



OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
STATE OF CONNECTICUT

Governor's Task Force on Transit Oriented Development in Fairfield County
November 21, 2019, 10 –00 am – 12 –00 pm
Margaret E Morton Government Center, Bridgeport CT
DRAFT Meeting Minutes

Task Force Members Present*

City of Norwalk	Jessica Casey, Chief of Economic and Community Development
JDA Development Company	Robert Wiener
Town of Stratford	Susmitha Attota, Planning Department
Town of Fairfield	Mark Barnhart, Director of Economic Development
City of Stamford	Ralph Blessing, Land Use Bureau Chief
University of Bridgeport	George Estrada, Director of Facilities
CT Metropolitan Council of Governments	Matt Fulda, Executive Director
City of Bridgeport	Lynn Haig, Director of Planning
Fairfield County Community Foundation	Juanita James, President and CEO
Public Housing Authorities of Westport and Fairfield	Carol Martin, Executive Director
CT Homebuilders and Remodelers Association	Jim Perras, Executive Director
U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development	Suzanne Piacentini, Field Office Director, Hartford Office
CT West Council of Governments	Francis Pickering, Executive Director
Redniss & Mead	Rick Redniss, Principal
Supportive Housing Works	David Rich, Executive Director
Fairfield County Housing Alliance	Christie Stewart, Director
Norwalk Redevelopment Agency	Tami Strauss, Director
Local Initiatives Support Corporation)	Jim Horan, Executive Director
Regional Plan Association	Melissa Kaplan-Macey, Vice President and CT State Director
City of Danbury	Lisa Morrissey, Director of Social Services
	Sharon Calitro, Director of Planning

*Leadership of participating entities may elect to appoint a designee

State Agency Representatives

Office of the Governor	Lisa Tepper Bates, Governor’s Senior Coordinator for TOD and Housing
Department of Transportation	Elise Greenberg and David Elder
Department of Economic and Community Development	David Kooris, Deputy Commissioner
Department of Housing	Shante Hanks, Deputy Commissioner

Task Force Members Absent

Alpha Community Services/YMCA	Carmen Colon, Executive Director
Business Council of Fairfield County	Joe McGee, Vice President, Public Policy and Programs
Department of Administrative Services	Noel Petra, Deputy Commissioner
Department of Energy and Environmental Protection	Betsey Wingfield, Deputy Commissioner

- I. The Meeting was called to order at 10:05 am. Co-Chairs Bob Wiener (JDA Development – Trout Brook Realty Advisors – Retired) and Jessica Casey (Chief Economic and Community Development, City of Norwalk) welcomed attendees.
- II. Co-Chairs Jessica Casey (JC) and Bob Wiener (BW) introduced the topic of the day’s meeting: a roundtable discussion with developers to get their feedback and on-the-ground perspective regarding what works, and what needs improvement, to advance transit oriented development (TOD) in Fairfield County and across the state.

Introduction of Panelists – Phil Kuchma (PK), Kuchma Corporation; Carol Martin (CM), Public Housing Authorities of Westport and Fairfield; John Guedes (JG), Primrose Companies; Ted Ferrarone (TF), BLT; Clay Fowler (CF), Spinnaker Real Estate Partners.

Discussion moderated by Task Force members Rick Redniss (RR) & Melissa Kaplan-Macy (MKM) moderators.

MKM – What is working in TOD development that we can amplify?

TF – demand for TOD; corporations demand commercial co-located with housing related to access to skilled workforce

CF – New “factory town” – offices and housing linked – lifestyle conjoined work and play must be economically feasible – beginning with land -state owned DOT land is a huge resource to capitalize on that should be monetized for livability

PK – Example of change from ten years ago – parking village district zoning is an improvement – state must look at innovative ways to use current structured parking – working from home has changed the 9-5 model – need to look for innovative solutions, such as flex parking, while working out the operational challenges

CM – In Fairfield County untapped potential enormous – we are static now and need to untap the potential that exists – Can we package state land with economic opportunity with housing and transportation? – need some regional victories to have tangible results so that local communities can see that it works

CF – BLT Harbor Point is a success – Private enterprise does it better – must streamline process to enter into Public Private Partnerships – good developers are out there – Spinnaker project at East Norwalk Train Station will be a success – Spinnaker to run the parking lot for DOT

JG – Municipalities have been zoning for TOD – but, projects can't be developed strictly on TOD – regs are now limiting density – economics of TOH didn't work because there is a limited market for that type of housing – it works in Lower FC and high density areas – proformas don't work with no subsidies or tax abatement programs

RR– How do you see the window of Opportunity Zones (OZ) playing in the equation in FC?

