

**BOROUGH OF HIGHLAND PARK  
MAYOR & COUNCIL REDEVELOPMENT MEETING**

221 South Fifth Ave.  
Highland Park, NJ  
May 8, 2018 at 6:00 PM

**CALL TO ORDER**

The Regular Meeting of the Highland Park Redevelopment Agency was called to order in accordance with the Open Public Meetings Act by Mayor Brill Mittler at 6:14 pm Mayor Brill Mittler indicated the location of the fire exits.

**ROLL CALL**

Present: Mayor Gayle Brill Mittler, Council Members, Josh Fine, Matthew Hersh, and Susan Welkovits

Absent: Council Members: Philip George, Stephany Kim-Chohan and Elsie Foster-Dublin

Professionals: Mr. James Constantine, Planner

**PRESENTATIONS:** None

**APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

April 24, 2018

Councilman Hersh indicated he asked if there were going to be a loss of units and asked that be reflected in the minutes.

It was MOVED by FINE and seconded by WELKOVITS that the minutes of April 24, 2018 as amended be approved with a voice vote by all present the April 24, 2018 minutes were approved.

**RESOLUTIONS:** None

**PUBLIC COMMENT**

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

**HEARING OF NEW AGENDA ITEMS**

**Proposed Amendment to Downtown Redevelopment Plan**

Councilwoman Welkovits said this amendment is for 130-134 Raritan Avenue (Route 27 Associates) it is across the street from the Popov project. There was an approval some time ago for a three story mixed use building that was abandoned.

Mr. Constantine said that a dialogue has begun and the developer thinks if they could get to a fifth story there would be enough feasibility. He said that these are the challenges with small sites. They went through several reviews with the Screening Committee and everyone was comfortable with a proposal in part using a design that would terrace back the fifth story. The current redevelopment plan allows three stories with a fourth floor provided a setback of 10' from the front façade and we are allowing a fourth story with a fifth floor set back 10'. There is ground floor commercial space, four apartments on each of the floors, four slightly smaller

apartments at 650 sq. ft., one bedroom and a studio apartment, and the terrace space would be accessible to all of building residents, with dynamite views of New Brunswick and we will be giving New Brunswick dynamite views of Highland Park. He said that the amendments to the redevelopment plan are simple, one is for height allowing for this fifth floor terrace back 10' from the front façade with a height not to exceed 60'. The second one would be on the parking similar to Popov with shared arrangements; they will have 16-18 spaces on site behind the building but will still have parking for commercial tenants. He said that they would have concept of the full parking when introduced. With the access issues in rear of the building off of Park, we would like to park the resident only in the rear not the commercial tenants. He mentioned that the zoning encourages shared parking, affordable housing is fractional on 16 units, 2.4 units and we are asking for three units.

Councilman Hersh asked if one of the units would be an efficiency unit. Mr. Constantine said that he would need to speak with affordable housing, COAH regulations read no more than 30% of the affordable housing units can be one bedroom. They may allow for that but in this particular case we are at 33% if one is efficiency. He said that he would talk to Dan; it would make sense to have a one bedroom, two bedroom and three bedroom but needs to verify first. The COAH regulations indicated that no more than 30% of the units may be one bedroom, minimum of 30% have to be three bedroom and the rest are two bedroom.

Mayor Brill Mittler indicated that it is important to know that from the time, this concept first came and Mr. Constantine started working with the Developer, and it went to the Screening Committee there have been dramatic improvements.

Mr. Constantine indicated that one other item to consider amending in the Redevelopment Plan was to try to lighten materials when you get up a little higher.

Councilman Fine asked as an idea could the Borough somehow own municipal parking garage, we would gain parking spaces, and revenue. Mayor Brill Mittler said that they had spoken in the past to James Polo's about his lot but we are awaiting the proposal from the parking committee.

Borough Administrator Jover agreed with Councilman Fine that the Borough is going to need to come up with a parking plan potentially structured down the line but in the short would like to try to have a meeting with the Church on 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue. There are never cars on the street during the day and asked that we re-energize that effort.

Borough Administrator Jover said that at the June 12 Council meeting if the amendments are straightforward enough and everyone is comfortable, to add to the consent agenda a resolution to refer the amendment to the Planning Board for review and comment.

Mr. Constantine indicated that he would bring the Planning Board up to speed at their next meeting. The Planning Board is concerned with the helping move some the projects along for affordable housing he can make sure everyone is aware that this amendment is coming, explain the amendment lets be prepared to workshop it at the meeting and be ready for recommendations

back to Council for introduction. He indicated that he and Mr. Baumann could bring Roger Thomas, Board Attorney into the process early so he is up to speed. Mayor Brill Mittler agreed.

Councilman Hersh asked if the neighbors on Park would be notified. Mr. Constantine indicated that once the plan is amended and the developer has been designated conditional redeveloper we can ask to have a neighborhood meeting in advance of them formally submitting anything.

Mr. Constantine suggested doing a neighborhood meeting similar to River Road/Walter, do specific notice to them, at the Senior Center. The statute has prescribed notifications and Mr. Baumann's concern is if we start bending that process to do specific non-statutory notification then how do you not do it again and again. He recommended we follow the statutory notice but we can do an additional neighborhood meeting and that can be done once the amendment is made and then we are really looking at the application and the parking, and circulation so the neighbors all get a shot on understanding the project before it is filed with the Planning Board. All agreed.

