

BOROUGH OF HIGHLAND PARK
MAYOR & COUNCIL REDEVELOPMENT MEETING

221 South Fifth Ave.

Highland Park, NJ

January 28, 2020 at 6:30 PM

CALL TO ORDER

The Regular Meeting of the Highland Park Redevelopment Entity was called to order in accordance with the Open Public Meetings Act by Mayor Brill Mittler at 6:34 PM. Mayor Brill Mittler indicated the location of the fire exits.

ROLL CALL

Present: Mayor Gayle Brill Mittler, Council Members, Fine, George, Hale

Absent: Council Members: Foster-Dublin, Kim-Chohan, Welkovits and Special Counsel
Baumann,

Professionals: Planner Jim Constantine, Borough Administrator Teri Jover, Deputy Clerk
Jennifer Santiago

Presentations

- 433 Cleveland Avenue Redevelopment Plan Presentation – Jim Constantine

Mr. Constantine said that started with preliminary goals and objectives for the Cleveland Avenue corridor to provide context for what could be done in any potential redevelopment plan. How can we improve the neighborhood and community and do something that has better outcomes. What existing conditions can we mitigate or improve; are there any things to be preserved such as buildings, open spaces, look at the Master Plan and some of the recommendations; fiscal impact of any non-residential uses including the proposed girls school which is subject to tax exemption as a non-project school and how can we zoom out and really provide a smart growth higher picture planning lens on top what is being done here.

Mr. Constantine said that this was talked about this last January in an open house workshop and there are challenges with the zoning in this area and the new Master Plan does provide some recommendations. During the open house at the community center, people identified where they lived or worked, identify some of the pedestrian and traffic hotspots, places they like the most and least, and there was a lot of input on Cleveland. There are some real challenges in terms of connectivity into the community, to River Road that were identified as some things that need to be addressed. Some of things that were heard at the workshops were fairly consistent, and only 4% of respondents said they would like to see Cleveland Avenue remain as is. The vision for Cleveland Avenue is to try and preserve what town qualities there may be there, or bring them from other portions of the town to try to take advantage of emerging trends and transform and enrich the current mix of uses on the outdated commercial corridor and support safer more attractive and livable complete streets. The longer term vision is to continue to see the street transformed, framed by buildings, walkable sidewalks, some public open space or private open space. The Master Plan sets forth and the redevelopment plan he believes supports and reinforces the goals that are set in the Master Plan. The issues that were set forth: next to the Northside neighborhood but lacks anything that ties it back or links to the rest of the Borough and as a result it is this quiet yet forgotten commercial area. Cleveland lacks an appropriate mix of uses, community facilities, this area used to be all light industrial and clearly the lower portion has become residential, there is outdated zoning. There is a lack of parking and green space, Some comments from residents included: promote more businesses in the area through redevelopment of abandoned areas, adding another small district would be great, adding more four way stops to prevent people from driving too fast, a dedicated building for arts and community gardening, higher density housing with commercial, encourage a café or restaurant,

complete streets for pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure. A diagram was shown for the potential 433 Cleveland Avenue and the other properties that are owned by the same property owner, the complete streets bike/ped improvements on Cleveland and Madison and an improvement at the intersection and identifying that there are other potential in-fill and redevelopment opportunities on smaller properties in the Cleveland Avenue corridor. Recommendations for the corridor: custom tailor in-fill and redevelopment, utilize site specific redevelopment standards, use desired by residents and address varying property assemblages, including other than light industrial and professional office to better serve the entire community, open up the permitted uses in the Cleveland Avenue corridor, repurpose specific vacant properties including pocket parks, dog parks, recreational opportunities for the community, enhance a trail connection from the end of Cleveland that goes over the ravine and connects with Edison Township, improve safety and connectivity and upgrade the existing pedestrian connections to the adjacent neighborhood, and create a mixed use transition zone to accommodate a better mix of uses such as small scale missing middle housing, broaden the mix of uses that are in scale with residential.

