

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

221 South Fifth Ave.

Highland Park, NJ

December 13, 2022 at 7:00 PM

CALL TO ORDER

A Regular Meeting of the Highland Park Mayor and Council Redevelopment Entity was held via Zoom, on Tuesday, December 13, 2023, and was called to order by Council President George at 7:00 PM. Annual Notice of this meeting was provided to The Home News Tribune, the Star Ledger and the Highland Park Planet on January 5, 2022. In addition, notice of this meeting via zoom was emailed to The Home News Tribune, The Star Ledger and the Highland Park Planet on December 9, 2022 and was posted on the Borough website at www.hpboro.com and on the bulletin board at Borough Hall, 221 South Fifth Avenue, Highland Park, NJ on December 9, 2022 and has remained continuously posted as required by law.

ROLL CALL

Present: Council Members, Foster, George, Hale, and Hersh

Absent: Mayor Gayle Brill Mittler, Councilwoman Canavera, Councilwoman Kim-Chohan, Jim Constantine, Planner

Professionals: Special Counsel Joseph Baumann, Borough Administrator Teri Jover,
Borough Clerk Jennifer Santiago

Presentation

- Presentation of Downtown Parking Study and Recommended Parking Program Plan by Gerry Giosa, Level G Associates

Gerry Giosa, Level G Associates presented the draft findings of the Downtown Parking Study and recommended parking program.

Council Member Hersh indicated what we learn about parking here is anecdotal and also experimental and his personal experience is that there is ease of parking but it sounds like that we are not nearly at capacity of what the town currently demands, is that correct? Mr. Giosa indicated that was correct.

Council Member Hersh asked if there was any way to quantify how severe the commuter parking is. Mr. Giosa said it exists to an extent and can take a closer look at that but the evidence found did not suggest that a lot of residents like to leave their cars on the streets, a lot on side streets and it was found that those are pretty much resident cars.

Councilwoman Foster asked about the crossed out areas, those blocks for ease of driving into and exiting and because Raritan Avenue is a State Highway would there be an issue or would we have to get special permission from NJDOT to take those spaces out. Mr. Giosa said yes that is correct.

Councilwoman Foster asked if cutouts would be included in the package presented, such as narrowing our cutout spaces and create possibly handicap spaces. Mr. Giosa said he would do that all together, and let the State know as well throughout the downtowns in the State have been operating safely in that format.

Council President George said he chaired the Borough Council sponsored group and the indecision on two hour parking was a split of opinions and it is exactly what Mr. Giosa

concluded. Elimination of curb cuts has been part of a redevelopment plan since 2005 but has a lot to do with property owners opting into the program. He said as indicated by Council Person Hersh if we are up to capacity, whether part of the plan is necessary along Raritan to eliminate those X's. Mr. Giosa said no, they found that there are spaces available on the side streets just a few steps further away so you know to sacrifice amenity that is helping to ease congestion.

Councilman Hale asked Mr. Giosa to clarify commuter friendly parking. Mr. Giosa said that it is spaces with a long term time limit, you could have sidewalks that lead to the bridge. He said that there was some evidence, not overwhelming, of commuter activity on some residential streets and we could to make commuter friendly parking on Lincoln and River.

Councilman Hale asked about the congestion factors and that it is pretty congested some parts of the day and asked if he had any sense of how long that congestion lasts. Mr. Giosa said that it is short lived.

Council President Hersh said that it was mentioned higher daytime parking on the North side was pretty contrasted from daytime on the South side and would you say that is from the schools. Was there any source of that institutions there hit with a small parking lot do they spill into the ambulation. Any recommendations for permitting in certain areas where we do have some overflow parking activity. Mr. Giosa said just the exploration of it, in some of the neighborhoods where we do have some of this overflow parking activity. It is permitted in New Jersey, and it is an easy route to do that and usually you engage the homeowners on that particular block.

Councilwoman Foster asked if the permitting would be just for people who live on those streets and they would be the ones permitted to park on those street at that time. Mr. Giosa said yes that was correct. Councilwoman Foster asked if this would create bias issues such as you are discriminating against the people who live on the other side and live in the same town. Mr. Giosa said that you usually have to get the buy in of the majority of homeowners on the block and there are different ways to do it, for example, two hour parking unless you are a resident, so residents can park there all day but everyone else can only park there for two hours.

