

STAMFORD PLANNING BOARD
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES #3541
TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 10th, 2009
4TH FLOOR CAFETERIA
888 WASHINGTON BLVD., STAMFORD, CT

Stamford Planning Board Members present were: Duane Hill, Theresa Dell, Rose Marie Grosso, Jay Tepper and Michael Raduazzo. Present for staff were Robin Stein and Todd Dumais.

Regular Meeting

The Chairman, Mr. Duane Hill, called the Regular Meeting to order at 7:05 pm.

Lease Agreement between City & CTE, Inc.

Mr. Stein described the request to the Board as an additional five years on the lease agreement and an increase in the rent charged. Mrs. Grosso moved approval of the agreement. Mr. Tepper seconded the motion and it passed unanimously with the members present voting, 5-0.

Capital Project Closeout Recommendations

Assistant City Engineer, Ed Gentile described the Capital closeout recommendations. He explained the recommendations which were closeouts for the following projects; West Hill High School, Franklin Street improvements, Government Center Drainage, Highway Facilities, Helicopter landing zone, and the Bridge Street Bridge. Mr. Gentile added that most of the rest of the projects are considerable less than \$100,000.

Supplemental Capital Request, Street Patch/ Paving, \$984,360.65

Assistant City Engineer, Ed Gentile described the request. Mr. Hill asked for an approximate cost of road and sidewalk improvements per mile of road and the total mileage of streets in the City. Mr. Gentile answered. Mr. Raduazzo moved approval of the supplemental request. Mrs. Dell seconded the motion and it passed unanimously with the members present voting, 5-0.

Supplemental Capital Request, Sidewalks, \$600,000

Assistant City Engineer, Ed Gentile described the request. Mr. Tepper moved approval of the supplemental request. Mrs. Dell seconded the motion and it passed unanimously with the members present voting, 5-0.

Supplemental Capital Request, Environmental Compliance/Storm water, \$600,000

Assistant City Engineer, Ed Gentile described the request. Mrs. Grosso moved approval of the supplemental request. Mrs. Dell seconded the motion and it passed unanimously with the members present voting, 5-0.

Zoning Board of Appeals Referrals:

ZBA 008-09, Corner Enterprises, requesting modifications of conditions associated with previous Special Exception and Variance approval (009-08) and an additional variance request for a proposed gas station convenience store located at 1199 High Ridge Road.

Mrs. Jackie Olschan, attorney for the applicant described the request to the Board. She explained that several conditions from the Zoning Board of Appeals previous approval

made it impossible to install signage and that further survey / engineering work uncovered the need to request for an additional height variance for the canopy. After a brief discussion, Mr. Tepper moved approval of the variance request. Mrs. Dell seconded the motion and it passed unanimously with the members present voting, 5-0.

Mr. Hill adjourned the Regular Meeting at 7:33 pm, stating that it would resume following the Public Hearing.

Public Hearing

The Chairman, Mr. Hill, called the Public Meeting to order at 7:35 pm. Mr. Rose Marie Grosso read the legal notice into the record. Mr. Hill then described the Capital Budget process. He stated that it begins in September when the various City Departments make their requests, based on their needs, and the Board complies a draft budget. A public hearing is held in February so that members of the public have an opportunity to comment. Any comments which the Board receives will be considered and at regular meeting the Board will vote on the budget which will then go to the Mayor's Office. Mr. Hill then highlighted portion of the transmittal letter and explained that the Board would go through all twenty-eight areas of the Budget taking comments from the public.

Ms. Karen Murphy, Resident of Stamford, asked if she could make some general comments to the Board covering a number of budget categories.

She's had a chance to go over the capital budget. She wants to know "where is the cash"? "Where's the money?" She stated that she has made FOI requests to the City to know how much cash is in the City's bank accounts but has not received copies of any of the bank account information and urged the Board not to go forward with the budget until it's certain they have funds in the bank.

Mrs. Murphy also stated that she found inconsistencies with the communication the City has made to investor experts and also found inconsistencies with the Board's three page introduction memo to the budget and inconsistencies with economists.

She added that she was critical of spending \$20M for a study and stated Stamford can't be on the cutting edge to fund studies. In addition, Mrs. Murphy said the City states that one of its priorities is education. The capital budget for education is approximately \$5 million with \$23K for field turf? She questioned affordable housing as a priority when there's currently a glut of housing in Stamford and if the City goes forward with more affordable housing the only thing that will happen is more foreclosures. Mrs. Murphy also questioned why only \$1M is being spent on police and fire.

