

Planning Zoning and Housing Committee (PZ&H)
Sub-Committee for 35 Leroy Avenue Study
January 28, 2010
Room 213

All committee members were present: Frank Adelman, Chairman, MariLu Cleary, Mary Ness, John Sini, Jr and Dana Fead.

Also present: Selectwoman Jayme Stevenson, Selectwoman Callie Sullivan, Amy Squires, Norm Guimond, Mary Guimond, Cecelia Smith (Patch.com) and a Channel 79 Camerawoman.

The meeting was called to order at 5:03 pm by Frank Adelman, Chairman. Frank requested approval of the agenda that had been forwarded to all members of the committee. Mary Ness expressed her concern with the formality of the subcommittee and the scope of the meeting. She mentioned that other PZ&H subcommittees reviewing open space policy and Allen O'Neal issues do not have formal agendas and are less organized. Discussion between members focused on the need for transparency in this particular committee analyzing 35 Leroy Ave usage because of the history of dissent on this topic. It was agreed that it would be preferable to have an open and transparent process, including taking minutes for the public record.

It was agreed that the minutes would be taken on a rotating basis. Dana Fead agreed to serve as clerk for tonight's meeting.

Frank offered the following opening remarks to clarify the group's charge, role and goals:

- He mentioned that all members of the committee are also members of PZ&H.
- PZ&H was the primary committee that evaluated the purchase of 35 Leroy Ave in 2007.
- Whatever use is decided upon it is the responsibility of the sub-committee to present ideas to PZ&H to evaluate it and present to the RTM as a whole. PZ&H members felt it was important to conduct the study as soon as possible.
- The 35 Leroy study group is not in conflict with the First Selectman's Facilities Study Task Force, chaired by Jayme Stevenson. It also was not formed to support or advocate any one specific use over another. The role is to study the property and current building and evaluate possible options for use in light of the available facts.
- "We are not here to perform a "Best Use Study" as if the decision as to how to use this property could be arrived at analytically. The best use for the property will be determined by the policy and financial priorities of the Town. We do not set those priorities. We are here to collect facts about the property and develop fact-based evaluations for the potential option for use. While we will not shy away from identifying options that are clearly superior or deficient along certain dimension." Frank does not anticipate that we will be making any affirmative recommendation to the PZ&H committee for the use of the property. Rather, our

- responsibility is to report our facts back to the PZ&H committee. PZ&H can make a fully informed recommendation to the RTM when called upon to do so.
- The role of this sub-committee and the role of the First Selectman's Facilities Study Task Force have a different focus and are responsible to different authorities.

MariLu Cleary mentioned that PZ&H needs to gather pertinent information for various options for use of 35 Leroy Ave. – we should not just look at the concept but also at financial implications as well.

John Sini, Jr. mentioned that we want to record information rather than come to conclusions.

Mary Ness mentioned that the set of information that has been collected has been helpful and that the scope of our role is to evaluate the data rather than plan the best use.

Dana mentioned that this study is overdue and that it is an opportunity to look at the needs of the town.

Jayne Stevenson was invited to share her thoughts as indicated on the agenda for the meeting. She mentioned that she is the chair of the committee reporting to the First Selectman that is analyzing the feasibility of moving the Board of Ed into 35 Leroy and moving the senior center into the town hall. She reiterated that 35 Leroy is a wonderful town owned resource. She said that she is here in the spirit of information sharing.

She described her task force assessing the condition of the Senior Center on Edgerton Street and reaching a unanimous decision that it is not feasible to renovate the building. Susan Swiatek and Beth Paris toured 35 Leroy and felt that it could not be adapted to use as a Senior Center so the Task Force is only considering the option of moving it to Town Hall. Jayme Stevenson mentioned that her Task Force is making a formal recommendation to the First Selectman on 2/16/10.

Callie Sullivan mentioned that the Task Force has a fairly narrow goal and it does not have the charge to explore other options.

