

**COMMUNITY PLANNING AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT
SPECIAL MEETING
MAY 13, 2021, 6:30 P.M.
MINUTES**

1. Call to Order

A. Meeting was called to order at 6:30 p.m. by Mayor Shari Cantor.

B. Attendees – Deputy Mayor Leon Davidoff, Councilor Lee Gold, Councilor Beth Kerrigan, Councilor Ben Wenograd, Town Manager Matt Hart, Town Planner Todd Dumais, Mr. Duane Martin from Community Planning and Economic Development, Ms. Kristen Gorski from Economic Development, and Mr. Pat Gallagher with SLR.

2. Business Items

A. Meeting Minutes February 4, 2021 – The minutes were accepted without objection.

B. Transit Development Oriented Workshop – Mr. Hart reported a major zoning initiative looking at how to best promote transit-oriented development along the New Park Avenue corridor. There is a community survey underway currently and there are community workshops including one with the Council through this Committee.

Mr. Dumais began the PowerPoint presentation regarding the Transit-Oriented Development Planning Initiative. The dialogue around Transit-Oriented Development around the New Park corridor goes back to 2015. There were several studies with the State and the DOT, resulting in a TOD primer concept memo, and in 2016 there was a capacity study with the CTDOT. In 2016 and 2017 grants were obtained for a New Park Avenue transit area complete street study, which was focused on infrastructure and creating a more transit-supportive mixed-use multimodal travel along New Park Avenue. There were some recommendations that resulted in over \$3M worth of grants to do a road diet and complete street improvement; streetscape and sidewalk improvements. In December 2020, the Council adopted a moratorium regarding non-supportive transit uses within the district. The moratorium also established the framework and guided the staff to come back with some specific recommendations on making the current zoning more transit-supportive. Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) takes into account the distance from a fixed station, population density to support transit ridership, diverse mixed land uses to create vibrant opportunities, and designed to be pedestrian-friendly with well-designed parking opportunities that support transit use. TOD is related to zoning as zoning controls uses such as density (residential and the number of units per acre), diversity, and design (setbacks, building orientation, parking requirements, etc.). The two study areas include Flatbush Avenue Station, which has a fastrak line, and Elmwood Avenue Station.

Mr. Gallagher elaborated more on three of the four Ds of the TOD (density, design, and diversity). Regarding density, 3000 people per square mile is considered lower transit-

supportive density with 10,000 people per square mile being considered high-density. There are higher employment densities in both station areas, which have more than 4000 jobs per square mile. The Floor Area Ratio (FAR), which is the ratio of building floor area to its lot area, is used for regulating density within zones. The FARs reflect how intensely a parcel is used. The permitted FARs range from 0.4 up to 1.25 with 1.0 for residential mixed-use projects. We are at 0.22 for the Flatbush Avenue station area and 0.25 for the Elmwood station area. There are currently no minimum FARs. Mr. Gallagher went over slides regarding diversity or mixed transit and non-transit supportive land uses and their corresponding zoning. Slides were presented regarding design, which included design elements of buildings (placement, architectural design, etc.), sites (setbacks, landscaping, etc.), and the public realm (sidewalks, bike lanes, etc.). Mr. Gallagher went over slides regarding zoning and how it regulates the design, i.e. setbacks, parking requirements, etc.

The forthcoming Complete Streets Improvement Project is designed to make the public realm supportive of TOD with new elements including decorative streetlights, buffered bike lanes, traffic signal improvements, etc. This project is in progress. The survey and design work has begun with construction expected to be started next year with appropriate construction costs of \$3.8M, much of which is covered by grant funding.

Mr. Dumais broached needing to understand what would be a successful process. Outside of TOD, other important areas to explore as part of this process include sustainability, site assembly, curb cut management, and affordable housing. The next steps include ongoing monitoring of changes to State legislation, a business and property owner focus group meeting, a public workshop, a summary report of outreach findings, drafting and refining of an ordinance, and a formal ordinance hearing.

C. Staff Report on Zoning Ordinance Related to Drive-through Expansion – Mr. Hart spoke of a memo generated by Mr. Dumais and stated that if the Committee was comfortable with the suggestions, then the next step would be to propose legislation for the Committee's review.

