

White Plains Council of Neighborhood Associations
March Meeting

Wednesday, March 13, 2024

Location: Education House, Homestead Lane

Time: 7pm

Attendees: Michael Sanchez, Michael Dalton, Tom Osbeck, Ben Brown, Anthony Fiorenza, Jeremiah Frei-Pearson, Bob Friscia, Deborah Fontana, Martin Gaujenieks, Tom Kissner, Ken Kristal, Melania Kolby, Mark Laloo, Judy Lee, Daniel Letizia, John Martin, Michael Matarese, Sheila McAndrews, Mary MacDonald, Chris Novak, Serge Prengel, Charlene Raynor, Kelly Roper, Christina Santiago, Evelyn Santiago, Leah & Howard Waldman, Allen Weintraub, Shawn Woodford, Debra Zipf, Michael Zygmunt

1. The Meeting was called to order by President Sanchez. President Sanchez introduced the meeting's topic: Affordable Housing in White Plain & Westchester. President Sanchez introduced the guest speakers:
 - a. Alan Weintraub – United Way - ALICE (Asset limited, income constrained, employed) Committee Partnership
 - b. Tom Kissner
 - c. Jeremiah Frei Pearson – White Plains Common Council
 - d. John Martin – White Plains Common Council
2. Alan Weintraub stated that the National Housing Crisis has come to White Plains. 45% of rental households and 34% of homeowners in White Plains are "Housing Burdened". Households are defined as "Housing Burdened" when they are spending 33% or more of their income on housing expenses (rent or mortgage) per month.
3. White Plains currently has a population of approximately 60,000 persons...in 1960 the population of White Plains was approximately 50,000. In 60 years...White Plains has added 10,000 persons to its populations which is not a particularly large growth rate. There are approximately 24,000 dwelling units (homes & apartments) in White Plains.
4. Solutions to the "Affordable Housing Crisis" are complex. Mr. Weintraub explained that there are 12 different housing types (single family, multi-family, condo, coop, market rate rental, stabilized rental, etc.) in White Plains. Having 12 different types of housing only makes solving the "affordability of housing" all the more difficult. Mr. Weintraub went on to say that he has requested data (broken down by the 12 types of housing) from Planning Commissioner Gomez over the last 18 months and is still waiting to receive this housing data/information.
5. Mr. Weintraub described a series of recommendations made in June of 2022 by the Democratic City Committee:
 - a. Appoint a Housing Commissioner who would report twice a year on the status of affordable housing in White Plains
 - b. Revise the Affordable Housing Assistance Fund
 - c. Eliminate the "buy out" option which allows developers to pay a fee in order to reduce the number of affordable units set aside in new rental apartment projects.
 - d. Utilize the "buy out" revenue collected from developers to purchase vacant apartments for affordable housing.
 - e. Request that the Finance Department make public the "buy out" revenue collected by developers thus far...and what is projected to be collected over the next 5 years.
6. The redevelopment of the Galleria Mall site could be a critical component in addressing the affordable housing issue in White Plains.
7. Mr. Weintraub questioned whether the City has the power to sell the rights of the 4-acre parking facility at the Galleria Mall without competitive bidding.

