. Mushak discussed some of the community meetings that he attended. There were safety concerns about having bathrooms in the park. There was a discussion about flooding in the area. The elevations have been raised so that the park

is not in a flood plain now. There was a discussion of the covered event pavilion. There was a discussion about where the Washington Village project was in relation to this park. There was also a discussion about signage for the remediation which had been noted on local blogs. There was also a discussion about the irrigation system.

***** MS. DIMEGLIO MOVED: BE IT RESOLVED** by the Norwalk Planning Commission in accordance with Section 8-24 of the Connecticut General Statutes, the referral made by the Norwalk Redevelopment Agency for the Ryan Park Improvement project be **APPROVED** and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that notice of this action be forwarded to the Common Council.

Before the vote, Mr. Davidson requested a condition that the work not be started until the complete sign-off on the remediation. Ms. DiMeglio said she did not think it was necessary to require the condition, but that it could be a recommendation. The commissioners agreed.

Mr. Baxendale seconded.

Frances DiMeglio; Tammy Langalis; David Davidson; Mary Peniston; Brian Baxendale; Mike Mushak; Nora King voted in favor.

No one opposed.

No one abstained.

b) Action item on 8-24 Review – Washington Street Plaza Park Improvements

Susan Sweitzer began the presentation by showing the commissioners the proposed site plan. She said it was a small plan and a simple design. She said that some part of the park could be used as outdoor dining from a local restaurant group that is next to it. There was a discussion of the sidewalks and lighting in the area. There was a discussion of the cost which was estimated to be \$800,000, which includes \$500,000 that was approved during the Capital Budget process. There was a discussion about the turf that was going to be used at this site. Mr. Mushak noted why he liked this design. Ms. Sweitzer noted that there was a stairway and ADA access. There was a discussion of where the monies would be coming from, which they noted was the Norwalk Center account. Monies were not coming from the federal or state government. There was also a discussion about painting the building. Mr. Davidson explained that he would be voting against it because it would be costing more than \$500,000 which was the original request for the project. He was in favor of the park improvements. There was a discussion about how the Parks and Recreation Department would add another park to their workload. Mr. Mushak explained why he would be voting for the project which he said he did not mind paying for, based on the \$800,000 estimate which he felt was not a lot based on the amount of work involved. Also, he said the park had not been renovated since it was built over 50 years ago and it is severely dilapidated and dangerous as steps and paving are uneven, because it was such a premier part of the

city. There was a discussion about how money is funded on this project and how that affects other departments in the city. Mr. Kleppin noted which lines were funded in the Capital Budget by the Common Council this year. Mr. Davidson noted that he was in favor of the project but for \$500,000. There was then a discussion of how the Planning Commission could vote on this project. There was also a discussion of how other departments get funding for their projects. Mr. Davidson thought there was a lack of transparency between the Redevelopment Agency and the Planning Commission. There was a discussion about the importance of this park and sidewalk improvements and how they were being funded. Mr. Davidson again said that he would support the plan but that it should cost \$500,000. There was also concern that while the park was being funded there were other projects in the city, including Planning and Zoning projects, which were not. There was a further discussion about the transparency of the funding. There was a concern that this sets a precedent for other departments to find funds for other projects that may not have been approved by the Planning Commission. There was also concern that the project would not be funded properly. It was also noted that in the 8-24 Review as per the CT General Statutes, the commissioners were to determine only if it conformed to the Plan of Conservation and Development.

***** MS. DIMEGLIO MOVED: BE IT RESOLVED** by the Norwalk Planning Commission in accordance with Section 8-24 of the Connecticut General Statutes, the referral made by the Norwalk Redevelopment Agency for the Washington Street Park Improvement project be **APPROVED** and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that notice of this action be forwarded to the Common Council.

Mr. Mushak seconded.

Frances DiMeglio; Mary Peniston; Brian Baxendale; Mike Mushak voted in favor.

David Davidson opposed.

Nora King and Tammy Langalis abstained.

The Planning Commission took no action.

There was then a discussion about Ms. King drafting a new resolution to be put forth which would include a provision that stated the cost would be \$500,000 and no other city funds would be used for it. There was a discussion as to whether a condition could be added to the previous resolution. There was also a discussion about the statute which said that once filed in the Planning and Zoning Department, if there was no action on an application it is approved.

