

City of Woonsocket, Rhode Island

Planning Board Meeting

Monday, November 5, 2018, 6:00 P.M.

Conference Room, 2nd Floor of Woonsocket City Hall

169 Main Street, Woonsocket, RI 02895

Present: Kenneth A. Finlay, Chairman
Rebecca Capwell, Vice-chairman
Stephen R. Crisafulli, Secretary
Roji Eappen, Member
Jonathan R. Pratt, P.E., Member Ex-Officio

Also Present: Ian McElwee, City Planner/Administrative Officer
Scott Gibbs, Interim Director of Economic Development
Pauline Washington, Recording Secretary

I. Call to Order

Chairman Finlay called the meeting to order at 6:00 P.M.

II. Attendance Review

Attendance was taken by Chairman Finlay that identified the above members as present.

III. Approval/Correction of Minutes

- Meeting of Tuesday, October 2, 2018- MOTION by Secretary Crisafulli, seconded by Vice-chairman Pratt to approve the October 2, 2018 minutes as submitted. The MOTION carried.

IV. Communications & Correspondence

- a. **2018-CP-13 - Request for advice & Recommendation from the Woonsocket City Council** pursuant to Resolution 18-0-55 - Referring to an amendment of the Code of Ordinances, City of Woonsocket, RI Appendix C, Entitled "Zoning" Changing the Zoning Designation of Assessor's Plat 39, Lot 9 from Residential-2 (R-2) to Mixed Use-1 (MU-1).

Chairman Finlay stated that a notice of this hearing was properly advertised on October 22, 2018 in the *Woonsocket Call* and posted on the Secretary of State website. Chairman Finlay stated that the purpose of this meeting is to consider the Planning Board's recommendation to the City Council regarding an amendment of the Code of Ordinances of the City of Woonsocket Appendix C, Entitled "Zoning", changing the designation of Plat 39, Lot (from Residential-2 (R-2 - to Mixed Use-1 (MU-1).

Stacy Corrigan, and Mario Cloutier occupy the property at 968 Elm Street; they each have a business located there (Plat 39, Lot). Ms. Corrigan stated that they have owned this property since 2011 and have been seeking a zone change since that time. Stated that they were waiting for the City's Comprehensive Plan to be approved - which she understood would put the zoning changes in line with the property's actual use. Ms. Corrigan stated that they had a tenant upstairs for a significant number of years in the building until they recently began renovating the building (exterior repairs have been completed). Ms. Corrigan stated that since submittal of their initial request for a zone change the City's Comprehensive Plan has been approved, but she has not received a response to her request. Ms. Corrigan stated that due to the fact that they are renovating the building and would like signage, and would like to occupy the building appropriately, she resubmitted her request for a zone change

Ms. Corrigan presented letters to the board from three neighbors: Trudeau's, RGM, and Mike Fontaine. Ms. Corrigan stated that the zoning designation for Trudeau's is MU-2, REPM is MU-1, (both on Cass Avenue), and hers is the first property on Elm Street. She stated that the suggestion is that her property would be a step down in zone but also being MU-1 going into the residential district which is the next house.

Mr. Pratt asked if there are any residential tenants on site. Ms. Corrigan stated that she asked the current tenant to leave due to the renovations, there's no why she could have stayed during the construction.

Chairman Finlay asked Ms. Corrigan if it's her plan to operate the appliance store and real estate businesses in the MU-2. Ms. Corrigan stated that they're seeking a MU-1 designation; the appliance store would be located on the first floor (no retail, just services & office and storage of tools & equipment). The real estate office would be located on the second floor as well as the rental unit. She explained that the building consists of ground level: Mario's Appliances, first level: Pizza Mine, and second floor: residential/one unit.

Chairman Finlay asked what is going to control signage use. Mr. McElwee stated that because signage is allowed by right, the applicant could always apply for a zoning variance to get signage up now, but the process would be a lot longer than if they had a permitted use.

Acknowledging that no other member of the public wished to speak before the board; MOTION by Member Pratt, seconded by Vice-chairperson Capwell to close the public hearing. The MOTION carried.

Chairman Finlay stated that in response to the Request for Advice & Recommendation from the City Council in Amendment of the Code of Ordinances of the City of Woonsocket, Rhode Island, Appendix C. Entitled "Zoning" Changing the Zoning Designation of Assessor's Plat 39, Lot 9 from Residential -2 (R-2) to Mixed Use-1 (MU-1), the Findings of Facts are as follows:

That the subject matter was received by the Woonsocket City Council at their regular meeting on Monday, October 1, 2018, where it was received, placed on file, ordered advertised in accordance with R.I.G.L. 45-24-53 and where it was received, placed on file, ordered advertised in accordance with R.I.G.L. 45-24-53, referred to the Woonsocket Planning Board and the Associate Director of the Rhode Island Department of Administration, all of which was accomplished.

