

BOROUGH OF RARITAN
Land Use Board Meeting
MINUTES
April 28, 2021

CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 6:46 p.m. The Board Secretary read the open public meetings statement into the record.

FLAG SALUTE

ROLL CALL

Present

Debra Thomas
Councilman Carra
Mr. Cunningham
Ms. Carra
Mr. Delacruz*
Ms. Goetsch
Ms. Sherwin
Mr. Brown
Ms. Windrem

Also Present

Larry Cohen, Board Attorney
Stan Schrek, Board Engineer
Angela Knowles, Board Planner

Absent

Mayor Bray
Mr. Sinagra
Mr. DeCicco

*Mr. Delacruz arrived late (approximately 6:50).

DISCUSSION/PRESENTATION

Downtown Raritan Sustainable Economic Development Plan

Ms. Thomas introduced Adam Tceza, Project Manager (Fitzgerald & Halliday), Blythe Eaman and Hannah Brockhaus. She complimented the team on their work. Mr. Tceza acknowledged Kate Keller of Phillips Preiss Grygiel Leheny Hughes.

Mr. Tceza reviewed aspects of the plan tied to people oriented economic development that were discussed during the presentation before Council. He explained that the plan was comprised of two main elements: A Public Outreach Summary including work done to date/existing conditions reports, a market assessment and public engagement; and Vision/Recommendations as to land use.

Mr. Tceza provided an overview of 6 elements of the Vision that make up the implementation plan describing them as "Physical recommendations for the next 10 years." He related that the Council presentation was more about the Vision than implementation and referred to the "implementation toolbox" as a framework for implementing the plan recommendations/achieving the vision. Mr. Tceza explained how it would be used with respect to recommendations at the action level.

Mr. Tceza provided an overview of the top level goals/strategies in the Economic development grouping such as capitalizing on “small wins,” focusing on people and creating tenant/owner driven improvement opportunities as a vehicle for driving economic advancement for residents. He spoke about the goal of place making and about governing/sustaining. He spoke about the importance of setting the framework for zoning and supplementing the Master Plan with a focus on public and private investment which would support one another.

Mr. Tceza spoke about the plan implementation working group which is comprised of stakeholders/residents. He also spoke about branding and the idea of designating a community liaison to low English proficiency speakers. He spoke at length about the various regulatory recommendations grouping goals into two categories (zoning changes and rehabilitation designations/redevelopment plans). This section of his report included discussion about Somerset Street in particular.

Mr. Tceza spoke about changes to the B1 zone; modernizing commercial uses and removing residential density in particular. He reviewed a proposal for 2-4 Family development as well as proposed changes to zoning in the R4 district.

Mr. Tceza spoke about the advantages of designating an area in need of Rehabilitation in contrast to a Redevelopment Area and suggested that the Borough look at designating the entire downtown as the former of the two. He spoke about the standards for rehabilitation designation (tax advantages in particular), lack of eminent domain powers, control over changes to the plan, ability to amend each and the message each type of designation sends. He clarified that a plan for an area in need of rehabilitation is also referred to as a redevelopment plan.

In furtherance of the plan for the R4 zone, Mr. Tceza explained the concept of “missing middle housing” which was being recommended. He spoke about how it would benefit retail with less of a physical impact given strict bulk standards.

Mr. Tceza spoke in detail about two specific places that were identified as potential areas in need of rehabilitation: 80 West Somerset Street and 30-40 Somerset Street. He described current conditions on each property and outlined the vision for each. He suggested that the tradition of having landscaped front yards continue.

Mr. Tceza spoke about properties in and around Nevius Street and how the area could be made more pedestrian and bicycle friendly. He discussed building infrastructure and ways to identify shared parking strategies and establish connections to regional assets such as the riverfront and Duke Farms.

Mr. Tceza provided an overview of the next steps. He explained that comments are out for the implementation toolbox, vision plan and community engagement summary and that land use regulations would be drafted. He related that the project would be ending in June and spoke briefly about action post finalization.

Ms. Thomas offered that it would be advantageous to give visitors to Duke Farms somewhere to go from there. Mr. Tceza advised that a parking lot on Orlando Drive was envisioned. With respect to 80 W. Somerset St., Ms. Thomas suggested enhancing the view looking up Nevius to make it more “enticing.” She stressed the importance of striking while iron is hot and reviewed relevant projects that Ms. Knowles is currently engaged in.