Mr. Constantine said that some of the open house comments that came in on the 433 Cleveland Avenue site and incorporated some of the recommendations and some of the discussion that occurred from last January through March. There is a concern about the loss of ratable and the applicant has offered a voluntary contribution to offset costs of municipal services and that will be in the redeveloper's agreement. There were many comments and concerns with traffic and circulation, concerns with sufficient parking for the school. The Borough's Traffic Consultant reviewed what was proposed and reviewed the traffic impact study that was prepared by the school developer. How can we bring complete streets in, is there anything that can happen relative to the pathway. The levels of service would not be significantly affected and would operate pretty much where they are today; there was an issue of arrival and dismissal times for the school and whether it could be staggered and the applicant has proposed that. Bus and truck maneuvering will need to address with the pickup and drop off in front of the school and that will be reviewed during site plan and they have committed to do that. Mr. Constantine indicated that a lot of these things will take place at site plan review. Three way stop at Cleveland and Madison both the applicants engineer as well as the Boroughs Traffic Engineer looked into that and it doesn't meet the warrants but there are some recommendations to do something at that intersection other than stop signs in all directions. A couple of the high level recommendations that are in the redevelopment plan are to add pedestrian access and complete the network along Madison from Cleveland to Grant, adding a crosswalk at the Cleveland, Madison intersection, add missing sidewalk on Harrison north of Madison, reducing the speed through the Cleveland, Madison intersection by installing a bump out and include other elements of the recently adopted Borough Ped/Bike Plan which includes the Madison Avenue. He mentioned that all of the recommendations from the Borough Engineer have been addressed in two subsequent follow up memos from the applicant, they have agreed to address every single condition. We wanted an independent Borough professional reviewing on behalf of the Borough and the public what was proposed, a whole series of recommendations were received and the applicant has addressed those, and agreed to do what was recommended or provide additional information to clarify that and all those will be subject to the redevelopers agreements.

Mr. Constantine indicated that the applicant had agreed to make the other parcel across the street from the proposed girls school additional parking related to the school, and the other parcel would be an office type use or a single family home or two family home, it sits next to a home and a medical office building. On the site on the proposed school, there are setbacks and design

standards have been set in the redevelopment plan, the rear would be a play area with proposed fencing that would back up to the railroad, setback but not a usable side yard that is also fenced, at the end of the street there is access to a parking lot that would be available for teachers and staff, there is a sidewalk improvement that is proposed along the entire street, along with street trees on both sides, there will be a specially sized turn around cul-de-sac and there will be access in and out of the additional parking lot across the street. Buses would pick-up and drop-off in the front of the school with some additional angled parking. There would be additional fencing, hedging and edging in the front yard. Landscaping is required along the edges of the parking lot across the street, and the other parcel if it is a single family or two family home it is recommended to comply with the draft design recommendations for residential development in the Master Plan, and if it was an office there would be a site plan review and in either case it is subject to the redevelopers agreement and review under the redevelopment plan and that parcel would be a tax ratable with either use. There are provisions to encourage green infrastructure by way of rain gardens or other types of storm water treatment which could include something that might occur in one of the art areas as well. They have agreed to address to dress up the trash and recycling area with a wall and higher quality treatment. Back to the original preliminary started last January before the public process: improve the neighborhood and the community in the process of creating some outcomes better than the existing zoning; identify existing conditions that can be mitigated or improved related to traffic and circulation; address some of the old Master Plan recommendations regarding zoning on the south side of the street; fiscal impact there is a proposed contribution and he thinks that was proposed in this redevelopment is consistent with the Master Plan but the Planning Board will have the last say.

Councilman Hale asked about the cul-de-sac and asked if that was designed for buses and large vehicles. There is one way in and it is not a wide street, and there are people parked on both sides regularly and asked how they would get in and out comfortably. Mr. Constantine said that the buses would turn into the school and discharge from the school and not in the cul-de-sac. Mayor Brill Mittler asked that the new Public Safety Director take a look at this to ensure it is safe.

Councilman Hale asked how many students are from Highland Park is currently being bussed. Borough Administrator said that it was approximately 80 students at a \$1,000 in transportation reimbursement. Councilman Hale said that it was important that to not have to pay for the bussing for that many students would save the district money.

Councilman Hale said the new Heritage development does anyone know traffic coming out of there was address and would assure that the number of people coming out of the Heritage and the Center School which someone is eventually going to do something with and is there flexibility in the future if there is a lot more cars than anticipated. Mr. Constantine said that based on the traffic analysis done in 2012 the additional peak hour traffic generated by the town home project will not be a magnitude to create over capacity issues at the intersections, traffic study confirmed that the traffic volumes utilized at all nearby intersections and the planned developments would be adequate.

Councilman Hale asked Mr. Constantine to explain the three way stop. Mr. Constantine said that there are warrants that the State uses and this does not meet some of those warrants and he thinks it has to do with the volume coming from all directions. The recommendation from the Borough's engineer and the applicants engineer is that they can do some combination of bump outs at the corners, raised speed tables, and they are bicycle friendly as well. There are new

crosswalks being stripped and additional signage at the intersection among other things. He said that there could be some testing done and see what the effect is on cars who are turning there. He mentioned that the entire improvement at that intersection would be paid for by the developer.