JG – Looked at this with financial experts and found it was not an advantage – only works if you have developers that are making a fee – in depressed areas it may work

TF – OZ interesting – looks like an enterprise and new market TC zone – in Stamford, OZ is better but no interest among developers

CF – As an investor I will do it, but the deal has to make sense – OZ only offers a very small boost – not good for rehab – 10 years it too long a horizon – Brookfield Mall sale is a travesty – Portland Oregon has all downtown as an OZ – a travesty

MKM – What is the boost? What tools do we need? What are the opportunities we can unlock for TOD in FC?

PK – TOD is working in Stamford, but CT isn't dense enough. Small cities – need to increase density – if State wants cities to grow economy need better regional development – everything is getting diluted with municipal development because we don't have the density – not a long term solution – must find ways to focus development that will bring density that will bring prosperity – we must grow

JG – Focused on industrial towns and cities, found key issues (1) Brownfields (Shelton), need state funding. Bridgeport has no clean sites – takes 2-4 years to be ready for construction – state agencies process is time consuming and holds up projects for years – (2) Zoning – municipalities attempt to create zoning that allows for redevelopment – but local zoning boards

do not focus on redevelopment of areas – rewriting of zoning is problematic – Brownfields and Zoning are big issues

CM – Need to do things differently, need a cooperative discussion - multi town cooperation must happen – how do we foster regional discussions?

David Kooris – Fairfield is a success – redone zoning in both cities (Fairfield and Bridgeport) were coordinated – applied together for multi-million dollar grant for pedestrian walking bridge so that they could double number of parcels within half mile of transit – 169 municipalities with local rule means there is no strong project delivery expertise at local level – Takes a long time because we don't have the experience – Need to build capacity to support the municipalities in implementation

CF – Spinnaker does have a job in Bridgeport and impediment is Bridgeport taxes. State has a role in this which is figuring out where you want to go and get everyone on board rowing in same direction. It requires strong leadership, from the top. Departments need to know that they have to work together. Get rid of cross conflict between departments – That is why LTB is here – developers are caught in that maze – doesn't cost a lot to fix – Norwalk is taking painfully long to do simple things

CM – Underlying infrastructure but can't implement due to local rule– so where is the TOD development authority to step in to navigate all permitting and processes – have the foundation for the structure but are missing the carpenter – how do we get a “TOD developer authority” to make sure these developments take off?

Lisa Tepper Bates – two ways – setting up a new authority/making large-scale structural changes takes lots of time. We can use this taskforce to pilot better ways to do this: it is the purpose of coming together in the Task Force. How can we lift up some projects that are not competitions between towns – but that collectively advance TOD for the region? How can we use your collective brain power to identify effective ways to shorten processes and streamline – get projects done, pilot and prove what works – lessons can lead to structural change in the longer-term – let's pilot this here in FC. At the same time, we understand that work is needed to streamline coordination/cooperation between agencies of state government – we have the opportunity with projects identified by this Task Force to show how this can be done (leveraging previous successful experience in Meriden). All the state agencies that have a role to play are here at a senior level – leverage this forum to find ways for the state to be a better partner to municipalities and developers alike

CF – FC is a TOD county. We should think regionally – include New Haven – success will take comprehensive zoning coordination between towns – DOT should partner with by providing land parcels– In addition to Land Use and Sites, nexus of success also includes transportation infrastructure – need tolls etc. / Transit improvements not just zoning.

JG – Can't forget downtowns and depressed areas. We focus on returns as private developers, we focus on wealthier towns. Valley towns and industrial areas need focus on TOD as well— no movement in economic base in these towns make it hard to make proformas work in those areas – we do have a rail line and should focus on all areas served by it.