Ms. Thomas polled the Board for questions.

Ms. Goetsch shared her perspective on Nevius St. as a homeowner there. She endorsed what Ms. Thomas said

about foot traffic going over the bridge. Mr. Sherwin suggested that placement of bike racks was critical.

Paul Malarcher offered that “bikes attract bikes.” Mr. Tceza suggested that the Borough work with Duke Farms to develop a bike share if a place for the people parking there could not be identified. Ms. Thomas shared her experience with recent visitors to Duke Farm who were aware of maximum limit on vehicles permitted in through the front gate.

Mr. Cohen asked about the adoption of a redevelopment plan prior to ordinances based upon his understanding of the process. He spoke about the importance of pilot programs in attracting developers Mr. Tceza clarified that while they are recommending that the area be designated an Area in Need of Rehabilitation, it would not preclude spot areas being designated as areas in need of redevelopment. Ms. Keller provided clarification and spoke about the advantages of the area in need of rehab designation over the area in need of redevelopment. Mr. Tceza offered that the rehab designation allows property owners to qualify for tax abatements.

Mr. Tceza explained that the first step would be to adopt the Sustainable Economic Development Plan as part of the Master Plan since it would serve as a foundation for the rest of the efforts and establish a legal foundation as well. Mr. Schrek added that there would be a blend of rehab and redevelopment and advised that Council had handed down another area in need of redevelopment study for property fronting on Somerset Street while continuing to move on another further down on the same street. He added that the Borough has the support of the County.

Ms. Knowles thanked everyone and advised that the Borough was getting exactly what they asked for, right down to draft ordinances. She advised that a Community Challenge Grant had been submitted to AARP which included letters of support from the County as well as Duke Farms with respect to a pedestrian plaza in front of the Nevius Street Bridge. Ms. Knowles also advised that she would mention ridesharing when she meets with the new Executive Director of Duke Farms.

Mr. Brown asked Mr. Tceza how to get development proposals that sync up with the direction that the Town wants to move in. Mr. Tceza offered that the plan would give the Borough a “concrete statement” if it is adopted that would serve as a foundation to deny anything that is not consistent with that vision. He offered that it would also help in identifying developers who the Borough wants to work with in addition to helping those developers know what the Borough wants. He deferred to Ms. Keller. She added that the plan provides a vision of what the Borough is looking for and serves as marketing material to developers. She explained that it also serves to discourage developers who keep coming back with undesirable proposals and that the regulatory aspect provides a legal background for negotiations.

Mr. Carra explained that the developer the Town has been working with on Thompson/Somerset is looking to see what the Board comes up with because he wants to proceed in accordance with what they want to see. He offered that they should work together in the best interest of the Town.

Ms. Carra called the parking lot “critical.” Mr. Tceza explained that they tried to identify some sites for a municipally owned lot given the reality of parking on Somerset Street. He offered that it can be difficult to find the space and explained that they want to try to create as many opportunities to access retail space using bikes/mass transit/pedestrian traffic as possible.

Blythe Eaman (or Hannah Brockhaus???) commented on improvement of bike and pedestrian connectivity throughout the Borough. Mr. Schrek spoke about the creation of a merchants parking lot off of Thompson about 10-15 years ago which did not function as intended as it was not enforced.

Calling it a “people driven economic strategy,” Mr. Tceza explained that there is “a string of parking” that presents a shared parking opportunity which exists behind Somerset St. between Wall Street and the Quick Check.

Ms. Thomas spoke about the lot created near the white church by Tropiano Jewelers. Mr. Tceza spoke about the importance of enforcement and wayfinding in order to find parking assets.

Ms. Thomas opened the floor to questions/comments.

Robert Verducci (128 Weiss Terrace) asked whether there was a plan in place to dismantle the mall and/or driving range at the Route 206/Orlando Drive entry point. Ms. Thomas offered that there were new owners for Raritan Mall who she hopes will be more “ambitious” and agreed with him as to the state of the range. Mr. Schrek explained that the range is owned by the County and that they do intend to remove it. He advised that the new owner of the mall purchased the property at auction and then asked the Borough about site remediation. Mr. Schrek explained that the property is a former municipal landfill and as such, a prime spot to start talking about an area in need of redevelopment.