Mayor Brill Mittler said that when school ends and they are going to try and do that at hours that do not conflict with a lot of the other traffic on the street, will it be in daylight or will it be something that what it looks like at 4pm now because if it is not going to be daylight and in crosswalks, as done by other schools, is we put flashing lights into the crosswalks so when it gets dark people can still see the crosswalk and asked that to be considered for the safety of the girls.

Councilwoman Welkovits indicated that she was concerned with buses backing up, standing and idling and she was curious why the bus drop off has to be in front of the door, unless someone has a disability she does not see anything wrong with someone walking. One of the things they are trying to teach the kids is that it is okay to walk. It is a common thing to have certain streets around the school closed for vehicular traffic those drop off and pick up times, she asked where the bus pick up and drop off, or where the car pick up and drop off is. She asked about the routes that the buses could take and how many buses there were. Mr. Stern said that the current school is four miles north of River Road, the same children, same houses, that is used currently there has never been one of their buses on Raritan turning on Fourth and it will not happen for this school either.

Councilman George said that he was concerned with the access for public works, fire and rescue and if they were able to use the pull in for the bus drop off that becomes less of a concern because a 30' curb to curb on the cul-de-sac, and asked about the individual passenger drop off and asked if it was going to be on Cleveland. Mr. Stern said that there would be specific signs for busses only and only on the right and parents will drop off on the other side. Councilman George said that in regards to the three way stop and the warrants, they would also allow you to look at the overall plan which is to increase the usage of all of Cleveland Avenue, while this is focused on the project, the plan is the revitalize the rest of Cleveland Avenue. The trail connection involves Edison, NJDEP, a lot of the Millbrook is private and still controlled by the NJDEP which they learned when they did the clean-up last year, and asked if there was a future provision for parking that would allow access to those natural trails. He asked if they could have some reservation of a parking lot because people looking to walk those trails will be looking for parking along Cleveland and even at the school. Mr. Constantine said based on the Environmental Planner recommendation is that we not try to create additional parking but to share the use.

Councilman George said that in regards to sidewalk improvements it is anticipated that the developer will put sidewalks in at their expense if the Borough obtains the rights of the easements to install sidewalks; the Borough is going to be embarking on a sidewalk study, is it the anticipation that the Borough is actually going to purchase the rights or will assist in negotiation and what is the timeline on that. Mr. Constantine said that he believes that the sidewalks can all be installed in the public right of way.

Resident, asked what streets the buses will be traveling on. Mr. Stern said the students attending would be from Highland Park and Edison and would be traveling the exact same patch as today, other than making a left on Cleveland down to River Road and make a right. He indicated that there was a total of four buses.

Resident on Madison Avenue said that in terms of improvement of the intersection she is happy to hear this, but did not hear anything about improving the drainage in that area. There is a big drainage problem that has always existed at that intersection between Madison and Cleveland Avenue and when it rains it takes several hours before the water drains down. The drainage at Madison and Harrison is not great either but much worse at Cleveland. She explained that when the cars travel down Madison there are huge splashing because it is not a four way stop so people coming down Madison at Harrison are moving fast so the splashing is bad, not so bad at Cleveland because there is a stop sign so the splashing is not as bad but there is three inches of standing water. Mr. Constantine said that Madison is calling for a bike plan as a bicycle boulevard and will take a look into condition. She raised the issue of security at religious institutions and heard nothing addressing that, she understands that the federal government is offering grants and such, but in terms of whether there are any issues around reimbursing the town or the towns responsibilities for added security. She mentioned things such as lighting on Cleveland. She asked about the grassy path over Millbrook she is thrilled that it probably years away in terms of development and it is one of the last remaining truly natural sites, there is wildlife that lives there and there is no place else for wildlife in Highland Park, as a nature walk it is already a nature walk so to create paths to call them a nature as made them less of a nature walk, and she loves it the way it is right now.

Harrison Avenue resident asked what the tax ratable that the school would have paid if it was not a school and is the payment that school will pay will it cover those amounts and how long will the school pay that amount. Mayor Brill Mittler said those were all things that needed to be negotiated with the developer. He asked how many teachers and administrators at the school every day because a car usually comes with each staff member and what is the parking capability that is planned, and there is not very much street parking. Mr. Stern said that there were 23 parking spots and in 29 years he has never ran out of space, the teachers that come from Lakewood carpool, except for PTA nights. He asked what the maximum student population would be. Mr. Stern said that the maximum would be 450 students. He asked how many buses would be coming in the morning and leaving in the evening. Mr. Stern said that there will be one arrival time and two dismissals, with 4-5, 54 passenger buses. He asked what the changes are being talked about together with this project that will have significant impacts on the people living in the area. Mayor Brill Mittler said that has not be ironed out but was in the Master Plan and when those ideas it will be discussed here publicly. He said that the project that has been completed on Cleveland Avenue and the project on the way is enough housing at this point and he hopes that we don't anticipate additional housing.

