

MINUTES OF THE REGULAR MEETING
CITY OF STAMFORD, CONNECTICUT
URBAN REDEVELOPMENT COMMISSION
THURSDAY, MARCH 13, 2014

1. At 6:07pm, Chairman Christopher D. Meek called the regular meeting to order. The following were in attendance:

Commissioners:

Christopher D. Meek, Chairman
Peter Sciarretta, Vice Chairman
Michaëlle Jean-Pierre, Secretary/Treasurer
Taylor R. Molgano
Mayra M. Rios

Staff:

Dr. Tommie Jackson, Executive Director
Rachel A. Goldberg, General Counsel

Also Attending:

David Barry, President, Ironside Development Co.
Attorney Michael Cacace, Cacace, Tusch & Santagata
David Killeen, Associate Planner, City of Stamford
Martin Levine, Special Assistant to the Mayor
Thomas L. Rich, President, F.D. Rich Co.
Joseph Schiffer, Newman Architects

2. Approval of Minutes

November 14, 2013 Regular Meeting; December 12, 2013 Personnel Committee Meeting; December 12, 2013 Regular Meeting, and January 15, 2014 Special Meeting – Chairman Meek recommended the minutes be approved as a group. Following his recommendation, Vice Chairman Sciarretta made a motion to approve the four sets of minutes as a group. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Jean-Pierre and carried by unanimous vote.

3. Master Plan Presentation by David Killeen

Mr. Killeen said, “I’d basically like to introduce you to the process and invite you to be part of it. As an overview, this is the team that’s working on the City of Stamford’s Master Plan update. The Steering Committee is chaired by Terry Dell, Chairman of the Planning Board. Robin Stein, who is Interim Director of Economic Development, is currently on the Steering Committee and it’s an interesting connect because he was the overseer of the 2002 Master Plan. Harry Day, Chair of the Land Use Committee, Tom Mills, Chair of the Zoning Board, and Roger Quick from the Planning Board are also on the Committee. We hope by having this representation and connection with the Boards that will ultimately end up adopting the Plan and implementing it through the zoning process that this representation will facilitate the process. The Land Use Bureau staff – Norman Cole, Bureau Chief, David Woods, Principal Planner, and myself, are all working on the Plan. The primary consultant we’ve chosen is BFJ Planning out of New York, being assisted by Perkins Eastman, Stantec and Coastal Management.”

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Mr. Killeen said, “They (the consultants) started by looking at the 2002 Master Plan. Unlike many communities in the state, the Stamford Master Plan has broader powers, broader influence, on building than most municipalities. Any zone change that occurs has to be consistent with the Land Use Plan that’s part of the Master Plan. The last Plan was created as a series of documents – an Executive Summary, a Policies Report, Neighborhood Plans, a General Land Use Plan - and then there was a series of background reports that included housing, economic development, urban design and transportation. I know that this group (the URC) has played a very important role in making urban design an important element within the downtown area. The biggest change that we’ve seen between 2002 and now would be to have one consolidated document.” Mr. Killeen went on to discuss the Land Use Plan’s various uses and showed a slide presentation noting: (a) the updating process began about a year ago; (b) in May of 2013, there was a major introductory workshop for stake-holders and a number of organizations in the community as well as the general public; and (c) following that, there were neighborhood workshops held between September and October.

Mr. Killeen continued, “The important thing when you’re looking at a Master Plan is to realize that basically it’s a statement of direction for the community. An important aspect of having that vision and direction stated properly is to obtain input from as many groups as possible, which was our goal in having the series of neighborhood workshops.” On April 1, there will be an open house/public workshop at which the consultants will make a public presentation. A Public Hearing is anticipated by the end of June.

Some of the direction/major themes that have often come out of the neighborhood meetings, according to Mr. Killeen, include: (a) recognizing Stamford as a regional center; (b) a sustainable future; (c) preserve and enhance the character of the cities’ existing neighborhoods. He went on to discuss transportation and mobility, specifically Metro North and the need for improvement of the basic infrastructure; economic development and the need to retain and create jobs for Stamford residents, and growth management, concentrating on commercial growth (office and retail) downtown and other neighborhoods within the community. It was noted that the Chamber of Commerce has expressed a strong desire that at least the concept of light rail be mentioned in the final Plan. There was also discussion at the workshops about improving pedestrian connections/crossings and bicycle routes throughout the community. Mr. Killeen said, “What the consultants tried to do was take the Transportation Center as the focus/the center of the radius and draw a half mile around it. That is a very traditional distance used in planning circles to define the area where the average person would be willing to walk. When we look at the large scale residential development that has happened in the last few years, we see that having proximity to the train station opens a lot of avenues and, in this case, a younger population which compliments the current labor force.” Mr. Killeen continued, “We haven’t seen all of the specifics in the Plan yet but it does show some of the elements that we’re looking at in the downtown, the south end and probably the most critical, the east side, where we look at how we can connect the two neighborhoods, the east side and the west side. This Plan is going to look at improving the connections, making it easier to get back and forth, and trying to figure out how we can optimize development within those areas. The amount of development in the coastal areas will also be addressed as will the importance of retaining affordable housing.”

