



Land Use-Urban Redevelopment Committee – Board of Representatives

Virgil de la Cruz, Co-Chair

Charles Pia, Jr., Co-Chair

Committee Report

Date: Wednesday, September 25, 2019
Time: 7:00 p.m.
Place: Democratic Caucus Room, 4th Floor Government Center, 888
Washington Boulevard, Stamford, CT

The Land Use-Urban Redevelopment Committee met as indicated above. In attendance were Co-Chair de la Cruz and Committee Member Reps. Cottrell, Graziosi, Lee, Lion, Michelson, Sherwood and Summerville. Absent or excused was Rep. Pia. Also present were Reps. Coleman and Stella; Ralph Blessing, Land Use Bureau Chief; Ted Ferrarone, BLT; Elizabeth McCauley, Estelle McCauley; Irene Toigo, John Wooten; Sue Halpern, Mark Okrent; Justin Gaboury, Andres Hogg; Carmine Tomas; Bob Owens and Fulvio Tamburro.

Co-Chair de la Cruz called the meeting to order at 7:05 p.m.

Item No.	Description	Invitee(s) or Designee(s)
1. LU30.031	RESOLUTION <u>and public hearing</u> ; Approving a Land Swap between O&G Industries Inc. & City of Stamford Related to FST CV 09-5012574S. 06/05/19 – Submitted by Mayor Martin 06/25/19 – Approved by Planning Board 09/12/19 – To be Considered by Board of Finance	HELD
2. LU30.021	REVIEW; Process And Results Of Imposing And Collecting Fines for Zoning and Other Infractions, Such As Illegal Commercial Advertising. 10/01/18 – Submitted by Reps. Lion and Quinones 10/09/18 – Moved to Pending 11/19/18 – Held in Committee 01/02/19 – Report Made & Held in Committee 01/30/19 – Report Made & Held in Committee 02/11/19 – Held at Steering 03/27/19 – Held by Committee 05/29/19 – Report Made & Held in Committee	HELD
3. LU30.030	RESOLUTION; Creating a South End Historic District Study Committee. 06/03/19 – Submitted by Rep. Adams and Zelinsky 06/10/19 – Moved to Pending	HELD 6-2-0

Co-Chair de la Cruz noted Items 1 and 2 were being held.

Co-Chair de la Cruz stated that several people had written to the Board office requesting to

speak at the meeting, and those people would be permitted to speak.

Rep. Adams explained that

- He introduced this item in order to enhance the 1986 list of properties on the National Historic Register
- This is just a study committee for the South End to see how many people would like to participate
- This has nothing to do with BLT and only people who choose to participate can
- This will preserve the historical properties in the South End and people who want to build on their property will have to maintain the character of the property
- They have worked with HDF to get no interest loans for some of these properties
- The Board would need to approve a historic district

Mr. Blessing discussed what the City has done with regard to historic preservation in the South End

- Last year, the City completed the South End Neighborhood Study to come up with a strategy for historic preservation and to look at the South End holistically, looking at affordability, historic preservation, displacement pressures created by development, and separation from the downtown
 - The goal is a comprehensive plan for the neighborhood
 - The historic preservation aspects of the plan begin on page 16
 - The study cost \$150,000 and approximately \$50,000 was earmarked for historic preservation
 - The study was reviewed by SHPO
 - The consultants had historic preservation expertise
 - There were 3 public hearings, stakeholder meeting and a meeting with HPAC (a member of HPAC was also on the steering committee for the study)
 - All historic properties in the South End were catalogued (the appendix of the Study Report details which historic properties are still in existence)
 - The broad land use recommendations are development areas and conservation areas
 - The conservation and preservation areas are the areas where there are still historic structures
 - Historic properties should be reinvested in
 - Add local preservation protection
 - Combine historic preservation and affordability
- After receiving the study, the Land Use Bureau responded with certain initiatives to implement the study
 - Proposed changes to the Zoning Regulations Including preservation of historic preservation overlay districts that would include site plan review for vacant land, the freezing of development rights for historic structures
 - The creation of a historic preservation trust fund (which is currently being reviewed by HPAC)
 - The earmarking of some of the fee-in-lieu money for affordable housing by HDF
 - BLT has committed to the preservation of 17 units on Henry Street
 - Hiring a dedicated intern for historic preservation
 - The City has secured a \$150,000 grant to evaluate the development of Lathon Wider and transforming it into a campus for the entire neighborhood
- Historic preservation is important which needs to be balanced with other planning goals
- His fear is that an additional study commission would result in additional costs to the City, which has already spent funds
- A study commission could create delays which would result in tear downs of historic properties