Alex Casey, 419 Harrison Avenue asked about the lot next to the house and medical facility. Mr. Constantine said that it could be a single family home, two family home, or an office but not related to the school. Mr. Casey asked what times are permitted for construction. Mayor Brill Mittler said there are times stipulated by law.

Mary, Madison Avenue asked about the sidewalks. Mr. Constantine said that the plan calls for sidewalks along Cleveland, missing sidewalks on Harrison as called for in the Bicycle/Ped Plan as adopted by the Borough. There are bike marking is what is being called for on Cleveland, eight bicycle facilities, it's a reminder for vehicles that they are sharing the road. Ms. Casey said that it is a very heavily traveled area. Ms. Welkovits indicated that every street in Highland Park and gave recommendations, everything that is in the bike/ped plan does not need to be done, and it will go through a whole vetting process anytime one of those streets is done and there is room for discussion on that.

Mr. Constantine said that sidewalks would be installed on Harrison where they are missing in Highland Park and Madison. She asked on Madison how that would affect her home. Mr. Constantine said that they could be installed in the right of way. She said that there would be several trees that would need to be taken down for those several blocks and the sidewalk would have to go across the bottom of her driveway where her cars are. Mr. Constantine said it would be the same; it would be in the public right of way. Ms. Jover indicated that this was being funded by the developer if the Borough chooses to move forward and we will be communicating with the neighbors. She said that she would have to see the actual property line, when she put her fence is 10' from her property line or curb, there is an oil tank under there, there are trees there, her driveway is there and she is not looking to have that all chopped up. She has no objection to the school but does not want her front yard chopped to bits. Mayor Brill Mittler said that as the project moves along they will have to take a look her situation and any other situations where the sidewalks are missing to assess. Mary, Madison Avenue said that if they determine a sidewalk needs to be installed what are the other options other than chopping up her front yard. Mr. Constantine indicated that the sidewalk would be in the public right of way, not on personal property and if you look down Madison you can see where the sidewalks begin. Ms. Jover said that there are other configurations that can be looked at to address these issues and a site assessment would need to be done to determine. Mary, Madison Avenue said that there wouldn't be any intention or support in the future by school leadership to transition into a Charter School. Mr. Stern said that the school has no intentions on doing that but are in a position to say that will not ever happen in the future. Ms. Welkovits asked that be looked into.

Glen Garlotti said his biggest concern is the traffic, with the new construction they are parking, loading and unloading it's like a game of chicken trying to get up and down Cleveland, coming up Madison to Cleveland no one ever goes past Madison Avenue, they don't stop, they don't look they just turn because everyone coming up Cleveland makes a right onto Madison. There is a catch basin on the corner of Madison and Cleveland that has not worked in 20 years; there is also one in front of Birnn Chocolate that works and the renderings do not show any parking at all on the street, and he thinks right now there is no parking on Cleveland from Janeway all the way, from Janeway down to River Road you can park on both sides. He asked what the next step was in the process. Ms. Jover said at some point a tighten up draft will be presented to Council, then to the Planning Board for consistency with the Master Plan, with another presentation with public comment, and then refer back to the Council for action, assuming it moves through, an application will go to the Planning Board by the applicant. This plan is only for the school site and there will be discussion about an overall plan for Cleveland Avenue which has not yet been finalized.

Mary, Madison Avenue asked if there was going to be use of the school on the weekends. Mr. Stern said that Sunday there could be some programs. Mayor Brill Mittler said that we tend to develop in piece meal, and what we have decided to do to get ahead of that is look at the bigger picture and what do we want to do with Cleveland Avenue corridor, some vacant lots, some businesses, office complexes and what do we want as a community to see happen on Cleveland Avenue, and this is not the only place in town we are taking a look at, because the school came to the Borough it directed our attention to the rest of Cleveland.

RESOLUTIONS

Resolution 2020-01

Executive Session – 433 Cleveland Avenue Redevelopment Plan/ Downtown Property Acquisitions

It was MOVED by GEORGE and seconded by HALE that Resolution 2020-01 be approved.

ROLL CALL: Ayes – Fine, George, Hale, Welkovits
Nays – None

There being four (4) ayes and no nays, Resolution 2020-01 was approved.

Discussion Items - None

Public Comment

Mayor Brill Mittler open the floor to the public, there being no one, public comment was closed.

Adjournment to Executive Session

There being no further business, on motion made by Councilman George, seconded by Councilman Fine and carried by affirmative voice vote of all Councilpersons present, the meeting adjourned at 8:28 PM to go into Executive Session.

Respectfully submitted,

Jennifer Santiago
Deputy Clerk