



CITY OF DANBURY
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PLANNING COMMISSION
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MINUTES
JANUARY 2, 2019

The meeting was called to order by Chairman Arnold Finaldi Jr. at 7:30 PM.

Present were Robert Chiochio, Arnold Finaldi Jr., Leah Glover, Helen Hoffstaetter, and Joel Urice, Also present was Deputy Planning Director Jennifer Emminger and Director of Planning Sharon Calitro.

Absent were and Alternates Kevin Haas and Gary Renz.

Chairman Finaldi said they would table the acceptance of the December 5, 2018 minutes.

ELECTION OF OFFICERS:

Mrs. Hoffstaetter made a motion to open nominations for Chairman. Mrs. Glover seconded the motion and nominated Arnold Finaldi Jr. for Chairman. Since there were no other nominations, Mr. Urice made a motion to close the nominations and elect Mr. Finaldi as Chairman. Mrs. Hoffstaetter seconded the motion and it was passed unanimously.

Mrs. Hoffstaetter made a motion to open nominations for Vice-Chairman. Mr. Chiochio seconded the motion and nominated Joel Urice for Vice-Chairman. Since there were no other nominations, Mrs. Hoffstaetter made a motion to close the nominations and elect Mr. Urice as Vice-Chairman. Mr. Chiochio seconded the motion and it was passed unanimously.

CONTINUATION OF PUBLIC HEARING:

Bilcol II, LLC - Application for Special Exception/Site Plan Approval for Contractor's Office/ Outdoor Storage of Construction Equipment in the IL-40 Zone - 22 Shelter Rock Lane (L15006) – SE #766.

Mrs. Glover and Mr. Urice said they had both watched the video of the December 5, 2018 meeting and reviewed the reports so they would be eligible to vote on this matter. Mr. Chicchio said he had not done either, so he would not be eligible.

PE Ben Doto said they had been waiting for comments from the Engineering Department and when they were received, they did not require any changes to the plans. He said there had been one change made in response to the Planning Department staff report, and other than that there were no other issues. There were no questions from the Commission.

Chairman Finaldi asked if there was anyone to speak in opposition to this application and there was no one.

Mr. Urice made a motion to close the public hearing. Mrs. Hoffstaetter seconded the motion and it was passed unanimously. Mr. Urice then made a motion to move this to Old Business so they could give Mrs. Emminger guidance for the preparation of the decision resolution. Mrs. Hoffstaetter seconded the motion and it was passed unanimously.

Chairman Finaldi then said they would deviate from the order of the agenda and hear from the Planning Director on the item listed under Other Matters.

OTHER MATTERS

City of Danbury by Sharon B. Calitro, Director of Planning – Presentation of Downtown Danbury Transit-Oriented Development Study.

Chairman Finaldi thanked Mrs. Calitro and Mrs. Emminger for all the work they did on this. He said after the presentation, the Commission will need to endorse its findings so future downtown development can focus on the directives in the plan.

Mrs. Calitro said that last year, the City received a grant from the State Office of Policy & Management (OPM) which enabled the Planning Department to do a study on the potential for transit-oriented development in downtown Danbury. An outside consultant was hired and a task force was established. The task force consisted of people from various City departments, regional planning and transportation agencies, educational institutions, downtown organizations, and business and property owners. Throughout the process, the focus was guided by input from the task force and public feedback. Public information meetings were held throughout the study period. A Transit Oriented Development (TOD) emphasizes a mixture of land uses designed in a walkable setting located near mass transit. It counts on the residents using public transportation and creates a synergy by having various modes of transit and land development opportunities in close proximity to each other. She added that downtowns offer special opportunities for redevelopment and the goal of the study was to strengthen the urban core and promote

opportunities for reinvestment by noting the link between transit availability and redevelopment. It remains clearly evident that much has been done over the years to promote the revitalization of our downtown. The grant required specific work be done including determining the study area and analyzing demographics to assess the existing state of the downtown. One of the major tasks was to look at the feasibility of moving the existing bus and rail facilities to one site for the purpose of increasing the use of transit. All of the work took place over an eighteen month timeline. Many different areas were studied, interviews took place, and the public was encouraged to give feedback during public meetings. The following strategy areas were studied and implementation initiatives were developed: (1) Land Use & Development, (2) Transportation and Infrastructure, (3) Urban Design and Public Spaces, and (4) Diversity and Cohesion. The following vision for downtown Danbury was also established: *“By capitalizing on its great places and multi-modal transit connections, transform Downtown Danbury into a more vibrant, densely developed center of urban life where businesses thrive, mixed-use neighborhoods develop and strengthen, and opportunities for diverse cultural experiences continue to grow.”* Mrs. Calitro said that they reached out to the public for input on several instances and after the final public meeting they put the draft study on the City website asking for comments. Since there were none, she is hoping that everyone who participated is satisfied with the final document.

