

JOINT SPECIAL MEETING
NEWINGTON ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION
AND
DOWNTOWN REVITALIZATION COMMITTEE.

FEBRUARY 9, 2009
7:00 P.M.
CONFERENCE ROOM 3

Economic Development Commission Members Present

Chairman P. Joseph Harpie
Commissioner Marie Dowling
Commissioner Jeff Hedberg
Commissioner Val Ginn
Commissioner Mary Niro
Commissioner Gregory Polk
Commissioner Thomas Shields

Downtown Revitalization Committee Members Present

Chairman P. Joseph Harpie
Council Member Christopher Banach
Council Member Michael Lenares

Also present:

Mayor Jeff Wright
Town Planner, Edmund Meehan
BL Companies representative, Derek Kohl

II. MINUTES OF JANUARY 15, 2009 MEETING

Commissioner Ginn made a motion to accept the January 15, 2009 minutes and Commissioner Shields seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

III. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

None.

IV. DISCUSSION OF JANUARY 15, 2009 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION COMMENTS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR REFINING CONCEPT DESIGN, TOWN PLANNER ED MEEHAN AND DEREK KOHL, BL COMPANIES.

Chairman Harpie: We had a number of significant issues to have the Town Planner, Ed Meehan, revisit the information that was presented at the last public hearing. The majority of the participants were very happy with the concept but there were questions that were centered on turning access and mobility for snow plows, fire safety issues, access in and out, etc. Some people felt that the sidewalk design, etc., encroached on their business properties and so we would want to address those issues. We are addressing those issues under eight points that the Town Planner will walk us through those now and then we will have discussion amongst this body and then re-open it up for public participation, so that you can have your questions answered relative to the considered modified changes. The meeting is now turned over to Mr. Ed Meehan, Town Planner,

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Mr. Meehan began his presentation by pointing everyone to the colored rendition of the concept plan which was presented on January 15, 2009 at the public work shop, prepared by BL consultants and depicts the 4.7 acre municipal parking lot, and copies also provided by BL for all members of the committee. There were seven points that seemed to arise from members of the public and the committee which are before you and attached are some possible modifications to the concept plan, a process that is evolving as we move forward.

1. Exiting out of the site to Constance Leigh Drive - can this exit be kept at current width with a left and right exit and entrance. We looked at that and think it can be done but the lanes would be 8'-9' with a little short storage at the senior high rise for that maneuver.

2. Sidewalk route coming in from Constance Leigh Drive into the parking lot for a safer pedestrian network from all four directions to bring citizens into the focal point as well as to the businesses into the center with concern about congestion and removal of mature trees on the east side of the parking lot.

Option A - Leave existing islands and trees where they are and make the islands wider on the north side, 4'-5' and thereby putting your sidewalk in that area, protecting the trees and new curbing and better definition of the north side.

Option B - Another option for the sidewalk would be to come in on the south side, adjacent to the senior high rise parking lot and then turn the sidewalk south down along the iron fence and connecting it to the existing sidewalk on the corner where the gun shop is located, the shoe repair and credit union and then straight out of Market Square. We can take a look at both options, cost them out and see which one is more feasible. That would take care of the sidewalks, preserving the existing trees, traffic at the entrance and still providing for a "left and right" egress.

3. At the two way driveway from Market Square, we would prefer to see 4' sidewalks and that would choke this down to only 22' for two way traffic, so we would think that you should have sidewalks on one side or the other from Market Square into the center green area, with a careful watch to the building on the east side of Market Square with ground level windows and very closely located to the driveway with drainage issues, etc. to that area.

4. There was concern about the turn around radius for fire equipment and project engineers looked at that with the key to their apparatus is in getting access to the senior high rise. Access to residents behind Flowers, Etc., are marked by fire lanes and a fire response plan. There are no fire hydrants inside the municipal parking lot; they are on the perimeter and as long as they have access to those, they are "okay". Mr. Kohl also added that they have a computer program that would meet the town's specific requirements.

5. Redesign concept layout for sidewalk location behind 100-132 Market Square. Try to use the existing sidewalk but still use the existing concept of this sheltered island and also as an advantage for a sidewalk connection, because it creates a good intersection which we do not have right now. The value of this concept is that it creates a main focal point.