The Woonsocket Planning Board will receive an explanation of the purpose and effect of the proposed ordinance titled above from the City Planner/Administrative Officer and the staff of the Department of Planning & Development at their regularly scheduled meeting on Monday, November 5, 2018.

That the City Planner/Administrative Officer and staff of the Department of Planning & Development will brief the Planning Board at the aforementioned meeting on the compliance and consistency of the titled matter with the provisions of the Woonsocket Comprehensive Plan 2012 and the “*general purposes of zoning ordinances*” as outlined in R.I.G.L. 45-24-30 and §§1.2 & 1.3 of the Zoning Ordinance of the City of Woonsocket as enacted December 19, 1994 and amended to November 17, 2017 as follows:

- (2) *Providing for a range of uses and intensities of use appropriate to the character of the city or town and reflecting current and expected future needs.*

The City Planner is satisfied that the proposed zoning change will allow for this property, which is located at an intersection with two existing MU-1 properties, to benefit the city by allowing for it to be utilized for commercial and residential purposes. The City Planner does not believe that changing the property’s zoning designation from Residential to Mixed Use will reduce the existing housing stock of the city as the property is currently used as both a place of residence on the top floor and commercial units on the first and second floors of the building. In the future, this zoning change will allow for further commercial use at this intersection while still providing residential use and will be an asset to the surrounding area rather than a disadvantage.

- (3) *Providing for orderly growth and development that recognizes;*
 - (i) *The goals and patterns of land use contained in the comprehensive plan of the city or town adopted pursuant to chapter 22.2 of this title;*

The City Planner is satisfied that the proposed amendment is consistent with the goals and patterns of land use contained in the Woonsocket Comprehensive Plan 2012 as recommended by the Planning Board of February 1, 2012, enacted by the Woonsocket City Council on April 4, 2012 and approved by the Director of the Rhode Island Department of Administration on April 24, 2012. The City Planner believes that the proposed Amendment promulgates the enactment of such legislation as consistent with the goals and objectives of the Plan by providing governance of such uses in a reasoned and responsible manner. Changing the zoning designation of this property will allow “for flexible development by increasing options available to property owners” as stated in the comprehensive plan.

- (15) *Providing for procedures for the administration of the zoning ordinance, including, but not limited to, variances, special-use permits, and, where adopted, procedures for modifications.*

The City Planner is convinced that the proposed amendment establishes a reasoned and responsible series of procedures under the provisions of the Zoning Ordinance to protect individual rights under the Act and provide for community-wide input into the regulatory process.

Chairman Finlay noted that the remaining chapters of the Findings of Fact will be as stipulated.

MOTION by Member Pratt, seconded by Secretary Crisafulli to APPROVE the zoning designation of Assessor's Plat 39, Lot 9 from Residential-2 (R-2) to Mixed Use-1 (MU-1). The MOTION carried.

VOTE ON MOTION

Vice-Chairwoman Capwell	YES
Secretary Crisafulli	YES
Member Eappen	YES
Member Pratt	YES
Chairman Finlay	YES

VOTE TO APPROVE 5 - 0

Mr. McElwee informed Ms. that the zone change ordinance would likely be on the Council's November 19, 2018 docket.

V. Informal Discussion with Scott Gibbs, Interim Director of Economic Development

Chairman Finlay introduced the board members to Mr. Gibbs. Chairman Finlay stated that this request was somewhat promulgated by Mr. Eappen who has a few questions regarding the city's economic development plans and goals. He asked Mr. Gibbs to give the board his insight and his vision for the City.

Mr. Gibbs stated that he wasn't hired for the purpose of 'vision'; Mayor Baldelli-Hunt asked him to step in as Economic Development on an interim basis to supplement her staff and respond to issues that she had been responding to. And secondly, to take a look at what should the City be doing, as it relates to a Department of Economic Development. Mr. Gibbs stated that he's been associated with the City for a long time and therefore he has intimate knowledge of the City. Mr. Gibbs stated that he has been a part of several efforts by the Mayor to respond to clients. Whenever they would get a request by a client it was like a 'fire drill'; looking for information, assembling information, responding to the client. This was a problem; the entire process should only take about fifteen minutes. He stated that the Mayor supported the engagement of a company called GIS Planning, the City's licensing their software, which is a GIS based real estate database system. He noted that we're currently collecting data to input into this system; the system should be launched in about ten days. Effectively the system will be used to respond to clients, but the system will be available online to anyone to do a quick search, without talking to anyone at City Hall. He stated that that's basically bottom line capacity that any efficient system.

Following that, Mr. Gibbs stated that they want to put into place a '*customer relationship management system*' as a way to manage our inquiries and to ensure that we're responding with the information being asked for by clients, and in a timely manner. This information would provide the City with an ongoing summary of who we're dealing with, what are the issues, what

are the results; are we losing clients, why are we losing clients, we're getting clients, why are we getting clients. The City wants to get this management system in place as soon as the GIS planning system is up and running. Mr. Gibbs stated that the third phase is to integrate both these applications into a offsite website block which allows us to start controlling messaging to the public.

