

MINUTES - PLANNING BOARD REORGANIZATION

January 10, 2018

WORKSHOP PORTION

Ms. Murray, Chairman called the meeting to order at 7:01 P.M. in Room 108 of the Municipal Building, 8 Springfield Avenue, Cranford, New Jersey.

1. SWEARING IN OF NEW MEMBERS

Bobbi Anderson, Class IV member for a four-year term ending December 31, 2021 was sworn in by Mr. Rothman, Esquire.

Andrew Cossa Class IV member for a four-year term ending December 31, 2021 was sworn in by Mr. Rothman, Esquire.

Julie Didzbalis, Alternate No. 2 member for a two-year term ending December 31, 2019 was sworn in by Mr. Rothman Esquire.

Thomas Hannen, Mayor/Class I member for a one-year term ending December 31, 2018 was sworn in by Mr. Rothman, Esquire.

Ann Dooley, Deputy Mayor/Class III member for a one-year term ending December 31, 2018 was sworn in by Mr. Rothman, Esquire.

Dr. Christopher Chapman, Class II member for a one-year term ending December 31, 2018 was sworn in by Mr. Rothman, Esquire.

William Masol was sworn in as Planning Board In-House Engineer for a one year term ending December 31, 2018 by Mr. Rothman, Esquire.

Motion to go into closed session to conduct interviews for Attorney was made by Deputy Mayor Dooley, seconded by Ms. Murray and passed on unanimous voice vote.

Motion was made to return to open session was made by Ms. Anderson, seconded by Ms. Didzbalis and passed on unanimous voice vote.

2. APPOINTMENT OF BOARD ATTORNEY

Mark Rothman was nominated as Planning Board Attorney by Ms. Anderson, seconded by Ms. Pedde and passed on unanimous voice vote.

3. ELECTION OF OFFICERS

Ms. Murray was nominated as Chairperson by Ms. Anderson, seconded by Ms. Pedde, and passed on unanimous voice vote.

Ms. Anderson was nominated as Vice-Chairperson by Ms. Pedde, seconded by Dr. Chapman and passed on unanimous voice vote.

Ms. Pedde was nominated as Secretary by Ms. Anderson, seconded by Ms. Didzbalis and passed on unanimous voice vote.

Ms. Feder was nominated as Alternate Secretary by Ms. Anderson, seconded by Ms. Pedde and passed on unanimous voice vote.

4. APPOINTMENT OF ADMINISTRATOR/SCRIBE

Kathy Lenahan were nominated as Board Administrator by Mayor Hannen, seconded by Deputy Mayor Dooley, and passed on unanimous voice vote.

5. APPOINTMENT OF PLANNING CONSULTANT

Motion was made by Ms. Anderson to designate Maser Consulting, P.A. as outside-planners as needed on applications as commensurate with their area of expertise, seconded by Ms. Didzbalis and passed on unanimous voice vote.

6. DESIGNATION OF OFFICIAL NEWSPAPER

A motion to designate The Westfield Leader and/or The Star Ledger as the Planning Board official newspaper was made by Ms. Anderson, seconded by Ms. Pedde and passed by voice vote.

7. COMMUNICATIONS

None

8. MINUTES:

Motion to adopt the minutes of December 20, 2018 was made by Ms. Anderson, seconded by Ms. Pedde and passed on unanimous voice vote.

9. RESOLUTIONS OF MEMORIALIZATION:

**Applicant #PBA- 1700010
322 Walnut, LLC, Applicant
322 Walnut Avenue
Block: 488, Lot: 15, R-2 Zone**

Subdivision application by right without any variances requested

After discussion, a motion to adopt the resolution approving Application PBA-1700010 was made by Mayor Hannen, seconded by Mr. Ashenbach with the following voting in favor of the motion: Ms. Murray, Ms. Anderson, Dr. Chapman, Mayor Hannen, Mr. Taylor, Ms. Didzbalis and Mr. Aschenbach.

10. OLD/NEW BUSINESS:

A presentation by Harbor Consultants of the Draft of the North Avenue Preliminary Investigative Report was held in Room 107.

