

BOROUGH OF HIGHLAND PARK
MAYOR & COUNCIL REDEVELOPMENT MEETING

221 South Fifth Ave.

Highland Park, NJ

February 14, 2023 at 7:00 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 Foster at 7:12 pm. Mayor Foster indicated the location of the fire exits.

ROLL CALL

Present: Mayor Foster, Council Members Hale, Hersh, Kim-Chohan.

Absent: Councilwoman Canavera, Councilman George.

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

Discussion Items

- Update on Tract C

Mr. Baumann, Esq. indicated that he was going to give a relatively brief update on our efforts on Tract C. You may recall when we went out for an RFP to encourage the most creative opportunities for Highland Park to move forward on redevelopment projects. We asked the developers to not only consider the parcels that we were including in the RFP that were controlled by the Borough, we also asked them to think outside the box and perhaps adjoining parcels might make sense in a redevelopment project. We did caveat that with the continuing position that we were not prepared to use condemnation, it's not available to us, but to the extent that they could reach agreements with adjacent property owners and present us with a better project, we thought that would be helpful. We did conditionally select Garden Homes, Brent Tanzman's the point person on that project, and they have been working to acquire adjacent parcels in order to present us with better redevelopment projects for our consideration, and that process is ongoing. In order to take the next step, certain of those parcels are not currently in our designated redevelopment area from 2005 or in 2021, so we would have to expand the redevelopment area for this particular project. The first step of that is as you recall, to go to the Planning Board next and to study the parcels. At our next meeting, Council meeting there will be a resolution for your consideration to expand to study an additional seven parcels in Block 2202, which is the block bordered by Raritan Avenue, South 2nd Avenue and South 3rd Avenue. Those parcels were not in either the 2005 or the 2021 plan. If you're on South 2nd Avenue at the corner of 2nd and Raritan Avenue, there's two parcels that are adjacent to the church. Those are the first two parcels that you would ask the Planning Board if you agreed to study and then walking you all the way across to the other side of the block, there's three parcels, 37, 38 and 39. Those parcels are not really anticipated to be in the project, but it feels like we should consider designating the entire front of Raritan Avenue. The developer hasn't moved with the property owners to acquire those. We do think there's value in expanding that area just in case. You'll recall that's adjacent to our current location for our plaza and then there's an additional two parcels that they have had some conversations with the property owners. On the rear entrance into that parking lot, not Raritan Avenue, the other side of the block, there's a parcel that's immediately adjacent to that driveway, Lot 9. If you're looking at that driveway to your immediate right, we would add that lot, its lot 19. Off of South 3rd Avenue there's a very long block that reaches all the way to our property that would be another one we would ask you to consider. The update for this meeting and for this discussion is there will be a resolution at your next meeting asking you to consider asking the Planning Board to study these additional seven lots. We'll have a further discussion at that time, but we wanted to give you a heads up on that

as it relates to Tract C. We do feel like this effort by this developer to take advantage of our suggestion in the RFP to think beyond the few parcels is absolutely going to move us to a much better result as we continue to negotiate with them on the project. This is sort of a preliminary step to have the official negotiation, but they have already expressed that they're speaking to several of these property owners.

Mayor Foster asked about Lot 13 on South 3rd Avenue and if it would be acquired and put in lot 2202. Borough Administrator Jover noted that the thought is potentially the rear yard because it is deep and the developer has been talking to the property owner who's very familiar with the project, which may or may not happen. It also could provide additional access to the rear of the project even if the backyard does not work out, an easement might. The idea is to provide additional ways in and out of the site.

Councilman Hale asked Special Counsel Baumann to take a step back and explain for the Council and the public that the process is that the Planning Board goes and does a technical study of the area as an area in need of redevelopment. Special Counsel Baumann noted that in every redevelopment process, step one is to put the property into a redevelopment area that begins with the Council asking the Planning Board, who has the expertise, to determine whether or not that particular property fits certain criteria as defined in the law. There is a category where the property itself may not qualify for one of the criteria, but it's critical to the project itself. The whole analysis will be done by the Planning Board once we send it there. With the advice of their Planner, they'll send us back a report that says whether they agree or disagree, whether they believe it qualifies or not under the redevelopment law into one of those criteria. Then with that fact-finding, back to the Council. We'll then designate it officially and put it into the redevelopment area. The last step of that, we would then have to expand the redevelopment plan which doesn't cover those properties to then cover those properties that the plan already exists in the area. It is multi-steps, multi-hearings, multi-presentations, Council/Planning Board back to the Council and then expansion of the plan. This is sort of a unique situation where we had our area designated and then the developer comes to us with a better plan and say that makes sense to have the foundation for a better plan.

Borough Administrator Jover noted that one other point I'd like to mention while we're just talking an update, I couldn't believe it when I was talking with Joe earlier that the agreement was signed in August. We'll likely need to extend the conditional redeveloper agreement and we'll be back to you with the process on that. That came up in a conversation I had with a Council member and I just wanted you to know we will follow up on that. We'll just put a resolution on the next meeting to give them another six months. That would be our recommendation.

Resolutions

- Resolution 2023-01 Executive Session: Redeveloper Negotiations - Tract B and 424 Raritan Avenue (Stop & Shop site)

It was MOVED by HALE and seconded by KIM-CHOHAN that Resolution 2023-12 be approved.

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

There being three (3) ayes and no nays, Resolution 2023-01 was approved.

Public Comment: (3 minutes per speaker)

Mayor Foster opened the floor to the public.

Peter Spool, 146 Graham Street, wanted to know which tract, if any, we're talking about. The idea is there's a request by the perspective builder to expand the footprint. Special Counsel Baumann would call it more of an evolution of a conversation between both of us where the Borough and the developer concluded this would be a better path to expand it. He also noted that there are agendas at the front of the room if he did not get one.

Grazina Strolia, 24 Redcliffe Avenue, commented about the development of the parking lot and asked if any thought has been given to putting in a dingbat, an architectural term. It's a building whose first floor is open so that the parking remains and then there's apartments above it. Borough Administrator Jover noted that it's not contemplated in the redevelopment plan and those are the parameters that we are operating under. You can look on the website at the redevelopment plan for tracts A to D and you'll see some general standards.

Charlie Kratovil, Editor of New Brunswick Today, commented that he is following up on some discussions he heard at prior meetings about having hybrid meetings. He wanted to express his personal support for them but also ask a question. At the meeting on January 17th they quoted there's only one town in New Jersey that's doing hybrid meetings and that we're in conversations with them to see how that works. He asked them to please identify what town that is. Mayor Foster noted that she has been working with a number of towns, but the one in particular she was speaking of at that time was South Plainfield. Mr. Kratovil noted that he did his own research and noted that there are four towns in Middlesex County that currently have hybrid meeting options, South Plainfield, Sayreville, Perth Amboy and North Brunswick. He stressed that it's not terribly difficult to accomplish this. Other towns in the County have and he encouraged them to talk to more than just South Plainfield. Highland Park can do this and should do this promptly. He thanked the folks who make it possible for him to watch the meetings from his desk in New Brunswick. He thinks Highland Park can be more on the cutting edge of access and public input and an easy way to do that is to implement hybrid meetings so that people can participate remotely as well as in person.

There being no one, Mayor Foster closed public participation.

Adjournment

There being no further business, there was a motion by KIM-CHOHAN and seconded by HALE regular meeting adjourned at 7:19 PM to go into executive session.

Respectfully submitted,

Jennifer Santiago
Borough Clerk