CF – Where are the jobs? They are also part of the nexus

RR – Lets focus on FC. We have a lot to do here. Affordable Housing/8-30G Carrots and Sticks – Do we need Carrots and Sticks for TOD? Do we need the same type of intervention [as 8-30G] from the state to make this [TOD] happen?

TF – Is there a stick?

CF – Do you penalize towns?

David Kooris – Derby made the decision to use primary site next to train station for a Home Depot so downtown and TOD sites are now less valuable and well positioned – there are sticks that could be utilized to make sure this doesn't happen elsewhere. DECD has \$5MM in infrastructure funding.

Jessica Casey – What is the process for DECD then, with regard to utilizing that money?

David Kooris – Politics have played a larger role in resource allocation – we have been advocating with this admin for recognition that you can't have a debt diet without strategic prioritization – debt diet makes sense but with less money you must be strategic about how you reward communities – given the way municipalities have become dependent on state bond allocations (they consider bond dollars a right). Communities should take a proactive approach with TIF (Tax Incremental Financing) – other parts of the country have Blended TIFs - government can incent localities – Dallas, Denver, Portland experiment – there is a way to give up a combination of future revenue that creates a series of carrots and sticks.

David Elder – Meriden was a success – last admin had a TOD executive team that drafted policy alignment across state agencies– CHFA prioritized TOD — DOT asked for a permanent person in Governor's office to coordinate activities – DOT is saying land is available – they need funds – DOT has relationships with lots of developers – if you have a project that improves commuters lives please bring it to DOT– New Haven line service and capacity problem is due to a four track system only operating on two tracks because of conditions because of a lack of financing. Towns want stations. Every time we add a station, we slow the whole system – financial problem is the reason for the service problem – DOT would like to see more ribbon cuttings – ADA compliance is expensive and if private sector can be part of the solution that would be good.

Robert Wiener – Is DOT willing to be pro-active in identifying sites?

David Elder – DOT land inventory on rail system is historic system which makes it hard to aggregate site information. DOT is transitioning to an electronic system. DOT can work on a site-by-site basis with interested municipalities or developers. (David Elder offered to be a point of contact for any such inquiries.)

Lisa Tepper Bates – Lots of pockets of information and we need to aggregate it

Jim Perras – Can municipalities also identify Sites they control? Oregon has legislation that requires towns to identify such sites

Jessica Casey – TOD is an opportunity to draw people to CT – when we think of TOD it is a holistic conversation – impacts more than just transportation

Lisa Tepper Bates – (to panel) Can you offer some specific and actionable items that are tools that we can utilize – “If not but this obstacle I could move more quickly.” Need to use your brain power to think about that.

TF – Biggest challenge is to increase efficiency – every corporation wants to know that their workforce can get to work – train stations are outdated and ridiculous

Susmitha Attota – Can DOT maximize train stations as a first step?

David Elder – A larger station facility is more expensive to operate – CT can have nicer stations with private developers as a partner – DOT can build it but need private sector to operate outside of station

Susmitha Attota – would you give the land to developer so they can do it?

David Elder – Our (DOT) value is in land and service – we are ready to work on that

CF – optimism here for public-private partnerships at stations like in East Norwalk. The power of TIF is huge – CT has only just adopted it – St. Louis job is powered by public inducements – TIF is most powerful – It is a huge Carrot for TOD – can do more than just housing – Missouri has sales tax revenue set aside for TIF

PK – Greenwich project is example of PPP – Should replicate Greenwich project throughout FC – Still need work on service but stations are a great way to induce development by allowing for private development

RR – Greenwich is stuck in Zoning Hell and is a bad example – exactly where the state needs a carrot - to get Greenwich out of the way of the TOD – example of why we need sticks to get municipalities out of the way

Ralph Blessing – Should be rethinking the governance structure of these state agencies; DOT has distinct divisions internally and is very difficult to navigate - need a DOT transit oriented development tsar for Stamford to coordinate all authorities – 2 different parking authorities in Stamford – City and State – need a holistic government approach to deal with station as a system – local guy in Stamford needs to know who to call to get things done