Ms. King suggested language for another resolution which Mr. Davidson said he would second. There was a discussion as to what the course of action could be at this point, considering that the previous resolution showed the Planning Commission taking no action.

Ms. King moved to approve the project with the understanding that it would be \$500,000 as the Planning Commission authorized and the Planning Commission did not support taking the funds from other city budgets. There was a discussion about the verbiage of the resolution which Mr. Wrinn then revised. Mr. Mushak said that he thought that this new amount would cheapen the design of the park. There was also a discussion about how the Redevelopment Agency was using monies in the Washington Street area. Some commissioners thought the funds were not being used wisely. Some commissioners thought that there was not enough transparency in the process and that they should know how much the project would cost. Mr. Mushak felt that the discussion should not have been about the cost of the project, but rather whether it met with the requirements of the Plan of Conservation and Development ("POCD"). There was then a discussion about the resolution proposed by Ms. King. Ms. DiMeglio said she would not be supporting it.

There was also a discussion that the Planning Commission approved \$500,000 but the Common Council approved \$300,000. There was then a discussion about the message that was being sent from the Planning Commission if this new resolution was approved and was sent to the Common Council. There was a further discussion of the amount that should be in the resolution. Ms. Langalis said she would second the new resolution. There was further discussion of the amount that had been funded during the Capital Budget process in prior years. Mr. Sheehan then noted that bids would have to be pulled if this new resolution was passed. He was then asked about the amounts in the two accounts that was in noted in the memo to the Planning Commission. He said they were told to use these accounts by the Finance Department and the Mayor's Office. Ms. Langalis withdrew her second if the Planning Commission did not have an impact on the funding. Without a second, the commissioners could not vote on it. Mr. Davidson noted that the funding would still be made available to the Redevelopment Agency by the Finance Department and Mayor's office. He would vote for a resolution that included a budget cost for the project at \$500,000. Mr. Kleppin said he would draft a letter from the Planning Commission that said they liked the design but were concerned about the total cost of the project and how it would be funded. Mr. Davidson asked that the letter be drafted quickly. There was a discussion about another new motion that was proposed by Ms. Peniston. There was also a discussion about the use of funds about the Redevelopment Agency. Ms. King did not think that the letter would be enough and there should be a motion. There was a discussion about the verbiage of the new motion that was proposed by Ms. Peniston and moved by Ms. King. Mr. Sheehan said that he had been directed by the Finance Department and the Mayor's office of what accounts should be used for this project. There was then an explanation of how much money was actually being used in the upcoming fiscal year. He said that \$500,000 was what the Planning Commission had approved but that the Common Council had zeroed it out. There was also a discussion about the fact that although the money was not in the account, it was directed to be taken from an existing Redevelopment Agency account. There was then a discussion of this project as it relates to other projects around the city. Mr. Sheehan publicly apologized for any

confusion in the past about the funding for the park. He also noted that the plan for the park needed more money than had been requested. There was a discussion about other properties in the urban corridor which were not being maintained.

At this point, Ms. DiMeglio said that she would like to revise the resolution and there was a discussion about whether she could do that. Mr. Davidson noted that the money would be given to the Redevelopment Agency whether the Planning Commission passed any resolution. Ms. DiMeglio said that she did not like the resolution to go to the Common Council as taking no action. There was a discussion about what question should have been answered when they voted on the original resolution.

The commissioners thought it would be a good time to take a break at 8:45 p.m. They returned to session at 8:48 p.m.

c) Discussion with Tami Strauss - Redevelopment Plan Update

Tami Strauss began the presentation by orienting the commissioners as to the location of the plan on an aerial map. She noted that she would be discussing the geography and areas that the plan would be redeveloped as well as design guidelines. There was a core working group that was working on this including two Planning Commissioners. There are certain industries in the area, including the hospital. There was an explanation of why the area was widened which included benefits to the city. There was a discussion of the waterfront. Ms. Strauss noted that they wanted to develop design guidelines for this area. There was a discussion about keeping the waterfront area under the Planning and Zoning Department and not move it to the Redevelopment Agency. Once it moves to the Redevelopment Agency, they receive monies for studies but not the Planning Department. There was a discussion about the waterfront area because it is a natural boundary. No zoning changes were being recommended for the waterfront area, where King Industries is. She then showed them another map which include the Toy R Us site because of connectivity issues. This map showed 5 opportunity sites. There was then a discussion of how the area was expanded to include the hospital. There was no blight in this area. Ms. King noted that people in the workshops had reservations about the waterfront area. There was a discussion about the zoning changes which would not be in the plan. Ms. King also noted the other concerns that there were set forth in these workshops. Ms. Strauss noted the zoning changes which would combine zones. She showed them on a map. If they were combined, the design guidelines would be the same. There was a request about having the Redevelopment Agency coming more often to the Planning Commission meetings.