6. Reduce the size of the center green from 16,500 square feet to approximately 10,000 square feet. A building lot in Newington is 12,000 SF, so in relation to that, this is pretty large. In relationship to that the comment was made if this could slide further east and still preserve some of the existing parking behind Steve's and the Karate studio because many of their patrons park there. Germane to this question was the time line question, when would Phase II begin?

Our suggestion is that we did not slide it over, but we sliced off about 6,000 SF from the western side of it, but still kept the 11 parking spaces and split it slightly easterly and in the interim it opens up 15 parking spaces which could be easily converted to match up the plan proposed by BL as far as the travel ways and the island, which gives you a total of 26 spaces. In that area right now there are about 36 parking spaces, and 34 of those 36 spaces serve the stores on Market Square, the other 12 spaces are related more toward the Eddy building and back toward East Cedar Street. We suggested as a compromise and also as a way of phasing into procuring, hopefully, the Bonelli property, building this out over on the westerly side. The "Bonelli" property outlined in blue can accommodate 67 spaces, which is Phase II.

7. To get to the parking count as designed by BL, which is a desirable parking count, there has to be another 17 spaces built on town property which would make it a more functional travel space and travel way.

8. Design entrance drives and drives around center green at 26' to 28' width to distinguish from parking bay aisles. There was a comment that this gives the impression of a maze, being very tight. We are trying to balance again, for pedestrian safety, and visual intersections with the moving of vehicles in the area with delivery trucks and waste trucks and fire engines, for the islands that surround the center green, we would set those out at about 28'. Normally in a parking lot your travel ways between stalls are 24', so this expansion might open these major routes and give more vehicular ease of access, all two way traffic.

9. Parking Count figures include 390 parking spaces right now within 4.7 acres, most of them on the east side, some of them on the north side. BL Companies Phase I with the larger center green contains 318 parking spaces, a loss of 72 spaces. The concept that we are suggesting is that by making the center green slightly smaller, you drop to 333 spaces. The original concept of the Build Out with 86 added spaces we are back to over 400 parking spaces, which would accommodate about 90,000 sf of development, right now we have about 78,000 sf of development, so there is the possibility of expansion and we know from experience that this area is never completely used, so we have need to grow. The Urban League, American Association of Planners are all backing their parking space counts; they used to be 5 - 5-1/2 per thousand and depending upon the use, for example, medical offices, food services - right now, the parking in this area is adequate and if you drive around today you see parking spaces lost to snow storage efforts, so 3 or 3-1/2 per thousand would work in this municipal parking lot. From a community planning point of view and by spending this money as part of your infrastructure for long range investment it gives you the opportunity to refurbish the perimeter buildings, to give them some value to add more square footage and they get free public parking to support that additional square footage. Therefore, it benefits the businesses, benefits the town from the economic development point of view and higher tax values. That is the catalyst of redoing this parking lot.

V. REMARKS BY COMMITTEE AND ECONOMIC COMMISSION MEMBERS

Chairman Harpie: Thank you, Ed. I think those points pretty much address the public hearing issues that were brought up last month, each issue confirmed the redesign of Phase I of this plan to make this project aesthetically attractive, and functional, commercially and publicly safe. Ed did a good job of hitting each and every one of those points.

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Mr. Meehan: The framework of the idea of the center green, the sidewalk network, the existing entrances to the parking lot, those are good concepts we want to maintain and not disturb that.

Commissioner Polk had a question regarding an education platform as opposed to a gazebo and whether that issue had been addressed and Mr. Meehan acknowledged that the rectangular shape on the plan would be whatever the organizations in town would like to have it become, but the town's thought at this level, and I can be corrected, is to provide a meeting place that can have multiple uses, such as a platform, gazebo and the project engineers need to know its function so that they can install the correct utilities, such as water, lighting and power, being built into the plan right now.

Commissioner Dowling inquired as to sitting areas. Mr. Meehan replied that there are several amenities, such as benches, uniform lighting detail from Main Street, signage, street furniture, etc.

Commissioner Shields inquired as to the electrical construction being underground. Mr. Meehan replied that the easterly side is well set and that the westerly side is being looked at and the area in back of Wings.

VI. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Joan Alice Taylor: Is there anything in this plan of fixing up the back of the buildings on Main Street?

