

**West End Civic Association
Board Meeting Minutes
Connecticut Conference United Church of Christ
April 5, 2016**

PRESENT: Amy Bergquist, Fi Bookwalter, Dorothy Lovett Buckley, Max Condren, Ruth Fortune, Lakisher Hurst, David Jorgensen, Lucas Karmazinas, David Klein, Jan Klein, Bongsi Magubane, Kurt Malec, Ed McEachin, Angela Pomfret, Anne Thompson.
Also present: John Carson (University of Hartford), Timothy Fisher (Dean of UConn Law School), Kenneth R Gosselin (Hartford Courant Reporter); Garrett Heher (Developer from Mercer Realty Partners).

Ms. Magubane called the meeting to order at 7:02 PM.

1. WELCOME & UPDATE ON NRZ HAPPENINGS

Ms. Magubane welcomed everyone and said to expect several guests and a reporter from the Hartford Courant.

Some people from the neighborhood were upset about an email forwarded by WECA from the Mayor's office. As per Mr. Klein's recommendation, WECA now has a disclaimer informing recipients of the choice to opt out of the email list if they don't want political emails.

Mr. Condren announced Hartford 2000 is currently in the process of reviewing which NRZs are working or need improvement.

2. MARCH MEETING MINUTES

Ms. Fortune moved to approve the minutes from the March 1, 2016 meeting with a second from Ms. Bergquist. The motion passed unanimously.

3. FINANCIAL UPDATE

Mr. Klein sent a finance report for the past two months adjusted to reflect the allocation for the youth programming approved at the last meeting. Membership continues to chug along and brought in about \$20,000. Expenses included the cost of the sexton at the Methodist Church and post office mailing of the print newsletter.

The Farmers' Market has spent nearly its entire budget for this year. Caroline Finnegan has FM checks for WECA.

4. P&Z UPDATE

Ms. Magubane introduced Dean Fisher and Mr. Carson. Board members present at the April 4 P&Z Committee meeting will share their views on the meeting. The guests will share some thoughts about the development plans for the Hartford College for Women (HCW). Finally, board members will vote on the HCW proposal.

Board Report on April 4 P&Z Committee Meeting

Mr. Klein said there was some concern about the late introduction of electronic voting. The bylaws do not allow e-voting for officers, though there is no mention of public e-voting. The P&Z Committee input to the Board is welcome; however the Board makes its own decision. The Board may choose to follow P&Z's recommendation, but it's not obligated to do so. The key

takeaway was that those who spoke were mostly against the proposal, but if something can be done, they wanted to restrict it to UConn Law or other graduate students.

Mr. Condren echoed what Mr. Klein said in that overwhelmingly folks spoke against the proposal. Some people felt they were not included in the discussion. Mr. Condren is personally more interested in the numbers and wants to hear the votes to steer his thought process. He is also curious about the point of view of those closer to the development.

Mr. Karmazinas said there was a distinct feeling that a lot of people were in support of a project oriented towards graduate students. Some were uncomfortable with restricting it to UConn Law students if the property is not affiliated with UConn. Some would be more comfortable if they were more clear about who the developers would target as tenants. Some found selling the legacy buildings as single family homes unfeasible.

Ms. Bergquist said there was a lot of “yes, but/or”. Some expressed their concern about increased traffic, lack of plans for the historical buildings, and the legal impossibility of restricting the new development to graduate students, unless UConn is the owner of the building.

Ms. Klein said, first, controlling who gets to live there was a priority for her. Second, there is no clear plan for the historical buildings.

Ms. Buckley said the buildings are part of the neighborhood. People had a visceral reaction and felt strongly about what happens to them, though she wanted something done.

Mr. McEachin said the main concern was the density to the area.

Guests’ Comments and Thoughts

Dean Fisher thanked everyone for allowing him to share his thoughts. He proceeded to say UConn Law desperately needs to move beyond being a commuter school to one with housing. In response to neighbors’ concerns about targeting only graduate students, Dean Fisher, again, asked the university wide administration to consider having the school own and manage the developed property. He received an even more emphatic no. Since UConn Law cannot fill 225 beds, it would force the school to become a landlord to non-students; and it simply cannot go in that direction. Mr. Fisher asked if not this project, then what project? Would the West End prefer nothing? While he didn’t see an alternative to this project, he asked board members not to simply opt for a blanket no to this project. He asked for another opportunity to allow the developers to make the next recommendation.

In response to Mr. McEachin concern about how short term international students will work with this project, Dean Fisher clarified that international students attend UConn Law for an entire academic year, thus won’t be a concern for the development. Short term visitors, such as guest lecturers, usually stay in a hotel.

Mr. Carson began by saying he doesn’t think there is a better team he would want to do business with than the two developers currently working on the project. University of Hartford wants to sell the property and the developers know they will add \$600,000 of taxes to Hartford’s revenue. He added there is no market for condos and expect the developers would be successful if allowed to proceed. University of Hartford does not have an imminent opportunity or resources to allocate to HCW. In response to Mr. Klein’s question, Mr. Carson said there are currently 1,600-1,700 graduate students and the school has no sense where those students are living. University of Hartford would do everything it can to get its students to this housing. Mr. Klein asked if students could pay the school for housing, and the school, in turn, pays the developer. Mr. Carson said he couldn’t speculate on that.