Mr. Tceza advised that they talked to the County and that they are looking to clean up the driving range. He related that they share the community’s vision for the riverfront and opined that that space could be transformational to the area as it would provide an enhanced image/perception of Raritan as sustainable. Mr. Tceza spoke about how access to the river will set Raritan apart. Ms. Knowles explained that the County identified that area as one in need of improvement then provided a few scenarios. She offered that they had received good guidance from the County for redevelopment of the mall.

Blythe Eaman (or Hannah Brockhaus???) referenced Orlando Drive as being a barrier to the waterfront as well as an opportunity to evaluate bike facilities/serve as cycle track/safer bike connection. Mr. Tceza explained that there would be addenda related to how to go about finishing the Greenway through Raritan and regional services (i.e. shuttle service).

Walter Lane, Director of Planning Somerset County offered that the County wants to be a “long term partner and resource.” With respect to the Mall, he spoke about re-launch of a grant program for the NJEDA for 21st century redevelopment as an opportunity for additional funding. Mr. Knowles advised that the Borough did not submit for the last round due to Covid. Mr. Lane offered that they hope to line up additional TPA funding as well. He concluded in saying that the County is “here to help” and would look forward to working with the Borough. He related that he would be conveying comments on the state of the driving range to the Park Commission.

Bill Cunningham asked why the Zeus property wasn’t mentioned. Mr. Schrek explained that the Council discussed it as an area in need of redevelopment and sent communication to the Board for consideration as such. Ms. Thomas clarified that it was addressed earlier in the day (in a late email).

Mr. Tceza responded to a question from Mike Patene about timeframes for existing businesses to make changes and how to bring the “right” businesses to the main street as the current class of businesses is not very diverse. Mr. Tceza offered that the current businesses on Somerset Street are good foundation for long term growth and explained that diversity will come through a redevelopment process where more modern retail that will attract the kind of commercial spaces being discussed can be constructed. He added that the other process is through working with the Implementation Group in recruiting businesses, identifying as being “open for business” and creating an environment for success.

Ms. Keller explained that this comes from early investment by creating curb appeal for residents and

businesses and looking at how to frame what is existing in order to benefit future opportunity. She suggested making the permitting process more user friendly in order to build a reputation in the region while leaving opportunity for established service oriented businesses that are foundational to the neighborhood. Ms. Keller explained that the plan would not have the authority to remove longstanding businesses but that it will send a message that the Town is open to conversation. Mr. Tceza cited a local restaurant as an example of a model for how new commercial spaces can grow in Raritan. He spoke about the value of supporting online businesses that transition to physical spaces.

RESOLUTION

Pushpa Rawtani

Block 2, Lot 15 (600 Route 28)

Motion by Ms. Goetsch, **seconded** by Mr. Carra and unanimously carried to approve the resolution, as presented.

Roll Call:

Aye: *Chairwoman Thomas, Councilman Carra, Mr. Cunningham, Ms. Carra, Mr. Delacruz, Ms. Goetsch, Ms. Sherwin, Mr. Brown, Ms. Windrem*

Nay:

Abstain:

MINUTES

March 24, 2021 Minutes

Motion by Ms. Carra, **seconded** by Mr. Cunningham to accept the Minutes, as presented by voice vote.

ENGINEERING, PLANNING & CONSTRUCTION/ZONING OFFICIAL REPORTS

There were no professional reports/updates.

TRC MEETING UPDATE

Chairwoman Thomas advised that there were no TRC meetings scheduled and that there had been none held.

AD HOC COMMITTEE (Cannabis Dispensaries)

Mr. Cunningham advised that they were still waiting on Sarah Trent's approval from the State.

PEDESTRIAN BIKE & SAFETY

Ms. Knowles advised that the committee had not met.

APPLICATION/HEARING

CGR, LLC and 93 West Somerset Street, LLC

5 First Street & 93 West Somerset Street (Block 85 Lot 15 & Block 103 Lot 2)

Site Plan Application with "C" and "D" Variances

(Completeness Hearing Only)

Mr. Schrek outlined the temporary waivers being requested and recommended that they all be granted. He also recommended that the [permanent] waiver for EIS be granted since the properties are both fully developed. He recommended that the application be deemed complete.