In terms of visioning, Mr. Gibbs stated that his opinion is that the City has no vision. He noted that his statement is not a criticism; this City has gone through a very difficult time 'fiscally'. The City has come out of it from a ratings agency viewpoint, which is positive, something the City can build from. He stated that the City had been dealing with trying to survive, but now it's beginning to look towards visioning, which was never his responsibility, but he's trying to address that issue before he leave. Mr. Gibbs stated that the City has three opportunity zones now, which is good news, but the bad news is, no one cares. He stated that there are trillions of dollars sitting on the sidelines now of unrealized capital gains that's looking to be place in the marketplace. However, the question is does the City get into the mental map of those investors so that they're aware of what we're doing and where the investment opportunities exist. He stated that we're not there; a lot of communities aren't there now. We hope to secure federal funding through the US Department of Commerce Economic Development Administration to develop a very robust strategy and vision for one of those opportunity zones - the Main Street zone (Main Street across the river along Front Street). The idea would be to create a very compelling vision strategy going forward as well as specific projects we're looking to fund. Once the project is teed up push it out to the qualifying opportunity zone funds that are emerging in the country now. Mr. Gibbs stated that in his opinion, we need to work very hard to make sure that these opportunity zone funds work for us. The key strategy going forward will be making a compelling reason why investors throughout the country should be investing here in Woonsocket. Mr. Gibbs also stated that the Opportunities Zone Program by itself, in terms of being able to defer capital gains taxes is not enough.

Mr. Gibbs stated that the last legislature session there was a significant amendment to the state's tax increment financing statutes; he wrote it along with Attorney Karen Grandy who is the bond counsel for the city, as well as bond counsel for about 75% of the communities in the state. Mr. Gibbs stated that the amendment was based on his argument that the tax increment financing program in Rhode Island just isn't generating a lot of interest. Whereas it's generating a huge amount of interest in Connecticut, Maine and Massachusetts. He stated that they looked at the statutes and understood where the weaknesses were, they proposed an addendum to the legislation that completely changed the program. That addendum passed and was submitted one year ago, unfortunately it was one of the casualties resulting from the Speaker's and the Senate Majority Leader's disagreement. Mr. Gibbs noted that this time the addendum passed and was signed by the Governor, and is in place. They want to make the Opportunity Zone Program and the Tax Increment Financing Program together, as part of an Opportunity Zone vision for Main Street and Front Street, to use that very aggressively to revive the entire area. He stated that that becomes part of the visioning process for the City.

And finally, as somebody who spent most of his career in Highland Industrial Park, we need to really think hard about how do we think about Highland going forward, and how do we

do a better job with linking Highland Industrial Park with Woonsocket. He noted that most of the people that work at Highland do not live in the City, and are not connected to the City. How to make Highland an anchor to Woonsocket and not an anchor to northern Rhode Island - that's a very challenging issue we need to address. He stated that companies across America are having a difficult time attracting human capital to locations like a Highland Industrial Park because they don't offer the amenities that the younger workforce need. He stated that we need to figure out how to solve that problem. He stated that they've been actively involved with trying to figure out how to work with a property that abuts Highland with the goal of developing a mixed use development for the people that work at Highland to give them a resource to patronize. He also stated that they've looked at the challenge of doing a Park-wide 'food truck' situation, which are key elements in some economic development situations. Mr. Gibbs stated that the issue is how do we change the corporate park mentality of Highland to be more of a mixed-use cultural location that people will really want to work at. He noted that a lot of corporate parks throughout the country are dealing with that same issue now.

Mr. Gibbs stated that these are some of the issues and discussions that he and the Administration have been kicking around; there's a huge amount of work that has to be done but nevertheless there's a better foundation to work from because the City's in much better financial shape.

VI. Administrative Officer's Report

Mr. McElwee stated that most of his work within the Planning Department the past month has been assisting Mr. Gibbs in his efforts to obtain a RI Foundation grant to purchase Ally's Pub on River Street, which was approved. He has been working with RIDOT on step funding for Monument Square, Worrall Street project. He has been working to get the RFP for that project's design out. He has also been working on trying to get a Microbrewery into 122 North Main Street (very time consuming). He noted that there are a few things in the pipelines, nothing for subdivisions lately. Mr. McElwee stated that he attended the Southern New England Planning Conference held in Hartford, CT. He noted that the conference was very interesting in that there were discussions involving cities that have had similar issues as Woonsocket: industrial rehab, regional issues, etc.

VII. Next Meeting

Scheduled for Tuesday, December 4, 2018 2 6:00 P.M. in Harris Hall

Adjournment

There being no further business lawfully before the Woonsocket Planning Board at this time, a MOTION was made by Vice-chairperson Capwell, seconded by Secretary Crisafulli to adjourn. The MOTION carried, the meeting adjourned at 7:35 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Pauline Washington
Recording Secretary