#### Walter Ave/River Rd Redevelopment Plan update

Mr. Constantine indicated that there was meeting with the neighbors in April at the Senior Center, attended by those most interested in the project. We had the neighbors place dots on the map where they live, ask them to tell us about existing issues in the neighbor and there was a map where they could annotate that, there is traffic issues, crossing issues, etc.. Some of the neighbors talked about exploring a bike lane on Walter Avenue because there is extra width in the road. There were some diagrams of how the site might develop residentially including some single family or townhomes and apartments, and there were images laid out and provided green and red dots and asked everyone to place a green dots on the images they liked and red dots on the ones they did not like and did not fit the character of the neighborhood. There was a discussion on the process moving forward, they were thankful for having input early and plan to go back to them at the end of this month, on Tuesday, May 29. We will show them massing character concepts about views from Walter Avenue, view from the corner of Walter and River Road, a view from River Road of what we think picks up the character of the green dotted images they liked. There were something that they suggested such as leaving the existing driveway on Walter Avenue, leave the parking lot where it is, there were somethings that had greater setbacks then what is on the current zoning. He said that they would be inviting the property owner Dr. Glasgold and his family to be there and share some of the concepts with perspective developers to get there input in the next week or two.

Mayor Brill Mittler said that what the plan is looking like is some stand alone homes facing Walter Avenue and then an apartment building facing River with terraces so can see the river and could be quite attractive and the neighbors actually picked the character.

Mr. Constantine said after the meeting on May 29, Mr. Baumann will provide to his office a frame work of what he believes to be a better version for use of a site specific redevelopment plan, we are not going to try and edit the existing redevelopment plan. He said that they hope to have that back by June 19<sup>th</sup> to Council for redevelopment entity meeting for a full presentation

and then goes to the Planning Board for review, come back to Council in hopes of adopting the plan in July or August the latest.

#### Borough Square update

Borough Administrator Jover said that she met with Attorney Lucille Davy with the owners of 226 Raritan to talk about purchasing the rear portion of their yard and we wanted to speak with them about the logistics, they seemed to be very interested. The lot is 287' deep and adds a lot of dimension. The main issues the Borough is going to need to obtain a subdivision for this property in order to buy that back lot and this is being looked into at the Attorney's office.

Councilman Fine asked what the property owner was asking for. Borough Administrator Jover said they were asking \$200k, which is reasonable, based on land value. We will be exploring the neighboring property, the driveway is shared between those two properties, and the Planner indicates that would be desirable to potentially ingress from Raritan. She said that she would layout a timeline of all the decisions that have to be made. She suggesting presenting this to the Screening Committee in June to at least bring awareness.

Mr. Constantine said the Screening Committee meets this week to discuss 6 Elbert, a subdivision and White Rose to discuss an idea they want to explore. Councilman Fine said that there was a restaurant where discussions about parking and residential parking came up. Mr. Constantine said that it could be White Rose; the Borough does not have a minor site plan provision in the Ordinance, which is something that might come out of the Screening Committee meeting discussions this week.

Mr. Constantine said that when fairly small improvements below a certain threshold, kick off major site plan which also sends you to the County Planning Board which means you get a bunch of requirements for improvements from the County and the project then takes on a whole different approach. Most Ordinances have a secondary category of smaller projects that up to couple of parking spaces, small additions, freezer box at a restaurant and technically right now a freezer box on Raritan Avenue requires site plan and the process costs a lot more than the freezer box. If the cost of the process is more than the improvement likely, the improvements are not getting done. He said you could require a fixed professional review, \$250 for the Planner, \$250 for the Engineer to turn it out quickly provide the commentary because it is a minor change. With a minor site plan category, we can negotiate a reasonable level of improvement of something on a relatively small improvement.

Mayor Brill Mittler suggested a meeting with Ron Rios, John A. Pulomena, County Administrator, herself, the Borough Administrator and the Planner and discuss Highland Park's redevelopment plans and how we need their support.

Councilman Fine asked if there were any way of taking back control of the library project, so we are pushing and making something happen. Councilwoman Welkovits said that Deb Tantleff has been named conditional redeveloper, the Borough obtained a \$150,000 grant for site investigation for that site, about \$50,000 went to the dry cleaner to do the analysis and sampling

that was submitted to the NJDEP. They are now installing monitoring wells for a couple of months that will be phase 2 and whatever needs to happen in phase 3 the monies are there.

Councilman Fine said at one of the last Library Board of Trustees meetings one of the trustees approached him and basically threatened litigation saying that they need to know the library is zoned single family residential area and therefore if you try going forward and doing this for whatever reason there will be litigation. He asked if that was true, and if we were 2-3 years away would it be crazy to be looking at that now, having an open meeting about it.

Borough Administrator indicated that there is no viable project on that site yet. There is a conditional redeveloper agreement with Tantleff and for the last 2 ½ years it has been renewed and the concept there has the library moving etc., but she is not aggressive and we have had difficulty because we have these grants but we don't have permission to access the property, the only we received was the dry cleaners. If we decided to cease the project, there are issues that we are aware of on the site and nobody is going to buy unless you get environmental tests done and how do you change the zoning if we are not sure that the library is even being moved. She said she spoke to the redeveloper and suggested a meeting for the end of May or early June when we have some results from Excel, and suggested since there are many new people that Deb Tantleff come to present her project.

Councilman Fine said at what point do we say we want to get something and not necessarily go with a tremendous project. Borough Administrator Jover said that was part of what she envisions being on the table at some point, having the grant monies is going to help with anything, and what is being proposed is not necessarily the only way to go especially the library piece may change, and suggested a smaller meeting with the professionals and the redeveloper to figure out where everyone is at and at that point grant another extension of her conditional redeveloper for the site at which point she should come here and present. All agreed.

**ACTION ON ANY OTHER BUSINESS:** None

**ADJOURNMENT**

There being no further business, on motion made by Councilman Hersh, seconded by Councilman Fine and carried by affirmative voice vote of all Councilpersons present, the meeting adjourned at 7:21 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Jennifer Santiago  
Deputy Clerk