

(The following is not a verbatim transcript of comments or discussion that occurred during the meeting, but rather a summarization intended for general informational purposes. All motions and votes are the official records).

SPECIAL MEETING – CITY COUNCIL

-SEPTEMBER 24, 2024-

Special Workshop of the City Council was held on Tuesday, September 24, 2024 in the Council Chambers, City Hall, Cranston, Rhode Island.

I. CALL MEETING TO ORDER:

The meeting was called to order at 6:05 P.M. by the Council President.

II. ROLL CALL:

Roll call showed the following members present: Councilman Ferri (left at 6:45 p.m.), Councilwomen Renzulli, Haroian, Councilmen Donegan, Campopiano (left at 6:40 p.m.), Paplauskas, Wall and Council President Marino -8.

Absent: Council Vice-President Vargas -1.

Also Present: Jason Pezzullo, City Planner; Rosalba Zanni, Assistant City Clerk/Clerk of Committee.

III. CITY COUNCIL WORKSHOP:

CITY COUNCIL DISCUSSION AND REVIEW OF THE 2024 COMPREHENSIVE PLAN (PHASE I) WITH THE PLANNING DEPARTMENT AND REPRESENTATIVE(S) OF WESTON & SAMPSON (THE CONSULTANT)

Director Pezzullo appeared to speak and stated that they worked on this Comprehensive Plan with the Consultant, Ashley Sweet from Weston & Sampson for approximately a year. They worked with the Planning Commission with many iterations and edits of the document. They have passed that document the end of August. Now that we are about to have public hearing for the Council adoption, he thought it was a good idea to have a kind of looser discussion with the Council prior to having the formal meeting on Thursday. He asked Ms. Sweet to give a presentation of what has been done in the past year and where we are going to be going in the future.

Ashley Sweet, Team Leader at Weston & Sampson and Project Manager for this project with the City of Cranston, appeared to speak. She indicated that she will address this evening what a Comprehensive Plan is, why this is in front of you and talk through the project approach that they have taken over the last year and what they plan to do for the next year after that and then talk about the next steps. A Comprehensive Plan is really your guidance document. This is your policy document that sets long range policies and manages growth and development for the community. They cover things like the environment and natural resources, historical and cultural features and attempts to balance the needs of the community and how you manage that with growth and development as the City moves into the future. It promotes open and democratic planning process and public engagement is a big piece of the Comprehensive Plan process. The document is supposed to strengthen the community preserving what you love and want to protect and improving upon where there are identified opportunities to make improvements for the future. Comprehensive Plan is made up of Chapters. These Chapters cover a variety of different topics. There are several new requirements that have happened since the last Plan. We now have to address energy, we have to address natural hazards and climate change so there will be new topics that you will see in the updated Plan. The goal of the Comprehensive Plan is to tie all of these components together. They start often at the top with a vision. They then develop policies to achieve the goals and then the actual action items. Those are the concrete things that the City is going to do. they use data and analyzing that data. They look for trends. They look at estimates, population projections to try to understand where the City is moving to address where the City is headed in the future. You have an

implementation plan in your Comprehensive Plan and that is what contains those goals, policies and actions. Those are all federal or created through the process of updating your existing conditions, analyzing that data and then taking the results of the public engagement, answers to survey questions, things that come out of workshops, comments that are left on the website where the things that concern people about the community start to rise to the top and people like to state what they love about the community, what they want to protect and see moving into the future. We use all of that information to help you develop those goals, policies and actions and the implementation plan is really the heart of the Comprehensive Plan. That is all included in the maps, graphs and charts. They include all that information in the Plan so all the data is there for people to look at and understand how they arrived at where we are with goals, policies and actions.

Ms. Sweet stated that the purpose of the Comprehensive Plan is really to coordinate growth and development through these series of different topics. They cover things like economic development. It is important that you provide opportunities for economic growth, what does that look like, what fits in the right places and what is not appropriate in other places and all of that policy that you establish directly feeds down into your Zoning Ordinance and your Sub-Division Regulations. Those are implementation tools. The Zoning Ordinance is very closely tied to your Comprehensive Plan and the Comprehensive Plan lays the framework and the Zoning Ordinance helps you implement that framework in a lot of ways. There are two processes that happen for the adoption and approval of the Comprehensive Plan. We are doing this a little differently in Cranston and she will explain later on.