Chairman Harpie: That is pretty much left to the efforts of the private owners and we would hope that this revitalization project would encourage private owners and landlords to make the initiative to correct those issues either through change of ownership or the potential of value added which has been missing in the center and this would encourage them.

Joan Taylor: I noticed there was a lot of discussion about a farmer's market.

Commissioner Ginn: In working with Alan Budney, last year we had Urban Oaks from New Britain and Mr. Budney had in mind two or three others, but people are still in the winter mode.

Deputy Mayor Lenares: Has the maze concept been addressed regarding the turn around from Market Square to the parking lot with the radius of the fire trucks? Mr. Meehan replied that a meeting has been held with the fire chief and the requirement for radius was discussed along with opening up the exit aisle of the drive to Constance Leigh, and opening up one side rather than both sides, a little wider travel ways on the main loops along the center green coming in, 26'-28' rather than 24' and they would carry more vehicles, which would help the "maze concept" which I do not think is a maze in itself. Mr. Meehan stated it is also being made more friendly for pedestrians. Derek Kohl added that this work shop would provide valuable information for a revised plan putting in these details and come back at a later date with these revisions.

Deputy Mayor Lenares: When does this go for a final vote for this plan?

Ed Meehan: The next step would be to do a revised site plan and on February 23, 2009 there was going to be discussion with the Town Council, and then on March 9, 2009 a Workshop #3 if needed, March 11, 2009 presented in draft form of the site plan to TPZ. March 24, 2009 receives final site plan and on March 25, 2009 submitting for final draft for bid documents.

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Deputy Mayor Lenares: Before the final review, could we meet for a walk through with that plan in hand?

Mr. Meehan replied that this could be done with the next site plan and it's a good time to see what snow storage does to the site plan.

Chairman Harpie replied that was a good idea and that this has to be presented to the Town Council by March 24, 2009.

Commissioner Hedberg questioned moving the site of the gazebo if a bilder wanted to erect a restaurant to which Ed Meehan replied that you cannot build any private sector uses in this municipal parking lot, with a grant restriction that exists right now, but if you do want this to happen you should know up front that you have to put in water lines and waste lines to wherever that structure will be and that would have to be done early in this process.

Chairman Harpie: Our plan is to get a consensus tonight or agreement that looks at these concepts to provide public safety and public access and a more attractive center, being pedestrian friendly and creating a high potential for retention of businesses and a greater potential to add new businesses. I would like to call for a vote on this modified concept and allow the architect to make these modifications, while maintaining the original concept that has been explained at several public hearings and I will entertain that motion now.

Council Member Banach questioned the minimum number of spaces needed for the area from 390 to 333, a reduction of 57 spaces, what is the need of the 15 spaces to give up the 6,000 ft of green space. Mr. Meehan replied is that it gives back some of the parking which services buildings along Market Square, which would be temporary in anticipation of building Phase 2, where 15 spaces would work into the next 86 spaces in Phase 2; it's an interim area.

Chairman Harpie added that it is more than just a parking area, it would address a turning access, the availability for snow shoveling and fire department concerns.
We need a motion.

Commissioner Hedberg: I make a motion to accept the plan as it is and move forward.

Commissioner Polk: I second the motion.

Chairman Harpie: Any discussion? All those in favor? Aye. The motion passed unanimously.

VI. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Valerie French: My only request in the design of the green that it be opened up on the edge for expansion into the parking lot.

Chairman Harpie: In the long term when we get Phase 2 completed there will be some overlap and availability to do some things, which is the goal here and your point is very well made and we will take it under advisement.

Richard Simons: Bart Stanko sent a letter to the town planner about donating the property between the apartments and where the World of Nutrition is located and you mentioned making the sidewalks wider, to which Town Planner Ed Meehan replied that the sidewalk now is an indentation of where the oil company is, and the plan is to build that out to align it with the other

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sidewalks so that would be wide and suggest using existing sidewalks at each end and take up the protruding one to align it.

Commissioner Dowling inquired as to handicapped ramps. Mr. Meehan replied that there would be one at every intersection.