Mrs. Murphy, stated that she finds flawed assumptions, spend, spend, spend is not the way to run government. Adding that, in a low interest environment, we should be refinancing our existing \$500 million in bonds and if the budget goes forward, it will lead to a diminution of quality of life in the City.

Mr. Hill responded to a few of Ms. Murphy's comments. He said the City has a AAA rating and that the City's Chief Financial Office is required to produce a report on the sale debt limit for the City and found that to be \$50 million. Mr. Hill added that the budget was prepared consistently with that.

Mr. David Cooper, Stamford resident his entire life questioned the spending being done on the Old Town Hall saying it's a tax pit where over \$400K has been spent on the building with no State funds. He also questioned the Mill River Park and suggested it's a

waste of City monies. He further stated the City doesn't deal with reality and questioned how well organized things are being done.

Ms. Mary Downy-Uva, resident of Stamford stated general comments and said her property taxes when she first moved to Stamford 12 years ago were \$12,000 and now over \$34,000 a year. Mrs. Uva said that property taxes in the City have increased \$100 million over that timeframe of which the City is paying \$50 million a year to service our debt and given the current economic situation, the City must be as conservative as possible on what we can expect as revenues.

She ran through a list of projects she would eliminate:

- Mill River Project – an enormous expense, will be a financial black hole.
- The Urban Transitway, Phase II, perhaps should be postponed.
- Cumming's Marina Dock upgrades should be delayed.
- The astro-turf replacement project at Boyle Stadium doesn't belong in the capital budget because the lifespan of the turf is 10 years and items on the Capital Budget must meet a 25 year life span requirement.
- Old Rogers School – why not sell the school or turn it into a green space instead of spending millions of dollars renovating for "unidentified tenants".
- Waste-to-Energy Plant – is a \$40 million incinerator, the pollution from which will impact the South End of Stamford significantly. She stated the projected energy to be produced upon completion is not enough to run UBS for even one hour. She asked for several risk assessment studies on the health issues anticipated.

Mr. Hill responded to several items brought up by Mrs. Uva. He stated much of the Capital Budget items are targeted to relieve expenses from the operating budget. Mr. Hill added that the Mill River Project will save annual dredging expenses and will pay for itself in the long term. In response to the Waste-to-Energy plant, he stated that most of this is being funded by a separate authority and projects go forward with public hearings and ample opportunities to speak on that project.

Ms. Kathleen Murphy, Resident of Shippan in Stamford and Treasurer of the Town of Greenwich commented that with increases in unemployment and foreclosures going up, people are worried about surviving and the government should be worried about the same thing. She stated the safe debt limit letter is a joke and that she did review the capital projects and is concerned about the impact this level of spending will have on taxes. Mrs. Murphy added that Capital projects drive the operating budget and that we can't do this in a vacuum and used as an example, the skateboard rink. After it was built, it was determined that a supervisor was needed to ensure users wore protective gear and maintained a safe environment. She said by adding new parks and putting new fields in place, the City doesn't have the resources to maintain them. We have to look at the subsequent impact the Capital budget will have on the operating budget. The City should also close out projects and reallocate left over funds. She said there's been a 25% increase in operating costs in the Operation's Department. It is irresponsible to spend \$80 million in this economic environment especially with debt service growing every year in Stamford.

Mr. Hill then began an overview of each line of the Capital Budget beginning with the Office of Administration and asked if any member of the public would like to comment.

Office of Administration

Ms. Karen Murphy stated the cost would be \$1 million to investors.

Public Safety, Health, Welfare

Mr. William Callion spoke and acknowledged he was thrilled the Board had supported funding for the Heliport landing zone in 2012. He introduced Assistant Police Chief Sue Breadhouse to speak. Ms. Breadhouse described the deteriorating facilities at the current Police Station and requested an additional \$625K be added to the Capital Budget to have architectural plans drawn for the building. With President Obama's stimulus package, funds will be awarded to shovel-ready projects and they would like to be prepared to request funds and in order to do so, they need building plans. She stated that they are looking to build a new police department where their garage is to house everything in one building, adding that they need a new building – they don't need to "paint the titanic".

Mr. Callion said he is working with the engineering department on this project.