8. Questions were raised concerning the “buy out” option for developers.
 - a. Any proposed housing project of 10 units is required to set aside a number of affordable housing units in the proposed project.
 - i. 10 -15-unit projects are required to set aside 1 unit at 60% AMI.
 - ii. 15 + unit projects can choose to set aside 12% of the total units at 80% AMI or 8% of the total units with 80% of the 8% of total units at 60% AMI and 20% of the 8% of total units at 50% AMI.
 - iii. Developers are permitted to “buy out” up to 25 units per proposed project.
9. The question was raised... “why is the City allowing developers to “buy out” of providing affordable units? And...shouldn’t the City just insist that the developers meet the affordable housing requirements of their project?”
10. Councilman Martin explained that the City is able to create and/or fund more housing units with the “buy out” monies received from developers than would be created by having the developer meet the requirements of affordable units in their project. Councilman Martin cited 2 examples where “buy out” money provided by the City of White Plains was the difference between getting an affordable housing project built...or not built. The “buy out” money that the City provided to those projects led to the creation of hundreds of affordable housing units in White Plains
11. To date.... the City has distributed approximately \$1 million in “buy out” funds towards affordable housing in White Plains. The City expects to collect approximately \$15 million over the next few years as developers complete the projects under construction. The project at 25 North Lexington (Gateway II) is scheduled to pay the City \$3.9 million in “buy out” money in 2024. \$3.9 million will generate hundreds of affordable units. The next phase of Brookfield Common will create 300 new affordable apartments. The new Senior housing project will create 90 new affordable apartments. White Plains Housing Authority administers 316 affordable units.
12. When benchmarked against our peer cities in Westchester...White Plains requires more affordable housing units in any new building being proposed than New Rochelle, Yonkers, Mount Vernon.
13. Government created Public Housing got its start in 1934 during the Great Depression. From the 1930’s till the early 1990’s...the Federal Government was heavily involved with the creation of affordable housing projects throughout the United States. The Faircloth Amendment of 1998 prohibits the Federal Government from building any new Public Housing in the United States.... which has effectively ended the Federal involvement in creating affordable housing.
14. “Subsidized Housing” is a complicated subject because there are many types of “subsidized housing” ...Section 8 voucher, Rent Controlled, Rent Stabilized, Senior housing, etc.
15. Councilman Martin said that the largest unmet need in White Plains is for people whose income is 60-80% of AMI (Area Median Income). The 100% AMI for a single person in 2023 was \$102,880. For a family of 4...the AMI in 2023 was \$146,800.
16. The question was raised... “what is the process of actually getting into an affordable home?” There are long waiting lists....it is not unusual for it to take years for an applicant to get into an affordable home. Who maintains the waiting lists? Is the data behind the waiting lists available for the public to review?
17. The redevelopment of the Galleria Mall site represents a potentially important opportunity to build more affordable housing. The Galleria site is currently zoned for a retail mall. The owner/developer of the Galleria property has asked the City to re-zone the property. This request by the Developer to “re-zone” the property allows the City to negotiate with the

developer “as a partner”. This will allow the City to “shape” the proposed use of the property in order to meet the needs of White Plains residents.

18. Mr. Weintraub emphasized the need for much more reporting transparency on the part of the City’s administration. Many requests and meetings have taken place by groups promoting more affordable housing and the City. These meetings have not led to many changes and the requests for housing information & data have largely been ignored by the City.
19. The question of “how large is the problem in Westchester?” was asked. How many affordable units are needed to meet the demand? If we don’t know the dimensions of the problem.... how are we going to design a plan to meet the demand?
20. Kelly Roper observed that it seems like we are trying to solve a problem without really understating the problem:
 - a. What is the current demand for affordable housing?
 - b. What is the projected future demand for affordable housing?
 - c. What are the goals of the “buy out” fund?
 - d. Where is affordable housing be built?
21. The question was asked, “as the largest employer in White Plains...has the White Plains Hospital been in discussion with the City to build “work force housing” for hospital employees?” Several years ago, the Hospital and the City pursued an “eminent domain” strategy to take control of properties on the west side of Post Road across from the Hospital. The property owners went to court to fight the “eminent domain” plan by the City and Hospital to purchase these properties and re-develop the properties for “work force housing”. The property owners defeated the “eminent domain” plan. Since then, the City and Hospital have not discussed creating “work force housing.”
22. Debra Zipf discussed the fact that we have seen affordable housing options disappear. For instance.... the affordable units in the YMCA building that was demo’d for a new rental apartment (market rate) building on Mamaroneck Ave. Whatever happened to “Boarding Houses” that used to be sprinkled throughout White Plains?
23. Discussion took place regarding Mark Stack, the new owner of the Tiburzi Property in Rosedale. Much of the Tiburzi property is zoned for residential. Mr. Stack has talked about commercial development for the property. The Tiburzi property has very difficult terrain with rock and ledge to deal with.
24. Michael Sanchez expressed concern that the North Street corridor with a number of houses of worship (many with ½ filled churches) might become the focus for new development activity.
25. Regarding the idea that the “draft” Comprehensive Plan proposes “re-zoning” neighborhoods in White Plains.... Councilman Martin stated unequivocally that “No change of Zone will take place in a White Plains neighborhood without the neighborhood’s support.”
26. Howard Waldman stated that repairing the Clock in the Clocktower at the White Plains train station should be a priority. Fixing the clock is both a “statement” and opportunity for the City. A broken clock in the Clocktower sends the wrong message to anyone traveling into White Plains. Getting the clock repaired and functioning sends the right message. Repairing the clock offers the opportunity to re-imagine the clock. The clock could be a digital clock and message board.... allowing sponsorship or advertising. The clock should be lit with LED lights that would change colors depending on the time of year or holiday.
27. President Sanchez thanked the invited guests and attendees for their participation and then closed the meeting.