

MINUTES

August 11, 2020

City Council President Michael Farina called the Joint City Council/Plan Commission Meeting to order at 5:35pm Tuesday August 11, 2020 at the current Mulligans Island site, 1000 New London Avenue Cranston, RI 02920. Councilman Farina and Plan Commission Chairman Smith took roll call.

The following Council members were in attendance: Council President Farina, Vice President Michael Favicchio, Steven Stycos, Lammis Vargas, Aniece Germain, John Donegan, Edward Brady, and Ken Hopkins. The Following Commission members were in attendance: Chairman Mike Smith, Ken Mason, Bob Strom, Robert DiStefano, Ann Marie Maccarone, and Robert Coupe.

Also present were: Jason M. Pezzullo, AICP, Planning Director
Douglas McLean, AICP, Principal Planner
Joshua Berry, AICP, Senior Planner
Jayna Jenkins, Clerk

Councilman Farina then turned the meeting over to the Applicant, Michael DiGuiseppe, of Coastal Partners, LLC. for a brief presentation on the Phase I proposal for the construction of a large-scale retail facility (Costco Wholesale Club) with an associated fueling station. Mr. DiGuiseppe touched on many topics including outdoor lighting, delivery operations, drainage, visual impacts & buffering, job creation, tax revenue and the potential new 3-way intersection across from Brayton Avenue. The meeting was then turned back to Councilman Farina for a Q&A session between the applicant and City Council and City Plan Commission members.

Council President Farina asked if the applicant had conducted a traffic study of how the proposed development would affect traffic on New London Avenue and the surrounding areas.

Mr. DiGuiseppe stated that a traffic study would be conducted and would be peer reviewed.

Councilwoman Maccarone asked how the applicant planned to buffer noise of the refrigeration units from the abutting residential neighborhoods.

Mr. DiGuiseppe explained that a 5'-6' parapet would be erected to buffer noise.

Plan Commission Chairman Michael Smith wanted to know the relationship between Phases I and Phase II?

Mr., DiGuiseppe answered that right now his main focus was Phase I and that a possible residential development would be proposed for Phase II but there was no finite plan as of yet.

Council President Farina asked if the applicant had plans to relocate the Historical Cemetery currently existing on site.

Mr. DiGuiseppe stated that he would like to move the historical cemetery to “Parcel 4” and has been in contact with, Greg Mierka from the Cranston Historic Cemetery Commission who stated that they are okay with the onsite relocation of the cemetery. Mr. DiGiuseppe stated that the applicant has retained the Public Archeology Laboratory (PAL) which is a local company out of Pawtucket, R.I. specializing in cemetery relocation, to work through the cemetery relocation aspect of the proposal.

Councilman Favicchio emphasized the importance of traffic and noise studies and asked if the applicant would consider eliminating the proposal for residential development?

Mr. DiGuiseppe stated that the residential development proposed for the back parcel was open for discussion. He also went on to explain that Costco has specific truck delivery policies restricting the times they deliver & and unleaded and restricting idling.

Councilman Hopkins asked if the applicant has alternate plans for the proposed new traffic pattern if the State of Rhode Island, who holds the lease on the Pitch ‘N Putt, was not willing to part with that parcel. He also asked how the applicant proposed to divert drainage from the abutting residential properties. Hopkins also stated that this is a prime location for recreational amenities.

Mr. DiGuiseppe explained that they had no plans to develop the State owned “Pitch N Putt” property and that the proposed 3-way intersection would be installed on the proposed Costco site. He also explained that the development must and will comply with required regulations to contain drainage and runoff through catch and retention basins. He stated that TopGolf will have an impact on the current recreational use and the owner will sell and property will be redeveloped.

Councilman Donegan expressed many of his concerns, the first being the proximity of the trash receptacles and dumpsters to the property lines and if the applicant had provisions in place for rodent control and abatement. He also wanted to know if the applicant had performed any environmental studies, including the issue of air quality, with his concern being the amount of open/green space that would be paved to construct the proposed wholesale retail establishment. Lastly, Donegan raised the concern about impacts to property values.

Mr. DiGuiseppe explained that Costco has an extensive rodent control program and that a site study was conducted last month but that additional environmental studies would be performed at a later date. He stated that he would be shocked if there was any negative impact to property values.

Councilman Stycos asked about the proposed parking area, what the intended lot size is and how many spaces were expected. He also referred to the applicant’s claim in the presentation regarding “smart growth.” Councilman Stycos believed the idea of “smart growth” would be to

create minimal impact on the environment, to encourage foot traffic and to oppose sprawl, and that this project does not propose any of those qualities.

Mr. DiGuiseppe explained that the parking area would be approximately 5 to 7 acres and 700 spaces which he believes exceeds the current requirements by 30%. He also compared the idea of “smart-growth” to consolidation, by bringing back of house operations to the front of the building and away from residential areas reducing noise and environmental concerns for abutting neighbors. He pointed out that patrons do not walk to and from the current use.

Councilwoman Vargas expressed concerns over the lack of details for Phase II and Phase III and asked that all meetings be kept public so as to maintain transparency. She also asked for clarification on the proposed “buffer” between the residential properties and Costco. She stated that she was open-minded to further conversations as things evolve, but cannot support the plan in its current form.

Mr. DiGuiseppe stated that the areas buffering the residential properties was 22 acres and that there are no plans currently available for Phases II or III.

Councilman Brady asked for more information regarding job creation.

Mr. DiGuiseppe stated that Costco planned to employ between 250 and 270 full and part-time employees as well as 300 to 350 construction positions with local union 271.

Councilwoman Germain expressed her concern for the quality of life of the abutting residents, particularly children, and asked what could the applicant guarantee those abutters? Were there any plans for a potential park or playground onsite?

Mr. DiGuiseppe stated that he could guarantee job creation and tax revenue and that he would be willing to discuss the possibility of a park or playground area.

Chairman Smith asked the applicant to estimate to the total investment value of the proposed project. He also asked if there were any plans to preserve green space by using a permeable pavers for the parking area and would the major utilities be private or public?

Mr. DiGuiseppe stated 20 million dollars was the estimated investment value. He went on to explain that a water permeable surface would not work due to the amount of traffic on site and the potential for frost heaves causing frequent repairs and that the major utilities would be public.

Commissioner Morales asked about the proposed buildings floor elevation.

Mr. DiGuiseppe explained that the proposed building would sit lower and that the total building height would be 32 feet.

Councilman Farina brought the meeting to a close by expressing his concern that the grand scale of the proposal was too large to the existing site but he encouraged members of the public to continue to send in comments, concerns and questions to their local councilperson.

ADJOURNMENT

Upon motion made by Councilman Favicchio and seconded by Councilman Brady, the City Council unanimously voted to adjourn at 6:30 p.m.

Upon motion made by Mr. Coupe and seconded by Mr. Morales, the Plan Commission unanimously voted to adjourn at 6:30 p.m.