Michael Gallon: Mr. Gallon had several questions regarding square footage with the reply being by Mr. Meehan that there was an overabundance of parking right now. A question regarding parking matrix on the Main Street side or on Market Square was replied by Mr. Meehan as being 35-36 parking spaces in front of the bike shop and Carvel's. He added that there are 400 spaces in back that will support 90,000 to 100,000 SF of building area, with 78,000SF there now, so there is room for expansion. Mr. Gallon asked about the redevelopment piece going "up" and not cut off because of the parking ratio concept. Mr. Meehan replied that the town did not want to go so low in its parking that there is no economic incentive for someone to tack on additional floor area, because free parking improves their parking value for floor area. The Mayor made a good point earlier, that is our parking standard zoning realistic. The second phase of getting 85-87 parking spaces on the westerly side is important. Derek Kohl also stated a trend toward more green space, more clustered design. He stated it comes down to a philosophical question as to what you want to do, what is your vision for your town center area and right now we are focusing on people and businesses and away from cars.

Council Member Myra Cohen: Once you start the project and you get into drainage, utilities, etc., where in the parking lot would you be digging - where in the parking lot is there going to be a mess that cannot be used at some point, when you start the construction.

Ed Meehan replied that we have not yet planned a construction sequence but the areas would be secured and this will be left to the engineers. Derek Kohl leaves it up to the construction phasing and signage to alert the public. Mayor Wright also added that the Board of Education provided its lot so as not to create problems with the activity of the Kiwanis Flea Market.

Chairman Harpie added that everyone would be very careful how this construction plan was laid out so that it was specific and concise with the needs of the tenants and business owners of the town center. We hope we have addressed the issues brought up at the last public meeting and if we didn't, now is the time to speak up and we can revisit it with the BL Companies. This has been specialized to the center of Newington, specific to the economic development of Newington laid down by the Mayor and what this committee intends is to go forward because we think this is in line with what we think Newington is all about "growth and progress". This has been going on from Mayor to Mayor from administration to administration and this is the first opportunity in my 18 years of public service that we had a million dollars to worth with, so we have to take advantage of this grant and make it work.

Mr. R. Simons: There was some discussion of changing the name of the plaza and a lot of people like Market Square. Mayor Wright asked if Market Square could be renamed Market Street and call this project Market Square. Mr. Meehan stated that to change a street name is not as easy as it sounds. This was named Constitution Square as Mrs. Eddy kept reminding me, it is Constitution Square. Chairman Harpie stated that a letter would be forwarded to the Town Council.

Ms. Doyle: I know we are in the first phase, but is there money for the next phase or are you going to spend it all on this? Chairman Harpie stated that our assumption was that we will need every penny that we are looking at right now and there may be another allocation by the state to various towns and cities. We have not gone out to bid yet and I could better answer that question

when the bids come in. BL Companies will provide an estimate as to market conditions at the time of bid.

Valerie French: Did we address the dumpster location issue? Mr. Meehan stated that although it is unsightly, the two compact dumpsters are the minimum we should have and move it to be more central in a parking island and make them larger. Chairman Harpie also stressed enforcement of this subject with the Police Department, etc and re-address this subject. Also, surveillance cameras were discussed.

The owner of 214-216 Market Square (Shoe Repair) asked about better signage stating "Market Square. Rear". Mr. Meehan replied that is one of the amenities they had in their power point presentation which provided a kiosk or signs that are the right size at the entrance points.

Commissioner Shields questioned the addresses on Market Square as being numbered "Market Square Rear" and not Constitution Plaza. Mr. Meehan stated that the sign or logo at each entrance is identified as Constance Leigh, East Cedar Street, Main Street and this is Market Square, that lead people into it.

Mr. Meehan concluded by stating the site plan will be refined and prepared for presentation to the Town Council with preliminary cost estimates during March. The Town Council makes an 8-24 referral statutory requirement and then at the end of the month we begin to work with the consultant to prepare draft final site plan and draft documents for submission to the DECD. There is another workshop built in, if needed, up to the committee and Chairman. The bid documents go out for public notice in early April; an aggressive schedule.

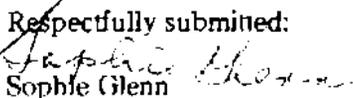
Chairman Harpie: May I have a motion to adjourn.

Commissioner Hedberg: I make a motion to adjourn the meeting.

Commissioner Dowling: I second the motion.

Chairman Harpie: The motion passed unanimously. The meeting adjourned at 8:20 P.M.

Respectfully submitted:


Sophie Glenn
Recording Secretary

Please note that a tape recording of this meeting is available for public review in the Town Clerk's office.