

## **Minutes - June 7, 2004 - Committee-of-the-Whole**

Minutes of the Committee-of-the-Whole Meeting  
of the City Council of the  
CITY OF DARIEN  
JUNE 7, 2004

### **1. CALL TO ORDER**

The Committee-of-the-Whole Meeting of the City Council of the City of Darien was called to order at 6:05 P.M. by Mayor Carmen D. Soldato. In attendance were: Aldermen Biehl, Cotten, Hagen, Marchese, Poteraske, Tikalsky, and Weaver. Also in attendance were: Mayor Soldato, Clerk Coleman, Administrator Vana, and Business District Development and Redevelopment Commissioners Coren, Cozzolino, Dahl, and Jiskra.

### **2. BUSINESS DISTRICT DEVELOPMENT AND REDEVELOPMENT**

Mayor Soldato recapped the redevelopment of the Triangle area at 75<sup>th</sup> Street & Cass Avenue; he stated that Council authorized Administrator Vana to communicate with the owners of the parcels. Administrator Vana spoke with the Shell and strip mall property owners; Attorney Murphey contacted BP Amoco and was awaiting their reply. Commissioner Coren, at a previous meeting, suggested contacting the owners and including the other corners, particularly Jewel and Brookhaven.

Administrator Vana stated that he spoke with John Manos, owner of Brookhaven Plaza; Mr. Manos has been significantly improving and upgrading the entire Plaza and has also submitted plans for aesthetic work: parking lot, islands, signage, etc.

Mayor Soldato stated that Council and Commission received a packet that included three proposals for appraisal services; a recommendation was made and was on the Agenda for Council consideration.

Alderman Weaver stated that she would like the whole Triangle developed and that it would be expensive to relocate the existing businesses; she indicated that she could not justify doing only the Cass Avenue portion of the Triangle. She said that it would be beneficial if the Shell property could be included with the Triangle development.

Alderman Marchese said that the development became exciting when the presentations were made; he felt that the proposals followed the Comprehensive Plan. He was concerned with partial development and the relocation of businesses. He said that the project needed further consideration and asked that Council consider development of the entire parcel.

Mayor Soldato stated that he would favor development of the entire Triangle according to the Comprehensive Plan; however he felt that it was not practical because of the many obstacles involved. He noted that there were property owners who would not commit to the redevelopment and that the City should not become involved in adversarial litigation due to condemnation. He commented that the City wanted to own the land on a short-term basis but did not have the funds to purchase all of the parcels. He noted that if the City had to buy the Cass Avenue property, the financial responsibility would be short-term and that the property could be turned over to a developer. He said that the City could acquire the parcels individually, but the City would need to increase revenues to pay off the debt service for the land and it could be an ongoing obligation without redevelopment due to timing issues. He commented on the different interest a land owner possesses versus a renter.

Alderman Tikalsky noted that once a lease expired, there were no guarantee of a renewal and that business could be forced to relocate. He said that the City could wait for each lease to expire. Alderman

Weaver inquired if locations had been identified within Darien where businesses could relocate; Administrator Vana stated that a database had been created indicating vacant space and was located on the website but tenants had not been approached.

Alderman Poteraske said that the appraisals should be done, await the RFPs, and then decide if the project was worthwhile pursuing. Alderman Marchese spoke about the proposed parking and green space. Alderman Weaver stated that she had difficulty justifying spending money and was concerned with relocation of the businesses. Alderman Biehl asked if the relocation was temporary; Alderman Weaver responded that she did not believe it was temporary.

Alderman Hagen said he was opposed to the concept of the Triangle because it was not realistically doable in the near future. He was in favor of redevelopment of the Cass Avenue portion without moving the businesses.

Alderman Cotten said that the overall goal Citywide was to place utilities underground; that reduction to the proposed development would significantly increase the cost. He was also concerned about the businesses; he indicated that commercial leases have an eminent domain clause that gives the owner the right to cancel a lease without penalty. He said there was no guarantee that an individual leaseholder would receive any money for relocation.

Mayor Soldato stated that there could be an opportunity for the City to assist the businesses; he said that being a tenant had risks. Alderman Weaver said she would like the City to offer financial assistance to businesses in order to keep them within Darien; Alderman Tikalsky stated that it was not the City's responsibility. Administrator Vana noted that while conversing with Mr. Manos, owner of Brookhaven Plaza, that approximately 10,000 sq.ft. would be available when Walgreen's moved. Mayor Soldato said that the City had an obligation to the business owners; Administrator Vana was instructed to draft a letter that indicated the City's intentions for review by the Council and Commission.

Commissioner Coren noted that it was important to consider the long-term businesses; that if the property was redeveloped, the existing businesses would leave for various reasons, including increased rent. He said that if development occurred along Cass Avenue, the rest of the project would not progress. He suggested progress through stages and to consult with the Gammonley Group to see if that was feasible; he asked to investigate other alternatives instead of partially redeveloping the Triangle and not abandon the 'whole' Triangle.

Mayor Soldato commented that the Gammonley Group proposal did not include the costs for land or litigation; contributions were needed perhaps by considering the area as a TIF district; and that high-end users were not interested. He said that phasing the project would be difficult to accomplish because it created uncertainty. Mayor Soldato spoke about piecemealing the purchase of land on a short-term basis; he said he was against doing that because there was no knowledge about how long it would take and when it would be used. He noted that something would need to be implemented in order to purchase the land, i.e., mandatory vehicle stickers or increased taxes.

Alderman Marchese stated that he liked 'the dream', which was proposed for the Triangle and that perhaps waiting would be better in order to do the project correctly.

Alderman Biehl asked if the strip mall would be redone and the Shell station still be full of weeds in 6-7 years; he suggested doing a portion of the project in order to clean up Cass Avenue.

Alderman Cotten said that part of the RFP criteria could be not to preclude or minimize the future development. He said the footprint of the building or parking could be different but did not have to be built in a way to preclude expansion of parking; he said the solution could be engineered into various stages.

Commissioner Dahl said that instead of eliminating green space later, she suggested constructing the first phase and include parking, businesses and residential. She said that the footprint could remain and then the project could possibly be completed in 5-6 years.

Alderman Poteraske stated that the 75<sup>th</sup> Street & Plainfield Road would probably be available as a green area with little development.

Commissioner Jiskra said she was concerned about the business tenants in the area and that the City owed it to its residents to have a 'downtown' area. She wanted the citizens to be considered not the tenants of the properties to maintain a sense of community.

Mayor Soldato concluded that Administrator Vana was authorized to draft a letter for consideration by both Council and Commission; that the RFP was to be revised; that the appraisal was on the Council agenda for consideration; and that discussions were to continue with the property owners. He said that he appreciated the on-going commitment of the Council and Commission toward the redevelopment.

### **3. ADJOURNMENT**

There being no further business to come before the Committee-of-the-Whole, the meeting adjourned at 7:00 P.M.

Carmen D. Soldato, Mayor

Joanne F. Coleman, City Clerk

JFC:jr

All supporting documentation and report originals of these minutes are on file in the Office of the City Clerk under File Number 06-07-04 Committee-of-the-Whole.

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