

MINUTES OF THE SPECIAL MEETING
CITY OF STAMFORD, CONNECTICUT
URBAN REDEVELOPMENT COMMISSION
TUESDAY, MARCH 15, 2005

1. At 8:30AM, 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
Neal M. Jewell (arrived at 8:35AM)

Staff:

Laszlo Papp, Executive Director
Rachel Goldberg, General Counsel
Durelle Alexander

2. Southeast Quadrant/Gateway District

- (a) **Discussion of Impact of Merritt Parkway/Route 7 Construction** – Chairman Osman introduced Merritt Parkway Conservancy Co-Chair Peter Malkin and its Director, Laurie Heiss, noting that they were present to explain the issues and address their concerns re: proposed plans for the Super 7 highway/interchange scheduled to begin this year. The Conservancy representatives, along with State Senators William Nickerson and Judith Freeman, will meet with State Department of Transportation (DOT) Commissioner Stephen Korta in Hartford this afternoon to request a public hearing before DOT officials sign a contract with the construction firm (O&G Industries of Torrington, CT).

Mr. Malkin said, "We appreciate the fact that the Commission represents substantial interests in Stamford and we think it's very important that the City of Stamford be aware of what's really going to happen here if there are no changes to the proposed parkway work." He noted that in addition to being Co-Chair of the Merritt Parkway Conservancy, he is the owner of Metro Center at the Stamford Railroad Center, Stamford Place where the Westin Hotel is, and Merritt View, an office building at the intersection of the Merritt Parkway and Route 7.

Speaking for the Conservancy, Mr. Malkin said, "We became very concerned about the DOT's procedures as a result of the still not completed almost three year project to improve the entrances and exits to the Merritt Parkway at North Street in Greenwich. The work itself went on way beyond schedule, and those of you who drive between Stamford and King Street know that for almost a year, there was one lane of traffic in each direction during the so-called 'off hours' and those 'off-hours' seemed to take most of the day and night, often taking drivers up to 45 minutes to get from Stamford to King Street. At this point, we decided we ought to see what else the DOT was planning to do and that's when we found out about the Super 7 interchange." It was noted that plans for the interchange had been developed approximately 15 years ago, public hearings had been held a long time ago, but construction was stalled in 1999 due to funding problems.

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Mr. Malkin continued, "Those plans contemplated a series of connections between the Merritt Parkway and Super 7... a concept that was developed back when it was assumed that Super 7 would continue north of the Parkway to Danbury... a project that has been dead in the water for a long time now. What we have found out about the plan is that it's to be done in two phases with the first phase at a budget estimate of \$30 million and the second, at a budget estimate of about \$50 million. The first phase would start immediately and take approximately three years and, during that three-year period, there would be a series of very major ramps from the Parkway running to and from Super 7 but not reaching Super 7 so that for those three years, even though there would be a very substantial interruption in the flow of traffic to Stamford, there would be no improvements. The contract calls for the Merritt Parkway to be limited to one lane approximately 16 hours a day/night, with two lanes during the rush hours but even those two lanes will require detours off the Parkway in two locations." Mr. Malkin explained that the plan contemplates tearing down the existing Merritt Parkway overpass bridge over Main Avenue/Route 7 at Exit 40 and the creation of two temporary bridges on either side of the Parkway while the main bridge is rebuilt in addition to the creation of four more temporary bridges along side the Parkway to the west closer to Stamford. "In addition," Mr. Malkin continued, "the contract calls for no penalties if the contractor closes down lanes more than I've described and specifically provides that it may close down all lanes during periods of dangerous construction."

Mr. Malkin pointed out some of the problems he described on a rendering. He said, "There are two major ramps that the Conservancy thinks make no sense at all which we call the 'ramps to nowhere and from nowhere.' The ramp to nowhere comes off the Merritt Parkway coming from New Haven connecting to Super 7 going north – which goes nowhere. The ramp from nowhere comes from Super 7 and goes under the Merritt Parkway, loops around for almost a mile before it comes back on the Parkway going east to New Haven. The first phase during the initial three years doesn't connect to anything. It's only in the second phase which is supposed to start in 2008 if federal and state money is available, that the ramps will be connected on both sides of the Merritt Parkway to the Merritt Parkway."

The proposed plans were discussed and Mr. Malkin summarized the Conservancy's position as follows: "We believe the DOT should stop the plans for the ramps to and from nowhere and redesign the project so there is no need to modify the bridge over Main Avenue and no need to create new bridges to the west." He concluded, "The project as designed is too expensive, too disruptive, too large and while under construction, will disrupt traffic in the area for several years, causing massive back-ups and having a disastrous effect on Stamford." The Conservancy wants: (i) one more public hearing before the contract is signed, and (ii) the DOT to come up with a simpler, less expensive, less disruptive design.

Following discussion, Commissioner Jewell said he would like to hear a "detailed response from parties on the other side." Attorney Goldberg concurred, noting that the Commission was only hearing one side of the story at this time.

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Commissioner Mellis asked if this wouldn't be "more appropriately dealt with by the Department of Economic Development." Commissioner Fuhrman agreed, but noted that there was "an urgency in speaking out at this time." The Chairman said, "I would like to be in a position to be available to go to the Governor to speak for Stamford and explain how this project will impact Stamford. Traffic is a serious problem here and this project could have a negative impact on tenants of properties that the URC develops."

Following further discussion, Commissioner Nixon made a motion to authorize the Chairman to meet with the Mayor and Governor and speak on behalf of the Urban Redevelopment Commission in requesting a public hearing/public information meeting to give the public and municipal officials an opportunity to comment on the project and the terms of the proposed construction contract. Commissioner Fuhrman seconded the motion. There was further discussion on the motion. The question was called and the motion was passed. Commissioner Mellis abstained.

3. Adjournment

A Special Meeting has been scheduled for Monday, March 21, 2005 at 8:30AM. The next Regular Meeting will be held on Thursday, April 14, 2005 at 6:00PM.

Having completed the business for which this Special Meeting was called, Commissioner Nixon made a motion to adjourn. The motion was carried by unanimous vote and the meeting was adjourned at 9:15AM.

Respectfully submitted,



Joel P. Mellis
Secretary/Treasurer