

MINUTES OF THE SPECIAL MEETING
CITY OF STAMFORD, CONNECTICUT
URBAN REDEVELOPMENT COMMISSION
THURSDAY, OCTOBER 18, 2007

1. At 9:45am, Chairman Stephen C. Osman called the special meeting to order. The following were in attendance:

Commissioners:

Stephen C. Osman, Chairman
James I. Nixon, Vice Chairman
Joel P. Mellis, Secretary/Treasurer
Edward J. Fuhrman
Robert S. Robins

Staff:

Gerrie Post, Executive Director
Rachel Goldberg, General Counsel
Durelle Alexander

2. Agency Administration – Strategic Planning

Executive Director Post reported that she and Steering Committee members Fuhrman and Robins had initiated the strategic planning process by distributing an information packet putting forth information and thoughts for the Commission's consideration. Each of the Commissioners responded listing five major priorities/goals they would like to see accomplished within the next ten years, noting whether or not the URC could impact these goals in either a leading or a supporting role. Executive Director Post said, "I think it is appropriate to say that our number one priority should be to finish the projects that are on board and see how we can fold our expertise and our Agency into other areas of the City."

Commissioner Fuhrman said, "We can just continue to do what we are doing. We are under no obligation to develop a strategic plan. However, this is what the Commission wants to do and thinks best serves our interests. What we're suggesting in the material is that we not undertake a classic strategic plan." Discussion ensued. Executive Director Post said, "According to the Commission's feedback, we basically agreed on three major priorities, with housing being a common denominator throughout." Commissioner Fuhrman reviewed the overall observations, noting that: (a) there is a considerable interest in pursuing the development of a new strategic focus and range of initiatives for the Agency, and (b) the Commission members want to continue doing what we are doing, with a desire to be more pro-active and play a more significant role in the growth and development of Stamford. Commissioner Fuhrman continued, "The Steering Committee proposed four initial questions and there was overall agreement that: (i) the effort involved in developing a strategic plan is worthwhile and necessary; (ii) the initial scope of the work outline is all-inclusive, although it might be preferable to limit its breadth to meet the URC's specific needs and interests; (iii) the effort should be driven by the Executive Director with heavy involvement by the Commissioners and General Counsel; and, (iv) the question of the engagement of outside resources should be held off for the present with the expectation that additional perspective and/or expertise would likely be sought on an individual as warranted basis as the process unfolds."

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Commissioner Fuhrman noted that upon reviewing the initial feedback, there seemed to be considerable interest in going beyond the traditional view of an eminent domain-based mission and role; further, that everything on the lists of priority goals could be accomplished within the current mission statement of the URC and the various statutes and legal role definitions as outlined by General Counsel. Commissioner Fuhrman said, "There were a lot more goals and priorities than five, some more project specific and some more conceptual." The Steering Committee summarized them as follows:

1. & 2. Complete the major current projects in order to:
 - Realize the vision & goals of the Mill River development.
 - Continue to support & promote the success and growth of downtown Stamford.
 - Ensure the attractiveness of the buildings and provide for the sound utilization of open areas.
 - Enhance pedestrian presence & appeal in the downtown area.
3. Extend the same positive involvement and impact to the West Side, East Side, South Side and the broader Stamford area.

Commissioner Fuhrman noted that these priorities seemed to center around: (i) affordable housing; (ii) urban/regional/cultural/technological center; (iii) more collaboration and partnerships with other officials, staffs and organizations to foster smart growth; (iv) livability of the environment with a broad range of residential choices, parks and green areas, cultural opportunities, an alive community quality of life with improved institutions; and (v) preservation of buildings of historic architectural interest, vernacular buildings, public spaces and Stamford's history.

Following his presentation Commissioner Fuhrman asked, "What do we see as the next steps going forward?" Commissioner Nixon responded, "At a Board of Representatives meeting last night they voted to approve signing over the responsibility for Mill River to the Mill River Collaborative ... and, from my point of view, this (the Collaborative) is something Steve started that has now taken on a life of its own. I want to bring this up because there are other things like that that somebody needs to play a role in. For example, I think that Mill River Park should be extended to the upper end of the Mill River but I don't know that the Collaborative will ultimately do that." The Chairman said that the Collaborative has been asked to study extending the Park beyond Scalsi through north Stamford, possibly up to the reservoir. Attorney Goldberg said, "None of our regulatory framework deals with creating a park in an area that is more suburban and rural, particularly as you go north. There is no tie-in to job growth, industry, or the urban center. However, we could ask for a resolution of the Board of Representatives, together with the Mayor's office, to give us the authority to study the area beyond Scalsi Park and we could fund such a study." Discussion continued.