Council President George opened the floor to public comments (3 minutes per speaker)

Mary Forsberg, 317 Denison Street said that she was very impressed with the presentation. She lives in a residential neighborhood which you call a transition zone. She asked Mr. Giosa about the downtown redevelopment plan and said that she did not hear it addressed and would guess he was not told about the plan. She was expecting talk about the parking garage and minimizing the cost of it which we know is really a lot. She asked what his perspective was on building of apartments and housing a major street with no parking at all on site, is your experience that people will really walk to a parking garage all of the time. She asked if he could also speak on the cost of building a parking garage for a town like Highland Park and how it would be accomplished. She indicated that this should be a hybrid meeting.

Joseph Baumann, Esq. said that this is a baseline that we are drawing, the purpose of this first study was to set the conditions as they exist today and evaluate those not to ask him and not part of his engagement to analyze the cost of a parking garage. We are just trying to understand the existing inventory and that was the limit of his study.

Mr. Giosa said that it is his understanding that three of the four sites can accommodate their parking demand on-site. The one small site Tract B there was discussions that their parking demand would be accommodated on Tract D and from his experience with a walking distance that resident would be willing to walk.

Hannah Shostak, 146 North 6th Avenue, asked what Mr. Giosa was asked to look at, a baseline meaning you had no assumptions about whether we had a parking problem or not. Are there going to be more parking studies related to the Redevelopment Tracts. There was talk about a two hour limit but sounds like the impact would be minimal based on your understanding of how long people park for, what would be accomplished then with a two hour limit. How many people are parking for a long time in front of the post office and what kind of impact would that have if most only park there for 15 minutes now.

Joseph Baumann, Esq., said with the input of the Mayor and Council, the Business Administrator and the entire team determined that we should clearly study Raritan Avenue and the transition area going further into the neighborhoods anecdotally we were told there were concerns or issues. Mr. Giosa was asked to study the area, and in his study was meant to deal with Raritan Avenue and all the impacted neighborhoods that were basically within a block of Raritan Avenue on either side all the way up to where we thought there might be commuter issues closest to New Brunswick. We did not indicate whether we thought there was a problem or not a problem because that was the point of the study. Mr. Giosa gave us what he calls a cold eye objective view. He explained that Mr. Giosa provided his expertise in terms of when to study and how to study, how to survey and what survey questions.

Joseph Baumann, Esq., addressed the question about Redevelopment indicating because they were in the early stages of negotiations, what is shared with Mr. Giosa which is what he reflected in his presentation. It is likely that three of the lots will park on-site, it is shared with Mr. Giosa as a reference but he is not in the weeds of Redevelopment because it is in the beginning stages but he did have the redevelopment plan so he was aware of the central garage. He stated that the Borough needed the current conditions with redevelopment projects they have a basis to work off for the additional studies to work off of that will come with individual projects. He said that the positive that came out of this is that Highland Park does not have a parking problem, we have inefficiencies.

Mr. Giosa said in reference to the question about the 15 minute limit in front of the post office, n one of the study days there was a black car with tinted windows that sat in spot right in front of the post office for three and half hours. Spaces that were supposed to be turned over frequently were being utilized by cars that are not intended for that purpose

Peter Spool, 146 Graham Street, said since the parking of tracts a, c and d are not expected to park on-site and tract d was supposed to be a parking garage has the use of that changed. Joseph Baumann, Esq., said that the Redevelopment Plan has never changed. The Redevelopment Plan contemplated central parking or not and we purposely drafted it to be flexible to get the best project possible.

David Copperman, 120 Hill Street, pointed out that Raritan Avenue is not just a State Route, it is a heavy pass-through corridor, so it is not just a matter of State permission it is also highly a matter of safety. Mr. Copperman spoke about the potential of parking meters being a source of revenue and enforcement and everything that goes into enforcement, none of which we have to

deal with at the moment and asked if any projections have been done into those numbers. What extent will it be a penalty on residents versus a gain from passive traffic. Mr. Giosa said that if parking meters are installed it will be a net revenue positive, if a resident chooses to park on the avenue, side streets and lots would remain free so it would incentivize folks to use the side streets and use the lots if you want to put 50 cents out of your pocket. Mr. Baumann, Esq., said Mr. Giosa was not suggesting parking meters to generate revenue. It is also important to understand that Mr. Giosa was to give us all the options out there. The world of choices of things that could be done if we think we have a problem and we need to fix it and parking meters are in that world of choices. He stated that the governing body is hearing this for the first time with you and decisions are not being made today or anytime soon.

There being no one further, Council President George closed public session.