P&Z Committee General Vote Results

Mr. Malec said his impression was that those who favored the development were excited the developers want to build in Hartford, though in their view, it's not the perfect project due to the tax abatement and density concerns.

Mr. Malec's information gathering and online balloting led to multiple email replies. He created and provided the Board a link aggregating the votes, comments, and a map of the electronic votes (see below). So far 141 people replied to the online ballots: 23.4% yes (33 votes), 76.6% said no (108 votes). The online comments centered on the tax abatement and having a contingency renewed/re-signed in September to align with the academic year regardless of when a lease was initially signed.

At the P&Z Committee meeting last night, April 4, 24% were in favor and 72% were against. Most properties abutting the development were against the proposal. Mr. Malec cautioned that it is important to consider how the WECA Board votes. Some members were irate that the Board could overturn the general vote.

Mr. Klein commended Mr. Malec for his efforts.

Discussion

Mr. Jorgensen said he would like to see something happen with the HCW property but doesn't think this is the right project for many reasons. In his opinion, perceiving there is no other opportunity is a bit of a pretense. The 225 beds can't be filled with graduate students and would deter single family occupation nearby. There is public funding available for other projects through CRDA. In response to Mr. Klein's question about CRDA funding, Mr. Jorgensen said funding is allocated on a case by case basis for any type of project.

The discussion became more open with some voicing concerns about the lack of planning to address the historical nature of the buildings, density, WECA possibly rejecting a second proposal to develop the area, spot zoning, and the type of people the development would attract. Others asked if the developers would consider luxury apartments and if UConn Law would subsidize the rent for its students. Other said perhaps WECA is not ready to reject this project outright, but could start with "no unless...yes but" and put together a list of contingencies that would allow this to move forward.

Mr. Heher said there are a lot of elements to pull together before completing a project. If approved and entitled, they will go through a rigorous process to consider if there is the potential.

AH&R Report on Proposal

Mr. Karmazinas said the Committee only considered the historic preservation component of the plan. As is, they cannot fully support the current plans. The lack of a vision for how historic buildings would be treated, which is concerning. They need an active plan on how the historic buildings would be dealt with.

Ms. Klein said the developers met with them and were willing to continue to consult with them. They had a positive reaction and the willingness to work with AH&R. If there is a blueprint, AH&R would be able to support it.

Motion 1

Mr. Klein motioned that the WECA Board approves the project subject to a satisfactory plan to deal with the historic properties and to ensure the apartments are rented to the demographics proposed. Ms. Bergquist seconded. The motion failed.

In favor: Ms. Fortune, Mr. Karmazinas, Mr. Klein, and Ms. Klein.

Against: Ms. Bergquist, Ms. Buckley, Mr. Jorgensen, Ms. Magubane, Mr. Malec, Mr. McEachin, Ms. Pomfret, Ms. Thompson.

Abstention: Mr. Condren.

Mr. Malec said the North sector thinks 225 beds are simply too many beds. Perhaps 100-125 would be better though he didn't believe there is a way to legally restrict housing to only graduate students.

Motion 2

Mr. Malec motioned that WECA does not approve the plan as is but is open to considering a new plan that (1) addresses the historic buildings, (2) provides better assurances about targeting a graduate student population and (3) brings the density of the project in line with Allyn Estate and Goodwin Circle. Mr. McEachin seconded. Mr. Jorgensen proposed a friendly amendment that the revised proposal is clear about the tax abatement, reduced from the current 7. Mr. Malec rejected the tax abatement. The motion passed.

In favor: Ms. Bergquist, Ms. Buckley, Mr. Jorgensen, Ms. Magubane, Mr. Malec, Mr. McEachin, Ms. Pomfret.

Against: Ms. Fortune, Mr. Klein, Ms. Thompson.

Abstention: Mr. Condren, Mr. Karmazinas, Ms. Klein.

5. ELECTIONS/NOMINATING COMMITTEE

Ms. Bergquist read the vacant positions for the Board and the names of those willing to serve on the Nominating Committee – Cynthia Courtney, Flora Murphy and possibly Sally Weisman.

Motion

Mr. Klein moved to approve all three candidates, with a second from Mr. Karmazinas. The motion passed unanimously.

6. JUNE GENERAL MEETING AGENDA

In response to Ms. Magubane asking if WECA needs a theme for the June meeting, Ms. Bergquist explained the June meeting's format. It begins with announcements, followed by elections of the next Board through a vote, and ends with the sector break out session.

Mr. Condren and Mr. Klein said increased attendance at the June meeting can result in more people getting involved with WECA to get more done.

7. WECA EMAIL/CC COMMUNICATIONS

Ms. Bergquist said she thinks Ms. Hurst should have all member emails and maintain a central database, instead of separate sector lists. Ms. Klein supported having a single database; further adding WECA needs to address the database issue.

Mr. Malec said he has email addresses of North sector residents who are not on the master list. He added that his sector engages more when he personally emails them.

Mr. McEachin voiced that he felt personally attacked by Ms. Bergquist about the sector email distribution.

Ms. Hurst said not everyone who fills out the membership form provided an email address.

Mr. Condren expressed his concern that the current membership form is not welcoming as is because it asks for a donation. He added WECA needs to take responsibility for getting email addresses from neighbors.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:06 PM.

Map of e-votes