- The state statute creates a very high threshold for creating a historic district (approval by 2/3 of the property owners) – these property owners are often small LLCs or absent owners who would be unlikely to vote in favor

Ms. Halpern spoke in support of the proposed resolution

- The South End was designated on the National Register of Historic Places in 1986
- She was pleased to see the importance in the South End in the South End study but disappointed about the development plans in the study
- She and others have been working for ways to protect the homes in the South End designated on the historic registry
- That is why they are seeking to form a Historic District Study Committee
- They are seeking everyone's comments on Historic District Status
- They feel the omnibus text changes do not offer sufficient protections and have provided their comments to Mr. Blessing
- A South End Historic District Study Committee would concentrate on the South End

Ms. Elizabeth McCauley spoke in support of the proposed resolution

- There has been a great deal of change near the street where she grew up, Walter Wheeler Drive, including high rises which bring traffic, exhaust fumes and automated garage doors
- They are seeking an opportunity to “preserve what is left of our history”, to protect their homes and their values, and that new construction will take into consideration green space and will be built in the style and character of the neighborhood rather than towering buildings which no one would want in their neighborhood
- The committee will work according to the state established guidelines to determine the interest and possibility of forming a local historic district

Mr. Quigley spoke in support of the resolution from the [attached materials](#)

Mr. Ferrarone of BLT stated:

- This feels like an NRZ initiative but has never been discussed at a meeting of the South End NRZ
- Residents of the South End are unaware of this
- Once a historic district is formed a resident in the district does not have the ability to opt in or out
- There is a formal process a homeowner must go through to do work in an historic district, which requires public notice and a public hearing and a decision by a 5 person committee, which overrides City agencies
- It is not clear who will be affected by this proposed historic district
- This group should come before the NRZ to involve the community; he has not spoken to any person who lives in the South End who is in favor of this
- There are 600 tax lots in the South End; 400 owners would need to vote for this
- He would like to see a map/description of the proposed district
- He would like to know how this project will be paid for

Mr. Okrent, the Managing Director of Asset Management for Gaie Real Estate, spoke in opposition to this committee.

- He does not understand why the fully restored Yale & Towne Site would be included in the district; this would limit their ability to make needed improvements
- They do not see the value of an additional layer of land use approvals
- The proposal does not set standards for ensuring that the board has sufficient expertise
- It would be better to focus on strengthening South End schools
- Thoughtful development should be done in connection with reinvestment in South End

schools

Mr. Owens, a former member of the Board of Representatives and the first president of the NRZ, stated that spoke in opposition to the proposed resolution:

- He is confused and is opposition to anything that is not volunteer
- Most people cannot afford the historic preservation of their homes
- This is not helping residents
- He would like more details before this moves forward
- If they want to see homes saved for historic preservation, then people need to be given funds, not loans
- Homes being renovated for historic preservation need to come up to building codes, have lead and asbestos removal; upgrade plumbing and electrical

Mr. Wooten, a South End resident; spoke in opposition to the proposed resolution:

- The South End had an opportunity with \$8 million of fee-in-lieu money to build affordable homes and deed restrict them; the NRZ did not want to do this
- He is more concerned about development and infrastructure; streets need to be fixed and he is opposed to any delay to the development of the interior of the South End
- He needed to do work to his mother-in-law's house to extend the living room; he would not be able to do this work if it were a historic district
- Most of his neighbors do not support this
- Most houses in the South End have flood issues and need to be torn down
- Many houses in the South end have deep lots which could be developed to provide for additional housing and off-street parking; these houses could be made to look historic
- Focus on revitalization of the South End
- The City is already doing an affordable housing study
- This is a way to keep BLT from developing the B&S Carting site
- The NRZ needs to work with the City to develop the neighborhood for home ownership

Mr. Kravet, a commercial real estate broker, spoke in opposition to the resolution saying that the property owner should have the right to make the decisions about their property.