Jayne mentioned that she felt that the Task Force efforts were trending toward recommending a Phase 2 study to explore options. Phase 2 would broaden the scope of the analysis of needs, including some newly articulated needs by the Darien Arts Center or for the Board of Ed to use some space differently than they have in the past.

Jayne mentioned that the new administration is action oriented – there's been a lot of talk, and a lot of studies – it's time to take action.

Callie Sullivan asked if the 35 Leroy study group had considered notifying the board of finance. Frank Adelman mentioned that our charge was to report to PZ&H and that we

were not tasked with interacting with the Finance Committee. John Sini, Jr. mentioned that were involved with land use and should focus on that.

Mary Guimond mentioned that she is a neighbor on Old Stone Road and has been representing the neighbors on this topic. She is also a member of the RTM and has been involved in this issue from the beginning. She said that she was hoping that we would rule out the idea of a dog park, transfer station and county jail. She mentioned that the neighbors and proximity to town should be significant factors as we consider options.

Mary Guimond mentioned that various uses had been vetted in the past and that she would be happy to share whatever information she has.

Jayme Stevenson mentioned that we need to reach decisions soon.

Frank Adelman reviewed the contents of the binders that were distributed to all of the study group members (with a copy at the Town Clerk's office, too...for review by interested parties)

Frank proposed that the group decide upon three aspects of the study: process, scope and timing.

The **scope** of the study to include:

1. Financial consequences:
 - One time costs such as acquisition, renovation, capital investment, etc
 - Long term or operating expenses
 - Potential to generate revenue through fees or taxes
2. Town priorities – met or not met
3. Alignment of the use with the Town's plan of conservation and development
4. Impact on the neighborhood
5. Broader impact to the downtown area
6. Zoning impact
7. Appreciation of the characteristics of the property

The study group discussed the need for financial assessments and estimates but agreed that our purpose is primarily a land use study. Although financial assessments are needed they will not be overly detailed or precise. We rely on some general estimates and assumptions and we will share the sources of our data.

After discussion it was agreed that the four components of **evaluation** are:

1. Gather all available information
2. Define a broad list of options
3. Detail aspects of the options
4. Report findings to PZ&H

It was clarified that we are not spending money on this study, not using consultants to develop new information and are not making definitive recommendations.

We are gathering facts and performing an analysis.

In terms of the **timing**, it was agreed that the group would meet again on Wednesday, 2/10 and 2/24 at 7:45 pm and be prepared to make an interim report to PZ&H on our next regular meeting on March 3rd.

The options that were discussed and will be analyzed are:

1. Sell the property
2. Adapt the existing building for affordable housing:
 - 21 Unit design per MHA design in line with CHALAC
 - At lower density
 - At higher density per Section 514
 - Designated Senior affordable housing
3. Re-use/Adapt the existing structure for new purpose other than housing:
 - New Senior Center
 - Board of Education offices
 - Municipal offices
 - Darien Arts Center
 - Community Center
 - Additional educational space for Darien Public Schools
 - Non-profit use: private school, day care
4. Demolish building
 - Pave for municipal or train parking
 - Build freestanding parking structure
 - Build a park
 - Build, or cause to be built, some form of housing (affordable) using a new building and design

Ideas that were discarded at this discussion were:

- Building a pool (needs at least 6 acres)
- Building market rate housing (not zoned for that)
- Dog run (\$4.2 base price too rich for limited dog lovers usage)
- Open space (location not suited for “naturalized landscape”)

Mary Guimond offered to provide some data they have regarding crime rates in parking areas. Frank will get this information.

Responsibilities were divided:

- MariLu Cleary to collect information on the housing options and summarize the housing alternatives.
- Frank Adelman and Mary Ness to refine and clarify uses listed under category 3 above and apply some basic cost analysis.
- Dana Fead to analyze Darien Arts Center use, and option 1 (selling the property).
- John Sini, Jr. will evaluate group 4 options including knock down and clean up costs, paving costs or parking structure costs.

Having conversations with Fred Conze and/or Jeremy Ginsberg about zoning issues was discussed and may be important to clarify some constraints on the land use.

Meeting was adjourned just before 7 pm.