Discussion Items

- Preliminary Investigation of a Non-Condemnation Area in Need of Redevelopment for Stop & Shop and Adjacent Sites

Mr. Baumann, Esq. indicated in order to address what is happening at the site of Stop and Shop and the collective goal of the Mayor and Council to make sure there is a grocery store in and remain here, if not Stop and Shop, another grocery store. He stated that they are singly focused on putting that property in a position where we can have a grocery store within the confines. Stop and Shop is private property and so step one of that is to try and put it into the world of redevelopment which gives the Borough the ability to either incentivize certain uses or zone certain uses or work with the property owner in a cooperative way to maintain a grocery store or replace the grocery store. Step one is to declare the area an area in need of redevelopment, study was done, sent to the Planning Board, they reviewed the study and concluded that it meets the criteria and they are now sharing it back with the governing body. He reported to the governing body that has occurred and the next action would be for the governing body to pass a resolution to declare it an area in need of redevelopment. Second Step is the redevelopment plan so that we're working through a path to put us into a position where through redevelopment we can negotiate with the property owners to preserve or replace the existing grocery store with a grocery store to ensure a grocery store stays in Highland Park.

Councilman Hale said that the Planning Board did ask a number of questions to the Borough Planner but overall was overwhelming in support of the redevelopment designation. He noted that the property owners were in attendance and in support of moving forward with this and this is a great sign to have the property owners here and willing to engage.

Councilwoman Foster mentioned that on the news there are a number of Stop and Shop's being closed, and everyone has the same concerns about creating a food desert because that is the only major shop we have here in town. Luckily for us we have the property owners who attended the meeting and are engaged in the process and hoping to get something really good in its place.

Teri Jover, Borough Administrator mentioned that the Borough was looking into transportation solutions because there will most likely be a gap between when Stop and Shop leaves and a new store in its place and we recognize there is an imperative to connect people to grocery stores in this area and find other creative ways to make sure that people have access to other grocery stores.

Council President George opened the floor to public comments limited to the topic of Stop and Shop.

Peter Spool, 146 Graham Street asked when the Stop and Shop lease ends. Ms. Jover said it was her understanding June 30th but will likely close before then potentially the end of March.

Council Member Hersh said that this was a two tract approach of setting parameters that are suitable for the community that ensure a grocery store in any redevelopment on that site but then also moving with urgency to find a new grocery store in the immediate term.

Councilman Hale agreed by all means necessary we will do what we need to try and get a grocery store as fast as we can understanding that there are some significant hurdles to making that happen but we are certainly pursuing.

Mary Forsberg, 317 Denison Street, said she was concerned about Stop and Shop leaving because if we lose Stop and Shop Highland Park has very little to fall back on. If the post office, Wells Fargo and a lot of business could leave in that area if they start thinking you're going to redevelopment that area and that is a very successful area and it is not just about the grocery store it is the whole area because it is a successful part of town. She asked if the owners of the businesses were spoken to about this plan. She spoke in favor of hybrid meetings

Councilman Hale indicated that the owners of the whole Parkview lot was at the meeting and were interested in having conversations. The main focus is on Stop and Shop, the area that was put in the study for redevelopment was included because of a geographic area and to square it off at the corners but again we are way early in this process.

Ms. Forsberg asked if the owners were all notified in that area, she knows someone whose home backs up against the Stop and Shop and that her home could be part of the redevelopment plan. Councilman Hale said that there are no homes apart of the redevelopment. Mr. Baumann Esq. indicated everyone in the redevelopment area was noticed if your not in the redevelopment area you did not get noticed.

Nancy Muffin Lord, 250 Grand Avenue, involved with the Food Pantry and we are all worried about Stop and Shop leaving. She indicated that their clients have gone up enormously over the past 2-3 years mostly because of covid and happy to hear they were thinking about transportation and if there any way that they could help to please ask.

There being no one further, Council President George closed public comments.

Resolutions

- Resolution 2022-02 Executive Session: Redeveloper Negotiations, Tract B

It was MOVED by HALE and seconded by HERSH that Resolution 2022-02 be approved.

ROLL CALL: Ayes- Foster, George, Hale, Hersh
Nays – None
Absent: Canavera, Kim-Chohan

There being four (4) ayes and no nays, Resolution 2022-02 was approved.

Public Comment: (3 minutes per speaker)

There being no one, Council President closed public participation.

Adjournment

There being no further business, there was a motion by HALE and seconded by HERSH regular meeting adjourned at 8:28 PM to go into executive session.

Respectfully submitted,

Jennifer Santiago
Borough Clerk