The following members of the Task Force were also present at this meeting: City Traffic Engineer Abdul Mohammed, Director of Health & Housing Lisa Morrissey, Director of Business Advocacy Roger Palanzo, Ernesto Rodriguez, Benjamin Doto III, PE, Joseph DaSilva Jr, CityCenter Director Betsy Paynter, and Perry Salvagne from Hodge Insurance.

Mrs. Calitro continued saying they may need to make regulation changes regarding parking, and mixed uses. Also they need to work on continued support for the tax deferral program, a plan for the distribution of public parking, and ideas for new development on surface lots. She said they want to continue the partnership with the regional development agencies, the Chamber of Commerce, CityCenter, and both of the colleges. She said she and Roger Palanzo have been looking into creating a rail line connection west to the Southeast train station. She said they worked with a transportation consultant to prepare a conceptual rendering using the existing train station. She added that we have received a second State grant to reconstruct the sidewalks in the downtown, which will help to provide a safe and easy walk to the train and bus station. They looked at what is existing and discussed ideas about what could be on various sites. In closing she said that we want downtown Danbury to be a cultural destination and we have started using street artwork to encourage the cultural diversity. Chairman Finaldi said the combined transit center would be a good idea. Mrs. Calitro said the societal trend in cities is to not own cars and creating the availability of transit will drive the area to become the hub.

Betsy Paynter, Executive Director of CityCenter Danbury, said downtowns are the places to be right now. She added that many empty nesters have discovered that real estate is not

the money making investment it once was and are looking to downsize to an apartment. Mrs. Calitro said she agreed with Ms. Paynter because the millennials want to be able to walk to a restaurant for dinner, whereas the older people want to be able to walk to their shopping or to go to the library. She said many more people are making the choice to live in an urban environment rather than to own homes in the suburbs. Mrs. Glover mentioned an article in today's Wall Street Journal regarding the housing boom slowing down and said this study can provide them with the necessary demographics so that the young people who own businesses and want to protect their futures can become invested in the area.

Ernesto Rodriguez said if there was a direct train line into New York City, there would be even more people who would want to live in the downtown. He added that right now, the commute time is over two hours and then the person has to get to their home. He thanked Mrs. Calitro for reaching out to his neighborhood and taking their input into consideration.

Mr. Urice asked if new market rate residential property is built, how that would affect the affordable housing requirement. Mrs. Calitro said Danbury has met the required 10% since 2005 because many local developers have been including affordable units in their developments. She added that the 2020 Census will tell a lot but we need to look at market rate housing because right now most of the housing units located in the downtown were built before 1941.

Joseph DaSilva Jr. said we, as a city, have been trying to redevelop the downtown for about forty years. Kennedy Flats took a huge gamble but it worked and now other big apartment developers are looking at our downtown. He said Stamford, Yonkers and New Rochelle have all taken this kind of chance with their downtowns. He added that the time to do this is right now. There needs to be different levels of housing because both millennials and empty nesters want to live where public transit is readily accessible. But we need more than just residential and transit because these residents want to be able to walk to entertainment venues, restaurants as well as to places that service their daily needs. He said it is time to let these big apartment developers come in and build because all the pieces are in place to make this work. He then mentioned "opportunity zones" which is a Federal program designed to provide tax incentives to investors who fund businesses in underserved communities. He said our demographics are very similar to Norwalk, they did it and the only difference between us and them is that they have the train lines in place. He also mentioned Harborpoint in Stamford which was nothing and now is very developed.

Roger Palanzo, Director of Business Advocacy, said if we can get the western connection done, it would make Danbury a hub since we would then have available transit lines heading both south and west.

Chairman Finaldi and Mrs. Calitro thanked everyone for their comments.

Mrs. Calitro asked that the Commission formally endorse the study as the planning guide for downtown development. Mrs. Emminger said the Commission members had been emailed a resolution for this. Mr. Urice made a motion to approve the resolution as presented. Mrs. Glover seconded the motion and it was passed unanimously.

OLD BUSINESS FOR DISCUSSION AND POSSIBLE ACTION:

Bilcol II, LLC - Application for Special Exception/Site Plan Approval for Contractor's Office/ Outdoor Storage of Construction Equipment in the IL-40 Zone - 22 Shelter Rock Lane (L15006) – SE #766.

Mrs. Emminger said there has been an address assignment made for this parcel as the adjacent parcel is actually #22. She said a letter will be issued and the Tax Assessor's office will be notified that the address assigned to this parcel is **#20 Shelter Rock Lane**. Chairman Finaldi asked the Commission members for any comments or conditions that they want to see in the decision resolution. The consensus of the Commission members was that this is a simple and clean application and they recommend a resolution for approval with no special conditions.