Mr. Hill said the Planning Board is quite supportive of the Police Department.

Ms. Dell asked a question about how the parking garage and new building would work.

Mr. Callion said within the next 10 days, they would present preliminary documents to the Planning Board with their proposal.

Ms. Maureen Bayne, Friends of Ferguson Library wanted to thank the Planning Board for recommending funds to rejuvenate the Ferguson Library.

Ms. Margaret Metwally, Friends of Ferguson Library also a member of the Friends of Ferguson Library, wanted to say thank the Board for renovations to the main library.

William Callion, Resident of Stamford, thanked the Board for their support to the Ferguson Library and with current economic conditions, citizens are coming in more frequently to use resources.

Board of Education

Mr. William Dunn, Chief Operations Officer of Stamford Public Schools Thanked the Board for its recommended appropriations. He requested the Board reconsider funding three projects at Dolan School: 1) boiler upgrade, 2) Engineering Dept revised Boyle Stadium Project from \$1.2m to \$1.7m with major changes in design to the field and 3) create an outer channel drain to draw water away from the field.

Ms. Maureen Cason, Resident of Stamford

Stated that in regard to the Boyle Stadium Project, she wanted to point out that a State study on health risks is examining turf materials. She asked that the City pause in spending monies on additional turf fields until it is proven safe for children.

Mr. Hill asked if there were any additional comments on the budget.

Mr. Michael E. Moran, Jr., Stamford Center for the Arts stated that they filed Chapter 11 Bankruptcy in August and would like to request funds for a few projects totaling \$85K:

- Emergency management system for the Palace Theater;
- Upgrade fire protection on the auditorium;
- HVAC system not operable – heating/cooling ineffective;
- Rich Forum – Tresser Blvd exterior wall glass panel missing.

Mr. Hill stated the Board had not previously received the funding request letter and suggested they use the formal submission process. If it doesn't get considered, there is a supplemental capital project process also. They should speak to Ben Barnes.

Mr. Hill asked if there were any additional Budget comments. There being none, he thanked all the people for coming out to make comments. He said the proposed Capital Budget has been considered in the current economic climate. The Board does consider the Capital projects' costs on the Operating Budget.

Regular Meeting (cont.)

Zoning Board of Appeals Referrals:

ZBA 006-09, Creative Dimensions, Inc., requesting a variance of Article IV, Section 13 F, to permit an increase in the amount of allowed ground signage in the C-N District for a property located at 288 West Avenue.

Mr. Dumais briefly described the application to the Board. Several Board members noted concerns that the new "Starbucks" sign might block the view of the onramp sign to the highway and requested any transmittal letter to the Zoning Board of Appeals include a provision to ensure the view of street signage would not be obstructed by the new sign. Mr. Raduazzo moved approval of the variance request. Mrs. Dell seconded the motion and it passed unanimously with the members present voting, 5-0.

ZBA 007-09, French Speaking Baptist Church of Stamford, requesting a Special Exception approval to use an existing residential building for a Sunday School and other Church related activities located at 22 Vista Street.

Mr. Dumais described the application to the Board. He stated that the Church was using the building for Church related activities for a number of years without the proper approvals and was now seeking to legitimize the use. Mrs. Dell stated concerns about the building meeting all applicable Health and Fire safety standards. Mrs. Dell moved approval of the variance request. Mr. Tepper seconded the motion and it passed unanimously with the members present voting, 5-0.

Approval of Meeting Minutes:

January 6, 2009

Mr. Tepper moved approval of the minutes. Mr. Raduazzo seconded the motion and it passed unanimously with the members present eligible to vote, 3-0 (Hill, Tepper, Raduazzo).

January 13, 2009

Mr. Tepper moved approval of the minutes. Mrs. Grosso seconded the motion and it passed unanimously with the members present voting, 5-0.

January 20, 2009

Mr. Tepper moved approval of the minutes. Mrs. Grosso seconded the motion and it passed unanimously with the members present voting, 5-0.

Old Business

Subdivision #3976, Request for extension of time to record the final map.

Mr. Stein briefly described the request, which was unanimously approved by the members of the Board.

New Business

None

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 8:00 PM.

Respectfully Submitted,
Duane Hill, Chairman

Note: These proceedings were recorded on tape and are available for review in the Land Use Bureau located on the 7th floor of Government Center, 888 Washington Boulevard, during regular business hours.