

Notes from Public Hearing  
March 28, 2011  
7:00 p.m.  
Council Chambers  
City Hall  
Norwich, Connecticut

**Public Hearing Opening:**

Mayor Peter Nystrom opened the Public Hearing at 7:05 p.m.

**In attendance:**

The hearing was attended by 5 members of the public; 2 members of City Departments; NCDC staff; press from The Day, Council members Desaulniers, Glenney-Popovich and Nash, City Manager Alan Bergren, Mayor Peter Nystrom, and Corporation Counsel Michael Driscoll.

**The agenda:**

Robert Mills, NCDC Executive Director, presented an overview of the Downtown Norwich Revitalization Programs Plan, the process followed, the proposed schedule and the next steps. Mr. Mills discussed the programmatic changes made due to public comment, thanked the public for contributing, and noted that the plan was posted on the City's web page and NCDC's web page, was available for viewing in the office of the City Clerk and the NCDC offices. The plan was also made available at three NCDC sponsored public meetings on the plan: on January 31, February 5 and February 8 and at the NCDC Public Hearing on March 23.

**Public Comment Period:**

Public comment period followed the presentation. Members of the public were given the opportunity to comment on the plan and to ask questions about the proposed programs.

Questions/comments:

Andy Depta: Mr. Depta spoke in favor of the plan. He thanked NCDC for their work to date; described the plan as a three legged stool in need of all three programs to succeed; urged the community to move to action; and looks for the Council to accept the programs and move forward.

John-Manuel Andriote: Mr. Andriote spoke to the cooperation and spirit of working together that he is seeing and urged the community to continue working together. He provided a hand out depicting first and upper floors of existing buildings and raised the question of why the code program addressed only upper floors. He noted a belief that the 30%/70% funds allocation as noted in the plan should be 'flipped' and that more money should be allocated toward a creative mix of activities; he said high tech business would do better in outlying mill buildings.

David Crabb: Mr. Crabb was highly critical of the plan and programs and does not support them as written. He compared the plan unfavorably to an annual meeting agenda and report for the Noble Corporation. He noted prior development projects that have failed (i.e. Heritage Discovery Center) and noted that neither Heritage Discovery Center nor the revitalization plan were true development plans rather borrow/tax plans and pointed to the payback periods. He noted that there is a difference between Community Development and Economic Development. He also noted that the plan contained no discussion of risk, competition, or challenges.

Keith Ripley: Mr. Ripley posed three questions: 1) Is there a sublet provision in the lease program? Is the State to be part of the outreach and marketing efforts? Explain how movement of funds between projects would work?

Brian Curtin: Mr. Curtin noted that these were generally good programs. He took issue with the statement in the plan that would preclude political entities from selecting projects. He asked that the Council not abdicate their responsibility. He also noted that retail follows people not the other way around and we need to put feet back on the street in order for retail to be successful downtown.

Mayor Nystrom responded to Mr. Curtin's concern noting that the Council would remain involved in policy decisions but that the details of administering and selecting projects was not a role Council wants to take.

Alderman Desaulniers: Questions from Alderman Desaulniers included: How will the lease program work and what does the \$5 represent? Will Council be provided with the detail documents and metrics being used?

Alderman Braddock: Questions from Alderman Braddock included: What is the State looking for in terms of space and will the programs apply? If approved how long before implementation? Will administrative fees charged for managing loans be part of the administration costs?

Alderman Laurie Glenney-Popovich: The question from Ms. Glenney-Popovich was: How did we determine that we needed to engage a Loans Administrator?

Mr. Mills addressed each of the questions:

- Lease rebates will result from a contract between Community, Tenant, and Landlord; subletting is not being considered at this time
- The plan does not intend to provide incentive to State, Federal or Tribal government agencies
- Per Bond Council funds can be moved between programs as long as 30% stays within the original program
- Program design provides for evaluating applications on their impact to the metrics identified in the City's Economic Development Plan. It relieves elected officials of potential pressure they could experience from their constituencies

- Lease subsidy will allow property owners to have funds to upgrade their properties; often there is not enough in the rental income to maintain the properties much less upgrade them. And it would be an incentive to the tenants to sign longer leases, meaning a more stable downtown business environment
- Once Council takes action on the plan it will likely take two to three months to roll out
- The cost of loan management will be included in the allowed administrative costs
- We believed that putting the revolving loans under the management of a third party with a proven record of accomplishment would be the most effective way to deliver the program. We are looking at three not-for-profit organizations that both manage funds and have a process to mentor businesses and provide them support services

**Public Hearing Closing:**

Hearing closed at 8:10 p.m.