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“The City has made great strides by using the below-market rate in the zoning regulations and we want to see the new Plan continue to utilize this benefit,” Mr. Killeen said.” He concluded his slide presentation and noted that he is expecting the City to have draft chapters of the proposed Master Plan available on-line within the next week or two at www.stamfordmasterplan.org.

4. Correspondence/Communications

None at this time.

5. Announcements/Media Update

Executive Director Jackson noted that he has been sending relevant newspaper articles along with the Board packages.

6. Southeast Quadrant

- (a) **Re-Use Parcel 38** – Attorney Goldberg said that typically the Agency retains an architect to assist the Commission in its review of the plans that are submitted. Attorney Goldberg said, “The last several times we used Dan Doern, who is no longer available. Executive Director Jackson has had a conversation with Joe Schiffer from Herb Newman & Associates, with whom we have a long standing relationship.” Mr. Schiffer has agreed to consult on this project and Attorney Goldberg sent a draft contract to HNA this morning. Consulting fees are not-to-exceed \$5,000.00 (hourly rate of \$200.00). The redeveloper of Re-Use Parcel 38 has agreed to pay the \$5,000.00 consulting fee. Chairman Meek asked for a motion to retain Herb Newman & Associates, specifically Joe Schiffer, as a Consultant for the Parcel 38 project. Discussion ensued. Commissioner Molgano made a motion to authorize the Executive Director to enter into a contract with Herb Newman & Associates at an amount not-to-exceed \$5,000.00. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Sciarretta and carried by unanimous vote.

Attorney Michael Cacace addressed the application before the Commission, filed by RB Stamford Associates LLC, which is a partnership between F.D. Rich Co. and an out-of-state developer from New Jersey, Ironside, a premier developer of primarily residential dwellings. He said, “We are here this evening to request your approval of four things: (1) to designate RB Stamford Associates LLC as the successor redeveloper of Parcel 38; (2) to approve the schematic plans that this developer has for Parcel 38; (3) to approve some amendments to the Urban Renewal Plan which have been classified as other than minor by your counsel and therefore will require approval by the Commission, the Board of Representatives and others; and (4) approval of certain variances in the underlying land use agreement.” Attorney Cacace said, “What makes this proposal somewhat unique compared to many that have taken place on this site is that it is significantly underdeveloped. Although we are going to produce several hundred units of housing on this site, there is essentially no commercial use of the density except for a public urban café and the density on the residential side is less than it could have been. In terms of height, area and bulk, this project is far less than what could have been built there. These developers have been very sensitive to produce a product that is aimed at today’s market.”

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Attorney Cacace said, “The status of this project is that they have signed a contract to buy the property, closing probably in September of this year. In the interim, a number of variations in terms of plans for the project have been looked at, vetted, and what we present to you tonight is the ultimate project they plan to go forward with. The process in order to close in September is for us to get on your agenda and get your approval of the four items I have specified so we can go before the boards and committees, have a public hearing, and then go to the full Board of Representatives probably sometime in July.”

Attorney Cacace continued, “We’re looking at a site that is 4.3 acres. We intend to produce 672 units of housing on that site together with a public café. It will have a large green oasis and open space in the center of the project. The amenities that will be described in detail are stellar cutting-edge, what the market is looking for, with lots of architectural articulation, both horizontal and vertical, with changes in materials and exterior finishes that will make this less monolithic than many of the other proposals we’ve seen. I will say, for the record, we have agreed to pay up to \$5,000.00 for the architect. I have worked with Mr. Newman and in particular Joe Schiffer in connection with the Park Square West project and have great respect for their work.” Attorney Cacace concluded, “I think the most important thing here tonight is what the development will look like so I would like to introduce Tom Rich to take us through that.” Mr. Rich gave a brief history of the site and proposed plans for Parcel 38 dating back to the sixties. He also reviewed the projects F.D. Rich and Ironside Development are currently working on. He said, “We have plans for the site, something called ‘urban ready living.’ The average size of the apartment in this project will be about 600 square feet. We do that to provide very efficient design with absolutely workable units, eliminating the wasted space from buildings. Studios are approximately 480sf, one bedrooms are approximately 630sf, and two bedrooms average 850sf. Within the design, the goal is really to create a very varied design that is connected.” Proposed concept plans and elevations prepared by Design Architect ‘Concrete’ were distributed to the Commission.