Mr. Dumais went over a memo regarding drive-through zoning elements and research. The memo tries to identify trends in the industry regarding drive-through facilities, the general pros and cons, and the critical elements of a zoning ordinance. There are three main types of drive-through facilities in West Hartford, banks, pharmacies, and restaurants. Each is regulated by zoning districts. There are currently approximately 22 drive-through facilities in the community; 15 banks, 2 pharmacies, and 5 restaurants. The impact of COVID highlighted the need for increased mobility and choice options for services, i.e. getting food. Many restaurant chains are focusing their future business expansion plans to include drive-through facilities. One of the pros of a drive-through is the convenience of receiving goods, i.e. food, prescriptions, etc., without getting out of the car, which is a plus for those with mobility issues or small children. A con of the drive-through is air/noise pollution associated with idling vehicles. A drive-through restaurant zoning ordinance amendment should be restrictive enough to prevent unwanted development outcomes but flexible enough to support the development and production of new drive-through facilities. Outside of regulatory processes, the ordinance should include design and operational standards to include setbacks,

building placement, site access, and limitations on noise and hours of operation. Approval was received to proceed and bring the Committee some proposed ordinance language.

D. Staff Report on Zoning Ordinance Related to Philanthropic Events – Mr. Hart spoke on limitations regarding special events charitable organizations can hold throughout the year and are the current rules too restrictive, especially as non-profits and other charitable organizations have become more reliant on these types of events in recent years.

Mr. Dumais went over a notation in the Table of Permitted Accessory Uses where it limits the charitable events to no more than three days duration for any one event. There has been some legal interpretation over the years that it was actually meant to be for three events over the course of a year, which is quite restrictive. There now appears to be an opportunity to clear up this definition to make it easier to read and use. Other provisions deal with farmer's markets and purposes outside of philanthropic. This is an opportunity to clarify how many events any such organization would be permitted and if they wanted to do more, it could be done through a Special Use process. A lot of the organizations are located in residential neighborhoods and there could be an opportunity to give them a little more as of right leeway and also provide them, if they are interested, the opportunity to go to the Planning Commission and ask for more through a Special Use permit process. Approval was received to proceed and bring the Committee some proposed ordinance language.

E. 2020 Complete Streets Annual Report – Mr. Martin briefly went over the 2020 Complete Streets Annual Report. Bicycle lanes were added during the Calendar year at \$30,500. A bike rack was installed near Barb's Pizza restaurant, which was only \$500 as the Town already had a rack in storage. Pedestrian improvements, including sidewalk installation/replacement and gap elimination totaled \$822,000. A couple of bike connectors were also replaced, which were provided by the Pedestrian and Bicycle Commission and they also provided priority. Thirty crosswalks were replaced. The pavement markings and signage came to a total of \$18,000. There were also 42 concrete sidewalk ramps installed and traffic signal improvements at \$50,000. This was the highest individual year for adding bike lanes of over four miles. There now over 50 miles of bike routes and 20 miles of bike lanes and 1.8 miles of multi-use trails.

3. Communications

Mr. Hart reported there were no communications.

4. Staff Reports

A. Economic Development Report – Ms. Gorski reported on the Leasing and Development activity. Restore Hyper Wellness and Cryotherapy is moving to a location next to Salsa Fresca and will be opening during the summer. Connecticut Physical Therapy Specialists are opening on the ground floor of the Simon Conover Building and Maximum Beverage is finalizing its relocation from Eden's Plaza to the backside of Whole Foods. Moving into Blue Back Square and West Hartford Center, Toro Loco Casita has a lot of work being done on that building which was the long-time vacant Petals and Paws on Raymond Road, next to

Whole Foods. They are also looking to open this summer. The School of Rock recently received its building permits and they will be taking the 2nd floor of 20 Isham. Sola Salon recently opened in Blue Back Square, which is about 20,000 square feet of hair salon co-working space. The Place to Be in Blue Back Square is looking to open soon. Kung Fu Tea is moving to the former Esquire Cleaner's location on South Main Street and is hoping to open in late June/early July. Lobster Craft continues to work on its buildout at the location on Farmington Avenue. Aroma Body and Foot Spa just signed a lease for its location on Farmington Avenue. People's Bank is opening in the former United Bank space on Lasalle Road. Hair, located in the back building of the Farmington Avenue parking lot, will be changing its name to Mane Loft Salon.

