

White Plains Council of Neighborhood Associations  
October Meeting

Tuesday, 10/8/2024

Location: Meeting Held: School District Headquarters, Homestead Lane – Conference Room

Time: 7pm

CNA Attendees: Michael Sanchez, Michael Dalton, Bob Friscia, Robert Kahn, Daniel Letizia, Steve Levinson, Tom Osbeck, Zack Salino, Howard Waldman, Shawn Woodford, Debra Zipf

Guest Speakers: Chris Gomez – Commissioner of Planning & Kristi Knecht – City Planner

1. The Meeting was called to order by President Sanchez. President Sanchez introduced the meeting's topic: Updates from Commissioner Gomez on the adopted White Plains One Comprehensive Plan & update on the Downtown Renewal Initiative (DRI)
2. President Sanchez introduced Commissioner Gomez. Commissioner Gomez explained that the new Comprehensive Plan had now been adopted by the City's Common Council. The new Comp Plan is now 'Live' at One White Plains. The new Plan comprises 6 "chapters" addressing all aspects of life in White Plains. The One White Plains plan is a totally "interactive" resource for residents and will be regularly updated by the Planning Department. Residents will be able to review the implementation of all aspects of the new Comp Plan. All the geographical information (mapping) embedded in the Comp Plan utilizes "ArcGIS". ArcGIS is a versatile Information Systems tool allowing for creating, analyzing and visualizing spatial & geographical data.
3. Commissioner Gomez explained the new Comp Plan is NOT a new zoning ordinance. The Comp Plan did NOT change the current zoning ordinance in White Plains. The new Comp Plan did propose examining a number of zoning changes in order to look for opportunities to create more affordable housing solutions in White Plains. Commissioner Gomez explained that although the Planning Department would typically be involved studying and recommending a change in zoning...the Planning Department does not have the authority to make changes to the zoning ordinance. Any proposed change to the City's zoning ordinance will involve public hearings and will require legislative approval by the Common Council. Currently, there are no changes planned for the City's zoning ordinance.
4. Robert Kahn asked Commissioner Gomez if the Planning Department will be moving forward with naming an "implementation committee" to oversee the execution of the new Comp Plan? Commissioner Gomez explained that the Mayor's Office would be responsible for naming members of any "implementation committee". As of 10/8....no one has been named to the "implementation committee". Robert Kahn stated that it is important that a member of the Council of Neighborhoods is named to serve on the "implementation committee".
5. Given how much demographic & census data was incorporated into the new Comp Plan....M Dalton asked Commissioner Gomez if the creation of the next Comp Plan should be timed to follow the publication of data from the next decennial U.S Census in 2030. Commissioner Gomez said that there was good reason to utilize the decennial census data to inform recommendations of the next Comp Plan.... but, there is another tool that City Planners rely on. The "American Community Survey" is publication which provides planners with a 3-5 year demographic "snapshot" local communities.
6. Commissioner Gomez explained that the most "contentious and misunderstood" aspect of the new Comp Plan was the "Live Chapter" which dealt primarily with housing issues in White Plains. This is understandable given that for most residents.... their home is their largest financial asset and any proposed zoning changes which could impact the value of their home is sort of a "third rail".

7. M Dalton note that many residents that he speaks with do not understand the importance of the City having a healthy downtown retail environment. Many residents are concerned about all the new development going on downtown and that it is too crowded. They do not understand that it is the sales tax revenue from the downtown retail and hospitality businesses that allows our taxes to be 50% lower than that of neighboring communities.
8. The City was awarded a \$10 million Downtown Revitalization Initiative (DRI) grant from New York State earlier this year. Cities & towns which have been awarded DRI grant money...prepare proposals for revitalization projects for their downtowns. The proposals can be sponsored by the Municipality or private organizations. New York State assigns a consultant who acts as a liaison between the State and Municipality. New York State is responsible for reviewing, approving and funding the projects. Kristi Knecht – City Planner explained that a local planning committee of 14 members reviewed the initial proposed DRI projects. 17 proposed DRI projects were presented at a public workshop in September. 9 proposed projects were sponsored by the City and 8 proposed projects were sponsored by private organizations.
9. R Friscia noted that many of the proposed DRI projects sounded like businesses getting funding which only helps their businesses. These projects did not seem to be focused on the Mamaroneck Ave downtown corridor.
10. D Zipf noted that none of the proposed DRI projects replace the loss of the YMCA on Mamaroneck Ave which provided low-cost housing in the City. And...the YWCA does not accept low-cost housing applicants. Commissioner Gomes noted that many Cities do not provide any very low-cost housing options...and although the City of White Plains does it part...it cannot solve lack of affordable housing on its own.
11. R Kahn asked, “could the City create a low-cost housing committee to study the issue and make recommendations?”
12. The issue of the Toll Brothers request for re-zoning their property was raised. Commissioner Gomez explained that when a developer makes a request for re-zoning his property is often a “balancing act” between rejecting the developer’s request or perhaps negotiating with the developer to create more affordable housing in their project.
13. The subject of ADU (Accessory Dwelling Units) was raised. Commissioner Gomez explained that the City wants to study the possibility of allowing ADU’s in some locations in the City. He explained that ADU’s represent one possible tool in the toolbox of housing solutions.
14. R Friscia noted that there are many Houses of Worship on the North St corridor. Do we have a surplus of Houses of Worship? Are these Houses of Worship actually functioning and what are the implications if these Houses of Worship sell or lease their properties for development?
15. The status of the Farrell Estates – Ridgeway subdivision was raised. Commissioner Gomes explained that the City has received the “scoping document” for the Draft Environmental Impact Statement and the DEIS is being reviewed by City agencies for “completeness”. The Farrell Estates project should be on the agenda for public hearings in the next few months.
16. Tom Osbeck – CNA treasurer reported that the CNA bank balance is \$1960...and that 7 Associations were current with their dues...out of a total of 15 currently active CNA neighborhoods.
17. President Sanchez stated that the November CNA meeting would be focused on the proposed CNA workshop to encourage and assist in the formation of more neighborhood associations.

18. M Dalton reported that his relatives living in the Church St. neighborhood were very interested in forming a Church St. association and would be happy to attend a CNA workshop.
19. Z Salino reported that he attempted to post information about the CNA on a Facebook White Plains Community page was not successful. The post about the CNA was taken down because you cannot "post" on to Facebook as an organization.
20. R Kahn suggested that the CNA needs to outreach to individuals, the Common Council, PTA's, Condo Associations in order to attract folks truly interested in creating neighborhood associations.
21. President Sanchez suggested that perhaps we should "re-draw" the White Plains neighborhood map showing 22 or 23 neighborhoods and reduce the total number of neighborhoods by combining several adjacent neighborhoods.
22. President Sanchez closed the meeting and thanked the participants.