Mr. Rich described the facade and noted that the buildings on the site will encircle a private ‘urban oasis’ featuring a pool, landscaping and activity areas for residents and guests. In addition, there will be a landscaped public plaza at the corner of Tresser Boulevard and Greyrock Place, adjacent to the cafe. The building in Block K will have a gym on the ground level, with residential units above it. All parking will be underground in one continuous basement level of parking and the building in Block F will have a sub-basement with additional spaces. The proposed plans show a total of 571 self-parked spaces, with a ratio of .85 spaces per unit. However, the developer will utilize tools available under the current zoning regulations to achieve a total parking ratio of one space per unit. Mr. Rich said, “The site buildings will reach a maximum of five stories in height. The top roof-top will contain some recreation/leisure area(s) between the buildings.” He reiterated that “the only retail envisioned for the site was an ‘urban café’ which would serve the development’s tenants as well as the general public. The primary focus is to ensure that the site is utilized well without over development or exposure.”

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Discussion ensued. In response to a question about timeframes, Mr. Rich said, “The building process should be complete within 24 months and ready for occupancy.” Mr. Rich concluded, “I am very excited and I hope the Commission is equally excited about this project.” The Commission applauded Mr. Rich and his team for their efforts to develop the site. In response to a question from the Commission, Attorney Goldberg briefly reviewed the plan review/design review process and said, “Dr. Jackson and I both have our own roles in the approval process as Staff. You as the Board have approval authority over each of the aspects of the four parts of the developer’s request as presented tonight by Attorney Cacace.” Executive Director Jackson will work with Norman Cole and others on the planning staff while Attorney Goldberg works on the zoning requirements. The Executive Director added that “the URC staff would work to move things along as expeditiously as possible.” He suggested that RB Stamford Associates LLC consider having the various City of Stamford Boards act simultaneously as was done with the Park Square West Phase II development.

6. Southeast Quadrant

(b) **Trinity (including Loan Agreement)** - At 8:03pm, Commissioner Rios made a motion to go into Executive Session to specifically discuss contract negotiations, including the proposed loan agreement, with Trinity. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Jean-Pierre and carried by unanimous vote. Attorney Goldberg and Executive Director Jackson participated in the discussion. No motions were made and no votes were taken. At 8:57pm, Commissioner Molgano made a motion to return to Open Session. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Sciarretta and carried by unanimous vote.

7. Agency Administration

(a) **Chairpersons Report/Discussion** – URC’s OTHRA representative Commissioner Molgano reported that the Committee had met with Mayor David Martin and his staff. Discussion was held pertaining to the fluctuation in rents between tenants. Installation of an elevator and handicapped bathrooms was also discussed, along with the allocation of existing funds. He said, “We all knew this building would never pay for itself, but estimates for preserving this beautiful building were way off.” Another meeting to address these issues will be held in the near future.

(b) **Budget/Status of Reimbursables** – Executive Director Jackson reported that the Agency was able to recover \$12,000.00 from the City for parking fees. Attorney Goldberg reviewed the status of outstanding Transitway invoices. Executive Director Jackson said, “I have a meeting tomorrow with Ernie Orgera. I’m going to suggest a less cumbersome process where, instead of our having to wait for reimbursements, the City consider paying the contractors/individuals directly as opposed to our having to advance the money.” Attorney Goldberg said that the Transitway has asked for further extensions through the end of the calendar year.

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(c) **Personnel** – Executive Director Jackson reminded the Commission that he was waiting for his engagement letter with terms discussed from October 2013. Chairman Meek asked the Commission if everyone agreed with the engagement letter and terms drafted by Commissioner Rios. Everyone agreed.

8. Executive Director's Report

Executive Director Jackson reported that the Mill River Collaborative is holding its second annual Dinner in the Park Gala on Thursday, May 1st. Tickets are \$300.00 per person and if anyone is interested in going they should contact the Director.

9. Old Business

None at this time.

10. New Business

Chairman Meek said he would like to have a review of all Agency expenditures done by an independent auditor. Attorney Goldberg said, "The City has an independent auditor who, every year, does a complete audit of our books and our operation." Commissioner Meek said the City saw the Commission as a component of the audit. However, Chairman Meek recommended a forensic audit of the URC dating from 2011 forward. The Commission concurred. Discussion ensued and the Director was asked to contact auditors and provide information/rates to the Commission.

11. Adjournment

The next regular meeting will be held on Thursday, April 10, 2014 at 6:00pm.

There being no further business before the Board, Commissioner Sciarretta made a motion to adjourn. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Jean-Pierre and the meeting was adjourned at 9:37pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Michaëlle Jean-Pierre
Secretary/Treasurer