1. STATEMENT OF COMPLIANCE WITH OPEN PUBLIC MEETINGS ACT

Ms. Lenahan announced in accordance with the terms and conditions of the Open Public Meetings Act, the Westfield Leader and/or the Star Ledger had been notified and the agenda posted in the municipal building as required.

2. FLAG SALUTE

3. ROLL CALL

Members Present:

Ms. Murray
Ms. Anderson
Dr. Chapman
Mr. Cossa
Deputy Mayor Dooley
Mayor Hannen
Ms. Pedde
Mr. Taylor

Members Absent:

Ms. Feder

Alternates Present:

Mr. Ashchenbach
Ms. Didzbalis

Alternates Absent:

None

Also present:

Mark Rothman, Esquire, Ronald Johnson, Zoning Officer, Kathy Lenahan Board Administrator.

Ms. Murray discussed the purpose of the meeting. Stated no action will be taken this evening. Mayor Hannen clarified that the resolution passed last April was to exclude Block 195 Lot 10 from the study area. Stated that this was an oversight and there will be another resolution by the Township Committee to rectify the issue. Asked for audience to give input to the Downtown. Looking to enhance the Downtown businesses.

Mr. Michael Mistretta introduced himself. Stated he is from Harbor Consultants and his office is located in Cranford. He is here to present a report that is only a draft. It is not signed or sealed. Will present a PowerPoint presentation. He discussed looking at the history of this study area and found there are documents on file that date back to 1985. Stated that the area was designated in need of rehabilitation which was previously approved by the Council and Planning Board but was rescinded and removed. In May of 2017 there was a strategic map approved for redevelopment. There is also a Downtown Cranford Vision Plan dated 2000. Stated that the Township is designated as a Transit Village. There is a long history from a planning perspective of documents and evidence that supports the request for this preliminary investigation. Stated this is a long-term approach.

Described the report as dated December 2017 and prepared by Harbor Consultants. Stated there are 18 properties in the study highlighted in yellow from North Union Avenue to North Avenue East and extending to the railroad tracks. Showed several aerial views of buildings. Total area combined is 3.95(+-) acres based on GIS and tax maps only.

Showed photos of properties within the study along with photos of flooding in the Downtown during Hurricane Irene. Showed zone map of the Downtown core, and that is where redevelopment and growth is being targeted.

Discussed the criteria of the study which is subject to change. Classified study area from a planning standpoint. Stated all criteria is listed in the first couple of pages in the draft. There are seven maps and discussed the criteria of each one of them.

Questions from the Board ascertained the following:

There have been seven different studies since 1985. All other planning efforts have failed. South side of train station designated as a NJ Transit Hub. Riverfront is part of fair share housing plan and affordable housing. There needs to be a closer look as to why North Avenue has not had an influx of private capital. Mr. Mistretta is not sure of status of clean-up on Swan Cleaners, nor if any of the other properties have been tested for environmental contaminants. Process is to have meeting with DMC and property owners in study area for ideas and feedback. If a group gets behind a plan, they can go to the County and State for grants. May get interest from developers. Discussed language of condemnation and eminent domain being standard language in the report. Language was part of the designation of South Avenue Redevelopment. The water and sewer infrastructure are over 60 years old. If there was a re-designation it might be multiple projects and it would be the responsibility of developer to do the infrastructure upgrades. There would not be a cost to the town. Needs to be economically feasible for a developer to come in. Developers must meet the new flood hazard standards. Report is only in draft form.

4. PUBLIC COMMENT PORTION

Michael Tears - He is the business owner of Marino's.

Asked what happens to him. Feels if there is redevelopment his rent will be raised. Asked if this has already happened. Stated this is not Hoboken, not Westfield. Asked to be kept in the loop.

Mayor Hannen stated they are looking for feedback on draft. Trying to make area better and would like to enhance the businesses in the area.

Deputy Mayor Dooley stated it is only a draft of study to see if redevelopment should even happen. The questions Mr. Tears is asking will come at a later stage if the plan were to move forward.

Shelley Shaffery – 5 Hillside Place

Asked why southwest municipal lot is not included in this report and why block 193 Lot 16 is included in the study. Does not feel necessary to be included.

Mr. Mistretta stated he was not involved in selection of properties. The Goodman Realty Building is identified as a section 3 property, but would like to hear from owner about their interest.

