

**REDEVELOPMENT AGENCY
MEETING MINUTES
JANUARY 15, 2009 – 7:30 A.M. ***

Members Present: Timothy Devanney, Chair Susan O'Connor
Barbara Weinberg Robert Schneider
Dan Moran Thomas Tomko
Teri Bogli Aaron Ansaldi
Michael Darby Gary Sweet

Also Present: Scott Shanley, General Manager
Mark Pellegrini, Director of Neighborhood Services
and Economic Development
Gary Anderson, Senior Planner

Adoption of Minutes of December 18, 2008

Ms. Weinberg moved to adopt the minutes as written, Mr. Schneider seconded the motion and all members voted in favor.

At the request of staff, the Agency members agreed to hear the presentation of the Broad Street Streetscape Plan as the next item on the agenda.

Broad Street Streetscape Plan

Mark Carlino, Manchester Public Works Director, gave an overview of the project. He said the streetscape plan would replace the culvert at the Bigelow Brook; provide uniform curbing and sidewalks the entire length of the street from Center Street to Middle Turnpike; reduce the number of curb cuts by reducing multiple curb cuts for individual sites, and establishing single curb cuts for sites with no curbing along the frontage of Broad Street; and enhance the streetscape with street trees and decorative lighting fixtures.

General Manager Shanley said \$4 million has been approved by the State Legislature, but those funds must be released by the Bond Commission. In order for that to happen, this project must be placed on the Bond Commission agenda by the Governor and it is unlikely this would be on the agenda any time soon. He noted that the estimate for the project is approaching \$6 million, and the Town would need to secure the balance of the money. The Broad Street streetscape project is the Town's number one "shovel-ready" stimulus package project out of approximately 30 submitted to the State of Connecticut.

Mr. Moran asked how long the money would be available and questioned whether the Town should wait to proceed with the project until all of the possible redevelopment parcels had been

* NOTE: This was the rescheduled regular meeting of January 7, 2009 which was cancelled due to inclement weather.

developed in order to avoid reopening the newly reconstructed street for utilities. Mr. Shanley said the anticipated federal money would probably have to be spent as quickly as possible. The State money is not available now in any event. Mr. Pellegrini said it may not be prudent to wait until all of the parcels are redeveloped, since those plans are not within the Town's control and would delay completing the reconstruction and streetscape improvement project, which many people are anxious to see completed. He said every effort has been made to identify the proper location for driveway openings and utility laterals, hopefully to minimize any future street disturbance, but some disturbance may be unavoidable.

Mr. Sweet asked if traffic signals were included in the project, and Mr. Carlino said a new signal at Green Manor Boulevard was included. The Broad Street / Middle Turnpike signal was newly installed by the State, and the Center Street signal is also State owned and not included in the project.

Ms. Weinberg inquired as to the status of Green Manor Boulevard. Mr. Pellegrini and Mr. Carlino explained that this was a private drive privately owned by the company that owns the shopping center that fronts on Middle Turnpike. Mr. Pellegrini noted there are some deed restrictions associated with the use of Green Manor Boulevard, and, according to the owners of the Middle Turnpike Parkade, the owner of the Green Manor Boulevard properties has some approval rights over changes to the parking or building configuration on the vacant shopping center property. This was one of the reasons the proposed Wal-Mart project did not go forward, he said.

Mr. Sweet asked if the business signs on Broad Street were compliant with zoning. Mr. Pellegrini said they were. He noted some of them were nonconforming or received variances. He said some of the signs will have to be relocated as part of the project and Town staff had raised the idea of offering an additional incentive for signs to be replaced with monument signs which would be more attractive and more in keeping with the design recommendations of the Master Plan study.

Mr. Moran asked if the Broad Street Streetscape project was an economic development project or a road reconstruction project. Mr. Pellegrini said it has always been presented as both. The street itself is in very poor condition and does not function properly. It was noted in the Parkade Study that without an attractive street and a better functioning roadway, economic development would be all the more difficult and developers would be reluctant to invest here. He said these kinds of streetscape projects are considered economic development activities.

In response to questions from Agency members, Mr. Carlino said the project would take at least two construction seasons. It was anticipated that traffic will be able to use Broad Street during the construction period and access to businesses will be provided.

Overview of Redevelopment Statutes

Mr. Pellegrini provided an overview of the redevelopment statutes, including a discussion of how redevelopment and redevelopment areas are defined; what is considered redevelopment in the statutes; and what must be included in a redevelopment plan. The redevelopment plan development and adoption process, the findings the Agency must make, property acquisition,

eminent domain, and the use of bonds was also presented. The distinction between an urban renewal project and a redevelopment project was discussed.

Noting that a redevelopment area must be considered deteriorated, deteriorating or substandard or detrimental to health, safety and welfare, Mr. Schneider asked if there was a danger of the Agency or the Town being sued by a property owner for making that determination. Mr. Pellegrini said he was not aware of anything that would be grounds for a lawsuit, although property owners may object to the designation or to aspects of the plan. He said he would ask the Town Attorney for further clarification on that matter.