Mr. Shrek advised Mr. Cohen that the parties are not contiguous. Mr. Cohen advised that he would speak to the applicant's attorney (John Sullivan) about Notice content.

Motion by Mr. Cunningham, **seconded** by Mr. Brown and unanimously carried to deem the application complete with a waiver from EIS as well as temporary waivers, as outlined in Mr. Schrek's of April 23, 2021.

Roll Call:

Aye: *Chairwoman Thomas, Mr. Cunningham, Ms. Carra, Mr. Delacruz, Ms. Goetsch, Ms. Sherwin, Mr. Brown, Ms. Windrem, Mr. Krajewski*

Nay:

Abstain:

MISCELLANEOUS

- **Master Plan Amendment – Hazard Vulnerability Assessment (Scope of Work)**

Ms. Knowles spoke about a new law requiring inclusion of a Hazard Vulnerability Assessment in the Master Plan and provided details for same. She advised that it would involve coordination with OEM, Public Works, the EC/Green Team and Storm water Manager/Certified Flood Plain Manager. She laid out the course of action she would take in order to begin (a build out analysis, an infrastructure assessment, identification of strategies for remedying situations, report preparation and meeting attendance). She estimated the cost of the work at \$12-15,000 but offered that she could narrow it down more once she had more information on the mapping costs tied to the build out analysis.

Ms. Knowles responded to questions from Ms. Thomas about whether this was state mandated and about any potential deadlines. Mr. Schrek advised that he would speak to the Borough Administrator about budgetary considerations and about overlap areas (storm water management, etc.). Mr. Cohen explained that it has to go to the governing body because it involves an expenditure. He spoke about the scope of work that the Board would be responsible for. The fact that it is in an unfunded state mandate was discussed. Ms. Knowles indicated that she had not yet looked into grant funding. Mr. Cohen spoke about how developers could use the information, once compiled in their planning considerations.

Mr. Schrek responded to a statement from Mr. Brown about the potential for gleaning from GIS what the ramifications relative to flooding would be of removing the three dams on the river.

- **Borough Resolution No. 2021-04-092 authorizing the Planning Board to undertake a preliminary investigation for the redevelopment of Block 116, Lots 13 & 14 and Block 108, Lots 1, 2 and 4-9 (“Zeus Property”)**

Ms. Thomas explained that this was a late addition to the agenda as the resolution was passed by Council at their meeting last night authorizing the Board to take up a redevelopment study of the area. Mr. Cohen provided an overview of the process.

Ms. Thomas opened the floor to public comment/questions.

Mr. Patente suggested that St. Joseph’s School should be included in the study. Mr. Schrek advised that authorization from governing body to include it would be necessary. Mr. Patente suggested that it would be good to look at during Angela’s review and Mr. Shrek agreed.

Motion by Mr. Carra, **seconded** by Ms. Sherwin and unanimously carried to authorize Van Cleef Engineering Associates to prepare a redevelopment study of the area sans the St. Joseph’s school property until/unless the governing body authorizes the inclusion.

Roll Call:

Aye: *Chairwoman Thomas, Councilman Carra, Mr. Cunningham, Ms. Carra, Mr. Delacruz, Ms. Goetsch, Ms. Sherwin, Mr. Brown, Ms. Windrem, Mr. Krajewski*

Nay:

Abstain:

- **Area in Need of Redevelopment Study (Block 116.01, Lots 25, 26.01, 27, 27.01 and Block 112, Lot 3) ("Raritan Crossing")**

Mr. Brown asked whether the Board would be reviewing the report provided by Ms. Knowles. Mr. Schrek advised that this discussion would be held at a later date.

- **Meetings**

A brief discussion ensued about when the Board might return to in person meetings. Mr. Cohen advised that there were timeframes for Notice associated with this decision. The Board concluded to continue with virtual meetings until further notice.

PUBLIC COMMENT

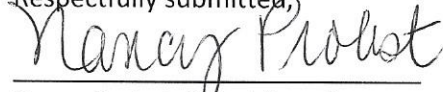
The Chairwoman opened the floor to public comment at 9:03. There was none.

ADJOURNMENT

Motion by Mr. Delacruz, **seconded** by Mr. Carra and unanimously carried to adjourn at 9:04.

APPROVED 7/28/21

Respectfully submitted,



Nancy Probst, Board Secretary