Executive Director Post said, "There are many things that we can do in concert with other local organizations and boards. For example, The Stamford Partnership is currently

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running an education program with the Planning Board and the Zoning Board that was initiated by the URC.” Attorney Goldberg said, “Since everyone who responded to the questions posed by the Steering Committee talks about trying to become something that is not a traditional eminent domain-based organization, what we need to think about is if we’re not that; what are we, and what does a reinvented URC look like?”

Commissioner Mellis asked, “What do we want to end up with at the end of today’s discussion? Ideas we should think about, develop further ... a variety of projects ... a direction? Is there a result we should be looking toward?” Commissioner Fuhrman responded, “Yes, we need to identify the next steps. That may be in terms of individual assignments pertaining to your unique interests and, in this regard, I think it might be helpful if everyone briefly reviewed their goals and priorities.”

Commissioner Robins reviewed his five goals:

1. Exercise special concern for preserving vernacular buildings and neighborhoods as well as preserving buildings and public spaces of historic or architectural interest.
2. Develop projects that will make Stamford a regional and perhaps even a national destination for culture, sports and education with a specific focus on UCONN.
3. Assist in innovative ways to enhance the livability of the environment, with special reference to human-scale development and outdoor life, winter as well as summer.
4. Make our area alive not only with residential tenants, but also with residential owners in the evening as well as during the day, specifically encouraging tenants to engage in activities in the community.
5. Be sensitive to architectural contextuality and continuity.

Commissioner Robins concluded that his main areas of interest would be historic preservation and creating a destination for culture sports and education (specifically UCONN). Attorney Goldberg also expressed an interest in culture and working with Commissioner Robins on further development of that goal.

Commissioner Mellis reviewed his five goals:

1. Establish a technology/research park with Stamford becoming a major destination for technology development particularly in the telecommunication area. Commissioner Mellis noted that currently no such focal point/research park for technology and communications exists in the State of Connecticut. The center in Durham, North Carolina, was cited as an example.
2. Provide a full range of residential choices to help support a diverse population in the City.
3. Preserve and enhance Stamford’s beauty by providing more greenways. Also preserve historic buildings and create pedestrian areas.
4. Enhance community life by monitoring the amount, scale and character of development, keeping in mind a primary goal of enhancing neighborhood quality of life by promoting services and amenities.
5. Continue to support and promote the success and growth of Stamford’s downtown.

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Commissioner Mellis concluded that his main area of interest would be communications technology in terms of developing a Stamford center.

Commissioner Fuhrman suggested that the Commission determine what they wanted to accomplish between now and the next strategic planning meeting. He said, "Following today's discussion, a possible assignment for each of us would be to write what we would propose as the five or seven major goals in order of importance."

Chairman Osman reviewed his five goals:

1. Find additional ways to influence decisions by the Boards so they would require development that is attractive as well as responsive to the needs of additional housing. The Chairman noted that design review would be a possible way to accomplish this.
2. Look at additional areas of the City that might be better developed and put a Plan in place with specific goals in mind that would positively influence that development.
3. Help other City institutions learn how to support their activities; i.e., Ferguson Library, ballet in Stamford.
4. Find a way to influence the development of retail stores in downtown Stamford.
5. Study the traffic problem with the idea of reducing traffic to and from Stamford as well as within the City.

Chairman Osman concluded that his main area of interest would be architectural design review.


Commissioner Robins left the meeting at 11:28am.

Adjournment

There will be a Special Meeting to further address Strategic Planning on either October 30th or November 2nd at 9:30am. The Annual & Regular Meetings are scheduled for Thursday, November 8th at 6:00pm.

Having completed the business for which this meeting was convened, Commissioner Nixon made a motion to adjourn. The motion was carried by unanimous vote and the meeting was adjourned at 11:35am.

Respectfully submitted,



Joel P. Mellis
Secretary/Treasurer

CITY OF STAMFORD, CONNECTICUT, URBAN REDEVELOPMENT COMMISSION

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SPECIAL MEETING
NOTICE

A Special Meeting of the City of Stamford, Connecticut, Urban Redevelopment Commission, will be held in the Commission Offices on the 9th Floor of the Stamford Government Center, 888 Washington Boulevard, Stamford, Connecticut, on Thursday, October 18, 2007 at 9:30AM.

AGENDA:

1. Roll Call
2. Agency Administration
 - (a) Strategic Planning
3. Adjournment
 - (a) Discussion – Next Meeting Agenda
 - (b) Confirmation – Next Meeting Date (*Nov. 8th – Annual & Regular*)