In response to questions from Mr. Schneider, Mr. Pellegrini said the planning commission does not have to approve the plan, but must make findings as to its consistency with the Plan of Conservation and Development and may make comments and suggestions on the plan. The redevelopment plan must be approved by the Board of Directors, he said.

Mr. Tomko asked if the Agency could develop a redevelopment plan without acquiring property. Mr. Pellegrini said the Agency could adopt a plan, but the extent of its involvement with execution may depend on its ability to acquire property or otherwise influence decisions. Mr. Schneider asked if the property owners in the study area are aware of what the Redevelopment Agency is charged with at this point. He felt the Agency should formally advise them of the Agency's charge and perhaps invite some of these property owners to meet with the Agency. Mr. Shanley said none of the property owners had been directly notified of the Agency's activities.

Discussion of Broad Street/Parkade Study and History of Parkade

Mr. Pellegrini presented the presentation from the 2003 Broad Street/Middle Turnpike study prepared by AMS Advisory Services, LLC. He noted the study objective was to find market based support for development and land uses in the study area. He reviewed the amount of land and building at the Parkade site, the assumptions of the study, the research undertaken by the consultant, the site considerations that were evaluated, and presented a summary review on retail, office, industrial, and residential opportunities.

In conclusion, the 2003 study indicated the strongest reuse scenarios included residential, retail and commercial mixed use, perhaps with some limited public purpose uses or private training or education or allied health care facilities. The weakest market scenarios included traditional community retail centers, retail outlets, office complexes, industrial or incubator space, hotel or conference centers, or nursing homes. The study also noted that any of the public uses such as libraries, recreational fields or hockey rinks, etc. were not market driven, but instead would require public subsidy, investment or ownership. These uses would also require a different kind of analysis than was being conducted for the purely market driven uses. The presentation concluded with a brief overview of a variety of possible development plan alternatives for the vacant Parkade site presented in the study.

Mr. Tomko asked if the ultimate goal would be for the Agency to somehow acquire the vacant Parkade property, or perhaps Green Manor Boulevard. Mr. Devaney suggested the first question to be answered is what does Manchester want to be? Does it want to be more retail,

more housing, or some combination? He felt this needed to be answered first to lead to a long-range plan. Mr. Pellegrini noted the Agency could also examine the factors impeding development here, including any regulatory barriers that would prevent the market from locating here, that may not provide realistic amounts of development on this land to overcome the cost of land, demolition, and redevelopment of roads and utilities.

Mr. Schneider asked if it might be possible to get Wal-Mart interested in the location again if title or other issues could be resolved. Mr. Tomko said he would like to see other ideas for development as well.

Mr. Darby said the consultants in the 2003 study didn't think a big box retail format would be successful in this location, and that nobody would use the current commercial buildings because they were obsolete. Mr. Darby and other members thought it might be possible that if Wal-Mart were to locate here, some other buildings in the study would become vacant because of the increased level of competition.

Ms. Bogli said she did not want to see the Agency put itself in a box at an early stage or limit the types of uses that are possible. She agreed with Mr. Devanney that a discussion on what the community wants or needs is appropriate. Mr. Sweet said one of the questions that should be answered is what the community is trying to sell here. How do we want to attract people to Manchester, what is our brand, not only for the Parkade area but for the community overall? The Agency reviewed the list of questions Mr. Sweet had e-mailed previously, and agreed that these should be discussed.

Mr. Moran suggested that at the next meeting the Agency consider such questions as whether it would support the use of eminent domain, and what would be gained if a Wal-Mart were placed at that location. He voiced a preference for the development of a medical complex of substantial office buildings over residential development. He felt residential development was not economic development. He also suggested the Agency discuss whether to acquire and hold the land for future public uses. Mr. Pellegrini said he would provide the marketing and branding comments from the Town's economic strategy planning meeting held on December 6, 2008 so Agency members could consider those ideas. He suggested that while most of the discussion has been on the vacant Parkade, there are other vacant properties in the district. He said the planning department would compile a map with an inventory of land uses and vacancy rates in the district.

Mr. Darby said it would be very difficult to get everyone to agree on anything, in particular what everyone in the community would want as a vision and how that would relate to a redevelopment study area. Mr. Darby said in his opinion the Agency would have to narrow its focus fairly quickly, especially if it intended to meet the time deadlines established for the Agency by the Board of Directors.

Agency members agreed that they would focus their discussion on the vision for the study area at the January 22 meeting. Members agreed that it would be necessary to adhere to strict time limits, in particular that the meeting should adjourn promptly at 9 o'clock.

In order to help expedite the next session, Mr. Pellegrini said staff would send questions to the members so they could bring their answers to the next meeting. Agency members also agreed

the first meeting in February would be an overview of the downtown parking lot study, and the Special Services District Board of Commissioners should be invited to attend.

Mr. Darby moved to adjourn the meeting, Ms. Weinberg seconded the motion and all members voted in favor.

The meeting adjourned at 9:40.