Judy Swick – Owner of Chapman Brothers - 36 North Avenue East

Stated Chapman Brothers has been there the longest. Purchased business 17-18 years ago along with the building. They have plans to renovate the office and loft

apartments which were already approved by the Board. Stated none of the owners knew about this meeting. No one was notified. Was not on website till Monday. Feels owners should have been notified. They want to have their office space there and build apartments. They want to be in the Downtown. Feels they provide a very good service for the people of Cranford.

Mr. Mistretta stated he started working on study late last year. He was not ready with study until now.

Ms. Anderson stated that at the time Chapman came before the Board last year, this was not on the table. It has been on backburner for 30 years. Trying to plan for the future.

Danielle Corriero – 144 North Lehigh Avenue
Has two concerns. One is density. Feels it can change the aesthetic. Feels overdevelopment will cause more traffic. Asked how will the Board address density.

Col. Andrew Burns – 607 High Street
He has been in Cranford 24 years. Raised his daughter here. Talked about tradition and community. Asked who will pay for remediation of Swan Cleaners. Stated people stay in Cranford because they like it.

Rob Simon – Attorney for Ralph Brunette - 25 North Avenue E., Block 193 Lot 15
Discussed his experience with the redevelopment process. Discussed condemnation law and the use of condemnation as boiler plate language. Stated that the Township Committee passed a resolution to investigate. In September 2017, the Planning Board passed a resolution to authorize an investigation for non-condemnation. Asked why does the draft report state the need for a condemnation area in need of redevelopment. Feels it does not meet the statutory criteria. Asked how much money and how many hours Mr. Mistretta has spent on this report. Asked if it has been over 100 hours. Feels property owners should be contacted and asked if they are interested in redevelopment. Stated there is nothing that prevents the Board from rescinding this and reaching out to the surrounding community and finding out what they want.

Mr. Mistretta stated yes, he has spent over 100 hours on the report.

Chris Fitzgerald – 120 Walnut Avenue

Read draft and listened to Mr. Mistretta. Feels it is all or nothing. Total redevelopment or do nothing. Feels there should be a happy medium. Township owns 59% of land in redevelopment area. If you add Swan Cleaners at 9% that's 68%. Suggested redeveloping the entire two-thirds and don't touch any of the businesses. Improve Cranford but keep traditions.

Rita LaBruto – 104 Arlington Road

Discussed transparency. Stated the Planning Board authorized hiring Harbor Consultants at a March 1st meeting, and that item was not on the agenda. Stated in past year or two Planning Board has not put on agenda what they will be voting on. Stated that the minutes for the March 1st meeting were just approved on December 6th. Has heard that Cranford is the next Hoboken. Feels the people don't want Cranford to be Hoboken. A lot of the buildings in study are owned by the town. Fix them up. Feels area could use sprucing up. Talk to property owners. Discussed Cranford Crossing and the debt service.

Deputy Mayor Dooley – Stated it is not a plan but an investigative report. Agrees that it is an embarrassment that property owners were not notified. Stated that the DMC wanted to speak to property owners but that did not happen because people wanted the report up on the website right away. This is only a discussion.

John Hartnett – 16 Elm Street

Asked for details as to what was best case scenario from a Township perspective. Discussed the Riverside and asked why it was a mistake that it was included in report.

Mayor Hannen described the buildings that were in disrepair. Wanted to try to stimulate growth in that area. Discussed purchase of the MDTV building.

Deputy Mayor Dooley stated that all five Township committee members said that the Riverside was not to be included in the study.

David Leber – 221 Orchard Street

Asked why the Dive is different than the other properties. Discussed South Avenue and development there. Stated the only properties that look really bad are township properties. Asked if there is an exit strategy for the MDTV building.

Mayor Hannen stated that it appears people want the area to be left as it is, with exception of the two municipal properties.

Ray Williams – 32 North Avenue East

He is part owner of the building. He is in insurance consulting. Tired of looking at MDTV building. Feels he has a nice building. Has parking in back, but would like street to be paved. Feels there has to be a better way. Very disappointed.