On Park Road, Jar and Bar opened today. Dos and Dyes, which is a hair salon, recently opened at 224 Whiting Lane. Within a week of being notified of Pechanga and Piñatas closing, there was an announcement that Fuego Picante will be opening in that location on Park Road. There has been some activity on Prospect Avenue; 409 Prospect Avenue received an SDD and received an SDD amendment in 2019 to construct 10 townhome-styled residences and they recently started construction there. There was a recent announcement regarding 136 South Main Street. The new Hartford Healthcare Building is going to be built at the former Taylor and Modeen site. Aldi's on New Park Avenue is currently closed for renovations. Smash Avenue recently opened at 635 New Park, Connecticut's first indoor smash room, and Body Rock recently relocated to the space next to Smash Avenue; both businesses are owned by Shaun Chambers. At 510 New Park, there was an approved site plan for Auto Zone. Auto Zone has to meet with the Historic District Commission for demolition approval for 522 New Park Avenue. If they are successful, then they will receive full site plan approval to move forward to relocate from New Britain Avenue to New Park Avenue. Lastly in that corridor, 540 New Park, the Housing Authority is working on environmental remediation of the site with anticipated completion sometime this summer.

Zaytoon's Mediterranean Bistro is opening a second location on Elmwood Avenue at the former Chalkboard space. Cake Gypsy will be opening on Elmwood. WeHa Brewing and Roasting is going into 141 Shield Street and hoping to open this summer. Mark's Appliance Warehouse will be moving to 80 South Street in the future. Storage Solutions is moving to the former Bally's space at 1031 New Britain Avenue. Ulta opened within the last month and Pure Hockey is relocating next to Ulta.

Vacancies are becoming few and far between. The economy is picking back up. Within the last couple of weeks, Ms. Gorski has been introduced to no less than 20 perspective businesses looking for space in town. Regarding the restaurant revitalization grants, which came out of the last recovery package from the federal government, they announced within the last 24 hours they have exceeded applications for all categories except for any food service that did not exceed \$50,000 in gross receipts for 2019. Businesses are reporting a challenge regarding the workforce and being able to find qualified workers or any workers at all. Ms. Gorski reported they are working with several businesses on this front to hopefully fill the positions that are presently vacant in the community. There will be an announcement in the near future regarding "Why West Hartford?", which will be the Town's new Marketing and Tourism website. The anticipated launch date is for later this month. It will be

geared toward providing updates on town events, pushing tourism. It will be a resource for businesses looking to come to West Hartford as well as already existing businesses in town. There will be a director of businesses where you can search and go directly to that business's website.

B. Building and Engineering Report – Mr. Martin reported the Building Division has resumed in-person interior inspections. The building inspectors are now fully vaccinated and with that, they have resumed interior inspections. The City View upgrade is also being worked on, which includes the Building, Engineering and Planning Divisions. There are a lot of meetings, software installations, training, and electronic forms being created with the goal of getting the upgrade off the ground by summertime for all three divisions to use.

Mr. Martin did a quick overview of some of the roadwork. There are three roads currently under reconstruction; Fennbrook Road, Owings Road and Cornell Road. They have already started with the curbing, sidewalk, driveway and catch basins. Reconstruction is about to start on Princeton Street. Beyond that, there is a section of Ridgewood Road planned between Sedgwick and Tunxis Roads for reconstruction, Arapahoe Road and Walbridge Road. Walbridge is the section between Fern Street and Farmington Avenue. Regarding additional roadwork, the first round of milling and paving is about to begin. The milling is planned to start on Mountain Road from East Maxwell to Glenwood, two sections of Fern Street from Mountain Road to Willowbrook and Fernbrook to North Main Street, Fernridge Road and a section of North Main Street between the North Main Street bridge and Fern Street the week of the 17th with Fern Street starting on Monday. Paving will start the following week on Monday, May 24, weather permitting. There is expected to be one week of milling and about two weeks of paving, weather permitting.

C. Town Manager Report – Mr. Hart reported the Affordable Housing Advisory Group, which was authorized in March, was advertised through April and received approximately 25 letters of interest. The letters are under review. They will start working on reviewing staff's work on an affordable housing policy and working on an affordable housing plan to submit to the State in July 2022. Once the group is assembled, the participants will be identified.

5. Future Agenda Items

Future agenda items include Economic Development regarding TOD, as well as the ordinances regarding drive-through and philanthropic events.

6. Adjournment

A. Meeting adjourned at 8:46 p.m.

/axb