d) Discussion with Tim Sheehan - Innovation District

Mr. Sheehan asked if they had questions on his memo and attachments, because of the lateness of the hour. There was then a discussion about why the Innovation District had not been shown to the Planning Commission earlier than this.

Ms. King said that she had spoken to several Common Council members and they did not realize that the Planning Commission had not received it. Mr. Sheehan discussed the issues were tax agreements and the planning of it. He explained that the innovation district would help businesses work together because they had synergy. He noted that there should be job creation in these areas, not just housing in the city. People should live where they work as well as using the entertainment in the area. There was a discussion about educating the public about what types of housing could be offered. There was a discussion about possible incubators in the city. There was also a discussion about the past history of the owners of 50 Washington St. There was also a discussion about the types of businesses that could be attracted to the city and who would be the ones to coordinate it. Mr. Sheehan said the city could repurpose buildings instead of building new construction for this. Ms. King did not think that owners of the building would renovate these buildings but Mr. Sheehan said that is what the city was working on. There was a discussion about what was happening in Boston, which was helped by many of the educational institutions there. There was a discussion about how Norwalk could be competitive and what other cities in Connecticut had innovation districts. Mr. Kleppin noted that there had been discussions about combining regionally, such as other areas of the state had done. There was a discussion about what types of light industries would be in this district. There was a discussion about the YMCA building which has been vacant for about 7 years. There will be new construction of this site and would be part of the Innovation District. They want to help connect that area to the hospital. Mr. Sheehan then explained the process for moving this forward which included being advanced to a public hearing and then to the Common Council. There was a discussion about other cities in the US which were setting up Innovation Centers. There was a discussion about working with Norwalk companies, like Datto and FactSet, to find out more from them about how the city could work on this district.

IV. APPROVAL OF MINUTES: May 15, 2018

MS. DIMEGLIO MOVED to approve the Planning Commission minutes of May 15, 2018, as amended.

Mr. Mushak seconded.

Frances DiMeglio; Tammy Langalis; David Davidson; Brian Baxendale; Mike Mushak; Nora King voted in favor.

No one opposed.

Mary Peniston abstained.

V. COMMENTS OF THE DIRECTOR

a) Citywide Plan (POCD) – Public outreach has been completed. The 4 topic workshops have been completed. There was not enough participation and interaction at the sustainability workshop. Some of the workshops were better than others. There had also been a discussion about New York City and how the suburbs helped the city. There was also a discussion about how well Stamford was doing. Mr. Kleppin noted that

Stamford was also lobbying in Hartford which Norwalk was not. Stantech is in the drafting phase and hoped to have it done by mid to late August. Ms. Peniston noted some of the issues that she heard at the workshops. She asked the commissioners thought that they should get a draft and think about themes. There was a discussion about future meetings and about getting a draft.

b) East Avenue Transit Oriented Development (TOD) study update – Mr. Kleppin said that he would review the RFPs in a few weeks and that he had received 7 of them. Several of the firms he had not heard of. There would also be an oversight committee for this study that would also sit on the interviews. Mr. Baxendale would be on the committee since he lives in East Norwalk. He also discussed the other commissions and persons that would be on the committee. There would also be a member of the Common Council who represents the district.

He also noted that there would be a commissioner training program from NEMO and there would also be other towns invited.

VI. COMMENTS OF COMMISSIONERS

There were no comments from the commissioners.

VII. ADJOURNMENT

Ms. Langalis made a Motion to Adjourn

Ms. DiMeglio seconded.

Frances DiMeglio, Chair; Tammy Langalis; David Davidson; Mary Peniston; Brian Baxendale; Mike Mushak; Nora King voted to approve.

No one opposed.

No one abstained.

The meeting was adjourned at 10:16 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Diana Palmentiero