

BOROUGH OF HIGHLAND PARK
MAYOR & COUNCIL REDEVELOPMENT MEETING

221 South Fifth Ave.
Highland Park, NJ
November 28, 2023 at 7:00 PM

CALL TO ORDER

A Redevelopment Meeting of the Highland Park Mayor and Council was held on Tuesday, November 28, 2023, and was called to order by Mayor Foster 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 3, 2023 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 January 3, 2023, and has remained continuously posted as required by law. In addition, notice of this meeting via Zoom was emailed to the Home News Tribune, The Star Ledger and the Highland Park Planet on May 12, 2023 and was posted on the Borough website at www.hpboro.com and on the bulletin board at Borough Hall, 221 So. Fifth Avenue, Highland Park, NJ on May 12, 2023 and has remained continuously posted as required by law. As a courtesy and to expand access to the meeting, the Borough offers a Zoom option to allow the public to participate remotely.

Fire exits are to the Left and the Right of the Council Chambers.

Chris Cosenza led the Pledge of Allegiance

ROLL CALL

Present: Mayor Foster, Council Members Canavera, Hale, Hersh, George
Absent: Kim-Chohan, Postelnik
Professionals: Special Counsel Joseph Baumann arrived at 7:15 pm, Borough Administrator Teri Jover, Borough Clerk Jennifer Santiago

DISCUSSION ITEMS: None

Resolutions

- Resolution 2023-06 Executive Session regarding:
 - (1) Redeveloper Negotiations – Tract C
 - (2) Redeveloper Negotiations – Cleveland Avenue
 - (3) Redeveloper Negotiations – Tract A

It was MOVED by Councilman George and SECONDED by Councilman Hale that Resolution 2023-06 be approved.

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

There being four (4) ayes and no nays, Resolution 2023-06 was approved.

Public Comment: (3 minutes per speaker)

Mayor Foster opened the floor for public comment.

Mary Botteon, Madison Avenue, indicated that the redevelopment plan included many parcels including several of our homes and asked at what point will those of us who are in this redevelopment parcel be advised of who the redeveloper is and when can we participate in the

drafting of whatever plan you have in mind. Mayor Foster indicated that there will be an opportunity for members of the public to participate but did not have a specific time at this moment but as soon as a date and time become available she will let everyone know.

Mary Botteon, Madison Avenue, said that her parcel is actually part of the resolution and she is not just a member of the public, she is a member of the redevelopment area and it would not make sense for those of us who are already on the map for redevelopment to be part of the initial proceedings as opposed to saying here is what we have already decided. She asked why her parcel was a part of the plan. Ms. Jover, Administrator said that we do not have an area in need of redevelopment designation for the properties included, there is no condemnation, this is a plan the Council approved a number of years ago and we are catching up on, there is no redeveloper for your property. When we are ready to share a draft it will be made available in time for comments and input prior to taking action.

Mary Botteon, Madison Avenue asked if her parcels and other homes as well as commercial properties and you are saying none of us are within the redevelopment plan at the moment that you're looking at why are we still in the identified as parcels and what is the advantage to us as a homeowner to be part of this redevelopment plan if we don't have the opportunity to speak at these early stages. Ms. Jover said that the motivation was there were a lot of varied zoning in the area that doesn't really comport with what the existing uses as identified in the Master Plan and you will have the opportunity to comment but we do not have enough of a concept to share at this point. Ms. Jover stressed that there is no interest in changing your property from what it is now, but it was included because it was in proximity to the other parts of the corridor which it varies significantly.

Mary Botteon, Madison Avenue indicated that given the proximity of her parcel and others and indicated that they should be given the opportunity now to know who is the redeveloper that you are negotiating with. Councilman Hale indicated that there is no redeveloper, there is no redevelopment plan. Ms. Botteon said that you are referring to redeveloper negotiations.

Ms. Jover said that there is no designated redeveloper for this area, this is all very preliminary discussions. Ms. Botteon asked who the redeveloper was that you are negotiating with or contemplating negotiating with after the close of public session.

Mary Forsberg, Denison Street, said she was curious about what Mary Botteon was talking about, she asked where the original plan was, why is there a plan that includes personal property of people who aren't wanting to sell but also Birnn Chocolates, Park Therapy both successful ongoing businesses so why even contemplate taking over those spaces. She suggested looking at the Charter school, people on Cleveland do not want to have their homes condemned to make some other things. Councilman Hale said there is not plan, there is no condemnation, no one is taking houses. Ms. Forsberg asked why are you talking about this if there is no plan.

Ms. Jover, Administrator said we had authorization to develop with LRK a Redevelopment plan and that is what we're doing and we have some discussions about some specific properties that we want to have as they're privileged in executive session tonight but we will be making the draft plan available publicly for everybody before actions taken to adopt.

Council President Hersh said that he wanted to briefly refresh the public, this is really to protect your properties from unconventional or irresponsible redevelopment that is not conforming to the zoning, there is a lack of uniformity and obviously anyone who lives near the Cleveland Avenue

corridor has experienced a significant amount of development over the past few decades. This is an effort to really contain that and to follow guidelines. Ms. Jover said that this area was studied in particular when we worked on the Master Plan and Land Use Element in 2019 and this is the next step coming out of that work.