Susmitha Attota – FEMA in Bridgeport is example of local presence that works to enhance coordination

JG – Railroads are federal – eight year hold up on project because no rail cooperation – cross-jurisdictional issues are problematic and expensive

TF – Time kills all deals – need to improve level of service – should do it now – largest challenge is that there is no cross functional person, so everything takes too long – local challenges – local rule is hard to work in

Jessica Casey – Two-year Mayoral terms are hard to navigate for long term projects and community development

David Kooris – Most parts of country there is a 10-year plan – CT is over reliant on project-by-project zoning – policy should be subject to upfront broad discussion. In Fairfield they frontloaded the process and have had great success. This is how the Plan of Conservation and Development should/is meant to be utilized.

Francis Pickering – Should update consistency across planning and zoning – West COG did a study of bus and shuttle system in Stamford – Stamford only implemented 1 of 9 recommendations – cultural issue that we have no synergy

Ralph Blessing – Need local person in charge of coordination – State must explain that train station is a state asset – local always trumps greater good – State must step in and correct this for the good of the whole

Mark Barnhardt – Towns need planning assistance from the state to bolster capacity

Rick Redniss – What do you need to make things happen?

JG – streamlining processes

Juanita James – Business went to shared service model decades ago – we need a narrative to educate public and agencies to build support for this work – CT doesn't think regionally – we think locally – and it is a problem – needs a comprehensive effort with leadership, data and narrative and to build a marketing campaign – also must force state agencies to get their acts together – agencies don't have a sense of urgency that time is money – PPP are unnecessarily complicated – must work more effectively – Must learn from other states but then have to understand what will and won't work that is unique to this state

PK – Amplify progress/success too. There are examples of this – 25 connector needed a bridge in Bridgeport – new processes - prefab - innovation must be elevated – NYC is privatizing design and construction of its infrastructure. Streamline the process. Need for a state and/or local ombudsman

TF – Many TOD sites are brownfields – DEEP has been pro-active in its approach and it is a good change

MKM – there are good examples of TOD done well – where is the leadership to get that message out? Someone needs to take that responsibility – we can't expect state government to carry this message.

TF – Need regional vision – big picture regional view – need a strategic vision – nighttime local hearings are ultimate roadblock

Shante Hanks – Needle has moved with this admin. Need more education for decision makers – Affordable Housing needed in Bridgeport but local P and Z voted down housing because of parking issues – loudest person in the room seems to carry the day – tail wagging the dog is not working.

MKM – New Rochelle model? What do developers think?

TF – NR's pace of change and improvement is amazing – low hanging fruit is moving in NR

PK – NR had a strong leader and a process with community engagement from beginning

Ralph Blessing – Need to bring folks in at *right* point though– Stamford has Fee In Lieu as part of inclusionary zoning, but not a good process in place to spend funds – Board of Reps is making this difficult – public input must come at the policy level, not the transactional level – CT enabling legislation should be reconsidered, strengthen the master plan process and pull back public part level – institutional and government infrastructure is too big

RR – 8-30g has produced housing in CT – unless and until we have a stick like this with train stations nothing will change – need state to be more forceful about TOD.

Mark Barnhardt – Can't we work with communities who want to do this and give them the tools to do it?

Matt Fulda – Prioritize investment for towns who are working on this issue, invest in areas that are taking on role of municipalities

Jessica Casey – Chapter 40R in Mass – created a district and allowed for 20% more density and those that adopted it were prioritized for more funding. CT needs not just incentives for

developers but incentives for the municipality to be a good actor – Should also coordinate cross-agency prioritization of supporting actions (brownfields etc.)

MKM – thank you panel.

III. Next Steps – Lisa Tepper Bates

In addition to examining what's possible with regard to streamlining coordination and cooperation across state government agencies, there are at least two possible paths: (1) Legislative change; (2) Incentives for communities to do the right thing and move the ball forward. MASS 40R is an important example to review. This taskforce can show folks how this is a good thing by creating successful projects. Let's Pilot this in FC starting now.

IV. Next meeting: January 23, 2020.

V. Meeting adjourned 12:05 p.m.