Jim Carvahlo – 9 Orange Avenue

Has been here since 1959. Feels that the Board holds a lot of power. Stated that the consultant from Harbor spoke about transparency and that they have a no bid contract. Stated that the Planning Board members are elected officials and the members must fill out a financial disclosure statement. Asked Ms. Murray and Dr. Chapman about their Financial Disclosure Statements. Discussed conflict of interest. Stated that the Township Committee minutes included using the words eminent domain.

Mr. Aschenbach stated that Board members are there to serve the community. Also need to respect property owner's rights. Spoke about the MDTV building and the previous owner.

Mr. Taylor clarified that the Planning Board members are not elected officials, they are volunteers.

Susan Choma – Owner of 34 North Avenue East

Asked Mr. Aschenbach to elaborate on why he stated that the area is too difficult for investors to develop. Said she gets letters from the DEP. Feels clean-up has been successful. Also asked Mr. Aschenbach about his comments about the South side and asked if any properties were taken by eminent domain.

Mr. Aschenbach stated developers don't want to invest due to the environmental concerns. Discussed the gas station and the coal supply facility within the South Avenue Redevelopment area.

Wayne Hayes – 18 Forest Avenue.

Has been there for 30 years. Talked about the places he frequents in the Downtown. He is a stakeholder. Discussed his experience in Jersey City as a Trustee. He is concerned about the words condemnation area. Stated he is aware of someone who wants to make a major investment in that zone. Does not think they will get a loan. Feels the report is very negative.

Asked if anyone on Planning Board knows anyone who wants to invest in the area. Suggested creating an Urban Enterprise Zone or Brownfields. Feels there needs to be a process and that this was a good education for everyone. Does feel area needs attention. But need to speak to each other.

Mayor Hannen stated he does know someone who wants to invest in the MDTV property.

Howard Markovitch - 14 Cornell Road

Asked about the Fire Department being in the study area and who would pay for it to be relocated.

Suzanne Dumont Millan– 21 Woodlawn Avenue

Has lived here since 1977. Asked about the value, character and quaintness in town. People have told her that the town is like a Norman Rockwell painting. Very proud. Does not feel that South Avenue is very quaint. Asked if Swan Cleaners is privately owned.

Deputy Mayor Dooley stated that Swan Cleaners is on a Vacant Property Act List. The property must go through a process and moving forward there are different remedies. Stated that Swan Cleaners has not responded to the letter they received stating they were on the list.

Mayor Hannen discussed the MDTV building and that it would go out to public bid if not part of this process. Discussed the parking situation. Feels we need to think ahead and engage the community and business owners. Asked what they would like to see in the area.

Mark Papa - 538 South Avenue East

His family has lived in Cranford since 1961. Stated he is confused as to what next steps are.

Mayor Hannen stated the next steps would be to have the DMC interface with business owners. Then go back to Planning Board. After that, an official question and answer public meeting. Then the Planning Board would make a recommendation to the Township Committee.

Roxanne Graham - 30 Nomahegan Court

Has been here since 1961. She appreciates the work the Planning Board does. Asked how they found a developer for the property on Centennial Avenue (Exxon station). Asked if the same process could be used for Swan Cleaners. Feels voices need to be heard.

Mayor Hannen stated that gas stations are different then cleaners. Gas stations have large companies behind them. Cleaners may be small entity.

Bill Hester – 116 Spring Garden Street

Has been here over 40 years. Asked about schools, police, and fire if there is redevelopment. How are the taxes and infrastructure of this quaint town impacted. He is concerned. Feels mistakes were made. Suggested setting up a committee and asking what the customer wants.

Mayor Hannen stated he wants to have a vibrant Downtown with good property values which helps mitigate taxes to taxpayers.

Jim Choma - PIA Properties

He and his wife own the building where Marino's is located. They invested in Cranford because of the spirit. Paid top dollar because of its location. Feels it is a great location. Did not put a lot of money into it. Loves the community. They are thinking about making renovations. Getting ready to negotiate a new lease and does not feel comfortable after what they have heard coming from the Board. Stated they will still invest.

No one else appeared and this portion of meeting was closed.

Ms. Murray stated Cranford is a great community. Thanked the audience for their thoughts and looks forward to everyone being engaged in the process.

There being no further business, a motion to adjourn the meeting was regularly made, seconded and passed. The meeting concluded at 10:12 P.M.

Donna Pedde, Secretary