Yash Goyal, student reporter, asked what the goal for the public of the redevelopment draft plan process and what would be the next steps. He said that he was referring to Tracts A-D, which include Cleveland Avenue. Ms. Jover said that does not include Cleveland Avenue, the downtown Redevelopment plan for Tracts A to D are properties along our downtown area on Raritan Avenue, Cleveland Avenue is closer to the railroad line and they have very different in nature and the approach is differently in the planning efforts.

Yash Goyal, asked if the Council was looking into Redevelopment at this time for both areas or just Cleveland Avenue and what the goals for each are in seeking redevelopment so for Tract A and C the four areas that are in the downtown. Mr. Baumann, Esq., said that the goal there is to economically redevelop the downtown in a way to produce more people living in town, spur development and economic development in the downtown. Cleveland Avenue is an area that has had sort of somewhat inconsistent development to date and we thought that it is right for a redevelopment plan overlay that will provide us sort of a more consistent and better ability to control development that will happen there. Mr. Goyal asked if they were hoping to attract more Rutgers students or facility living in these areas or foster any relationship with the University. Mayor Foster responded absolutely.

Ira Mintz, North 5th Avenue asked why Cleveland Avenue would be discussed in executive session. Mr. Baumann, Esq. said that the redevelopment process will be a declare redevelopment plan, you select redevelopers, negotiate a redevelopment agreements and property owners, might be in the redevelopment plan, will be a part of negotiations so its important for us to have some conversations that would exclude potential developers we are going to have to work with or negotiate with.

Ira Mintz, North 5th Avenue, said he was confused because he thought sense the Council took over this responsibility and these are public meetings and this a public body why wouldn't those discussions have to take place in public under the open public meetings act. Mr. Baumann, Esq, indicated that the open public meetings act recognizes certain circumstances in which it is in the interest of the public for use to go into closed sessions and discuss certain items such as personnel, negotiations, litigation, and this is under one of those exceptions, expected contract negotiations.

Ira Mintz, North 5th Avenue said that this is a discussion about what the redevelopment plan might look like or an endeavor to go out to someone to develop a plan. He indicated that he will look further into what was said

Gerald Pomper, South 3rd Avenue, asked if there was any news on the supermarket site. Mayor Foster said that there is an agreement and she will be meeting with the new supermarket owners this week and after this meeting she will be making an announcement.

Mary Forsberg, Denison Street, said you are redeveloping Cleveland Avenue why is it that when you're doing Tract B which are the two houses on Raritan Avenue where the Sunoco station is directly next to it BB big and now a house is for sale why haven't you ever done any kind of

analysis of that because that frankly is the biggest eye sore in this town and it seems to me that you ought to like spend a little time thinking about things that are already unattractive rather than looking for successful businesses and nice houses to redevelop. How is it that you've never done a survey to find out what kind of store people in Highland Park would like I mean I have heard that a rumor that Sprouts is one of the store that might be coming to town and I'm sort of curious about that because Sprouts is a nice store but it's a fairly like a whole food store but a problem for low income households. Mayor Foster said that what people would like to have come into town and the people that are interested in us is two separate things, we searched high and low for a supermarket interested in coming to Highland Park and it was a lot of hard work. She has received at least 50 suggestions, the supermarket coming to town will be a great fit and everyone will be pleased.

Mr. Baumann, Esq, said that the Sunoco station is spoken of regularly and the two adjacent properties are in the redevelopment plan because that property owner is interested in redeveloping the property, the Borough has spent a fair amount of time trying to persuade the Sunoco station owner and other property owners to join together. We are not prepared to use condemnation and there is only so much you can do to encourage property owners to doing something that they have the discretion to do or not, and the same is true for what stores may or may not come, it is going to be made by the individual property owners at the end of the day.

Mary Botteon, Madison Avenue, said that she and a couple of her neighbors homes are in the redevelopment plan, and received some conflicting responses: there is no redevelopment plan this is something they are contemplating to draft now yet the resolution clearly states redeveloper negotiations and it was made clear that these are contract negotiations and she is trying to understand a couple of things, who is the redeveloper that you are already in contract negotiations with, and why are we so far in the process of already negotiating if we haven't even developed the redevelopment plan yet for Cleveland Avenue. Mr. Baumann, Esq., said that there is no redeveloper at this point in time but were concerned that some of the conversations we are going to have, once we do select a redeveloper, we do not think that we would want them have the benefit of those conversations so it is an anticipated negotiation. He said that all of this will be discussed in several meetings in the public. Ms. Botteon asked if the parcels included would be included sooner than public comment. Mr. Baumann, Esq., said that will happen simultaneously, and indicated that it would talked over whether notice would go out prior to public comment.

Seeing no one further, Mayor Foster closed public participation.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, there was a motion by Councilman Postelnik and seconded by Councilwoman Canavera the regular meeting adjourned at 7:35 PM to go into executive session.

Respectfully submitted,

Jennifer Santiago
Borough Clerk