Mr. Tamburo, the owner of the service station on Pacific Street and other properties, spoke in opposition to the proposed resolution

- Why is there a need for another layer of regulation
- This is an up & coming neighborhood and the progress is good for the whole area
- He is not sure how the gas station would be dealt with in an historic district
- He needs to replace his tanks in 2 years and is now considering whether or not to reinvest in the property

Committee members and other Board members then discussed the resolution with the invited guests:

- The creation of the committee does not necessarily mean that an historic district would be created
- There are many historic properties in the South End, including the Duncan Fife house
- Without the study, the committee does not know what would be in the Historic District

In response to questions from the Committee, Mr. Blessing stated that:

- The South End study was completed in September 2018
- There are properties in the South End already designated as historic properties; which gives them the ability to apply for grants

- Any work done in the Long Ridge Historic District requires a certificate of appropriateness for any work that is done, which is decided by the committee
- The Long Ridge District is about 100 properties
- His concern is that this process would take time and replicates work that has already been done
- A district would usurp the powers of the Zoning Board, Planning Board and Board of Representatives
- This would apply to properties both within and outside of the district

The Committee continued to discuss this item. Points made include:

- The State statute is very broad
- Historic preservation needs to be balanced against affordability
- This may not be the right tool
- The City already knows where the historic buildings are and has a plan to preserve them
- The Commission would trip over the City's efforts
- This is not an NRZ initiative and many South End residents have come out to oppose this
- The way to increase affordable housing would be upzoning
- A study committee should not be created unless the Board is willing to form a historic district
- Historic Districts are drastic outcomes; they prohibit things such as solar panels
- Historic homes should be saved where the owner wants to take the initiative
- People should not be encumbered as to how to repair or sell their houses
- More people don't want this than do
- The people who are advocating for this don't live in historic houses in the South End
- The district could be designed to include certain properties
- Residents want to self-regulate
- The only way to know the scope of the district is by forming the study committee; the district could be as small as 10-15 houses
- The South End study has no way to preserve historic properties
- South End owners should be able to decide for themselves
- This is a way to take away homeowners' freedom
- There is not enough information being presented to vote on this
- Nothing in the regulations prohibits the individuals who want to do this from doing preliminary work or seeking a grant
- The City has already spent \$50,000 defining where the historic properties are
- This is not enabling or empowering people, it is giving a small group of people power over many
- The people in the South End should be able to decide
- People who live in the South End are opposed to this
- People who live in the community are concerned and confused about this
- This resolution would just be permitting the committee to possibly spin its wheels
- Without the resolution, they can't get the information
- Historic districts should not be limited to higher socio-economic brackets
- Members of the public won't understand what the Board has approved
- The Board needs additional information prior to approving this
- The Board needs to confirm that all of the proposed members of the committee are electors in the City of Stamford
- The [email from Mary Dunne](#) notes that the City is eligible to apply for grant funds for the promotion of historic resources
- A grant could be used to hire a professional consultant
- The proponents could develop a proposed map, recognizing that it might change after

the committee is formed, so the Board could have a better idea of what they are planning

- How would the committee use a \$20,000 grant?
- There are problems with how the resolution is drafted; the 1st and 4th whereas clauses are contradictory
- If the resolution is to proceed, committee members should discuss the makeup of the committee

A motion to hold this item was made, seconded and approved by vote of 6-2-0 (Reps. de la Cruz, Cottrell, Lee, Michelson, Sherwood and Summerville in favor; Reps. Graziosi and Lion opposed).

Co-Chair de la Cruz adjourned the meeting at 9:47 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Virgil de la Cruz, Co-Chair

This meeting is on Video ([Part 1](#) and [Part 2](#)).