REFERRALS:

8-24 Referral – December 2018 City Council Agenda Item #6: Waste Water Treatment Plant Bond-Approved Renovation & Improvement Project.

Mrs. Emminger explained that City Council recently approved an ordinance appropriating funds and issuing bonds for improvements to the City of Danbury Water Pollution Control Plant and facilities system. The City's Water Pollution Control Plant is located within the Public Works complex on Newtown Rd. The proposed improvements include the construction of new facilities on the complex property, and renovation, replacement, and/or upgrades to existing facilities and equipment within the Plant. The Plan of Conservation & Development (POCD) acknowledges the need for improvements to sewer service and necessary upgrades to the Water Pollution Control Plant as may be required over time. Mrs. Hoffstaetter made a motion to give this a positive recommendation subject to development of the site per the requirements of the Zoning Regulations and standard Department of Public Works/Engineering Department conditions. Mr. Urice seconded the motion and it was passed unanimously.

8-24 Referral – December 2018 City Council Agenda Item #10: Housing Redevelopment Proposed Improvements – 54, 56, & 58 Town Hill Avenue.

Mrs. Emminger said the proposed improvements consist of the extension of municipal storm sewer, road widening, and an on-site truck turning easement in conjunction with a Site Plan approval that was granted on October 11, 2018, (SP #18-02) to permit the construction of a 24-unit apartment house. The project is oriented to Town Hill Ave. and the on-site parking area is accessed via Park Place. All of the proposed improvements were conditions of the site plan approval. This request is for an extension of the storm sewer located in Park Place to the subject property. The property owner is also proposing to widen a portion of Park Place to allow for an additional two feet of road pavement. Lastly the property owner is proposing to grant the City of Danbury an easement to enable City vehicles to turn around at the terminus of Park Place. Mr. Urice made a motion to give this a positive recommendation subject to development of the site per the requirements of the Zoning Regulations and standard Department of Public Works/Engineering Department requirements. All final plans and documents should be approved as to form and content by the Office of the Corporation Counsel prior to acceptance by the City and recording on the Danbury Land Records. Mr. Chicchio seconded the motion and it was passed unanimously.

8-24 Referral – December 2018 City Council Agenda Item #11: Request for Storm Sewer Extension - Westconn Properties, Inc., 233 White Street & Meadow Street.

Mrs. Emminger said that a Special Exception/Site Plan (SE #732) was approved by this Commission in August 2015 to permit an approximately 12,000 sq.ft. medical office within an existing building. This request is for an extension from the existing Meadow St. storm sewer location to the White Street intersection. Mrs. Hoffstaetter made a motion to give this a positive recommendation subject to development of the site per the requirements of the Zoning Regulations and standard Department of Public Works/Engineering Department requirements for storm drainage. All final plans and documents should be approved as to form and content by the Office of the Corporation Counsel prior to acceptance by the City and recording on the Danbury Land Records. Mr. Urice seconded the motion and it was passed unanimously.

8-24 Referral – December 2018 City Council Agenda Item #12: Request for Water Main Extension – 54, 56, & 58 Town Hill Avenue.

Mrs. Emminger said the Planning Department issued a site plan approval on October 11, 2018, (SP #18-02) to permit the construction of a 24-unit apartment house. This request is an extension of the water main from Park Place onto the site that would connect to the existing water main located in Town Hill Avenue. Additionally, the extension of the

water main will provide water service for a proposed fire hydrant. The Plan of Conservation & Development (POCD) indicates this site is within the Existing Water Service Area. Mrs. Glover made a motion to give this a positive recommendation subject to development of the site per the requirements of the Zoning Regulations and standard Department of Public Works/Engineering Department requirements for public water main extensions and construction. All final plans and documents should be approved as to form and content by the Office of the Corporation Counsel prior to acceptance by the City and recording on the Danbury Land Records. Mrs. Hoffstaetter seconded the motion and it was passed unanimously.

8-24 Referral – December 2018 City Council Agenda Item #13: Request for Acceptance of Water & Sewer Easements and Lines – BTJAMM, LLC, 18-20 Sheridan Street.

Mrs. Emminger said this is a six unit multi-family development located next to Sheridan Commons. These easements were a condition of approval on the Site Plan #16-04 which was approved by the Planning Department on December 8, 2016. Mr. Urice made a motion to give this a positive recommendation subject to approval by the Department of Public Works. All final plans and documents should be approved as to form and content by the Office of the Corporation Counsel prior to acceptance by the City and recording on the Danbury Land Records. Mrs. Glover seconded the motion and it was passed unanimously.

Chairman Finaldi said there is nothing listed under New Business or For Reference Only. He then noted that the regular meeting schedule for 2019 was listed under Correspondence.

At 9:10 PM, with no further business to discuss, Mr. Chiochio made a motion to adjourn. Mrs. Glover seconded the motion and it was passed unanimously.