Ms. Sweet stated that the typical approval process is that you have the Planning Commission hold a public hearing, which they have done. They will forward that draft Plan to the City Council for the City Council to hold their public hearing, which will be done on Thursday and then the City will submit that Plan to the State to go through the State approval process. Once the State receives the Plan, there is a State coordinated review process where it goes out to other State agencies who look at their respective topic areas and submit comments back to the State. The State will give us a set of their comments and we will address those comments and then the State will make a determination on an approval of the Plan. In Cranston, we are doing this a little differently. We are doing a two-phased approach and that is because of the results of the State Law that said that your Comprehensive Plan is not valid to deny a land use decision if it is older than twelve years. At the time, you went out for RFP and there was a window of time where your Plan was less than twelve years and now it is going to be older than twelve years and we want to prevent a situation where you cannot use that Plan to deny a land use decision if you had valid reason to do so. The approach that they proposed to the City was to do this in two phases. The first phase would be to do a complete data update and existing conditions update, which they have done. They would hold a public workshop during Phase I, which they have also done. They would establish a project website, which they have done. They would develop the required Chapters that do not exist in the current Plan, which she mentioned was energy and natural hazard climate change and that is all brand new text and that they would then have a Planning Commission public hearing, which they have also done and they are at the point where they are having the City Council public hearing on Thursday. Phase II of the project will be to review and revise that policy. That is when they are going to take your existing goals, policies and actions and will work with staff, other boards and commissions and comments and feedback from the general public about what the real issues are in the City, what the opportunities are that we want to capitalize on and how we would move the City forward to achieve those larger goals. They will implement a public survey, they will have additional public workshops in Phase II, they will continuously, through the process, continue to update the project website eventually finalize the Chapters. They will bring that Plan back to the Planning Commission for approval, they will bring it back to the City Council for approval and then they will submit it to the State for their approval. In Phase I there is very little in the way to change to policy. They have almost entirely maintained the City's existing goals, policies and actions with the exception of a few requests that were made by staff to either remove something that was no longer relevant or remove something that had already been achieved and there was no reason to carry forward. They did develop a set of goals, policies and actions for the energy Chapter and for the natural hazards and climate change Chapter because those did not exist before. All of that has gone before the Planning Commission for their review. They made edits based on their suggestions and requests and now you have those documents before you to consider it public hearing for adoption. Next steps in this process are to continue public engagement. Phase II is to be much more public engagement more than Phase I was because we are not changing policy, we are just updating data as much as possible so when we move into the Phase of wanting to change policy we definitely want to engage the public as much as possible and have them be a huge part of that conversation. We will amend those goals,

policies and actions accordingly based on all of that feedback that they get and then they will finalize those Plan Chapters and bring them back to both the Planning Commission and the City Council for review and approval.

Council President Marino asked generally how long it would take for the Phase II process Ms. Sweet stated that she believes that they had planned for approximately a year, more or less 12-18 months.

Council President Marino thanked the Planning Department, Planning Commission and Ms. Sweet for taking on this very important piece for the City as a whole before she was even on the Council, three and a half years ago as a constituent. This was very important to her and it is even more important given the clock that is now ticking given the State Legislation that had passed. She asked if there is any kind of table of content for each of the sections. Director Pezzullo stated that he does not believe so, but he will look into it. Council President Marino stated that she is just looking for Chapters, that would be great enough. Director Pezzullo stated that if you look at the 2012 Plan to now, it is organized very differently. The goals and policies have been refined, they have been basically restacked in a way that he thinks is more user friendly, but if you went back to the 2012 Plan to now, though we did not change policy, we certainly had to change some of the goals and policies and action items. Some of them were defunct, some of the action items were accomplished, what action items could never be accomplished so we came up with a matrix and that is available if the Council is interested, and they went through and color-coded everything. They are fairly pleased with the outcome now, but if there is anything that anyone sees that they are uncomfortable with, let's talk about it now or between now and Thursday.

Councilman Ferri stated that on a day to day basis, for the Council, he asked Director Pezzullo if he could give any examples of things that have changed between 2012 and 2024 that is going to basically affect how the Council does business when something is brought before them. Director Pezzullo stated that change in the way you do business, no. This should be business as usual. We did not change policy, as he stated before. The only things that were actual changes would be the Planning Commission voted to remove the A-20 up Zones of Alpine Estates so all three of those lots, Pepper Mill, Sage and Caraway, they recommend to go back to A-80. That was their recommendation. That is your choice if you want to keep that or change it back the way it was. Those were the only changes that were made to the Future Land Use. There still are approximately 1,500 parcels that are straight mis-zoned. Those were policy decisions in the last Plan and those are the policy decisions before you. That is going to take some will to change that. There are whole neighborhoods in the City, off Cranston St. near the Police Department, entire neighborhoods Zoned Heavy Industrial, but they are all houses, it is a mis-Zone. There are huge areas that are Zoned Open Space, but they are also Industrial. There are a number of things that they have identified. Those still remain and we need to address those eventually. Phase II will not solve that rezoning problem.

Councilwoman Renzulli stated that at the end when both Phases are done, she asked if this is still going to be kind of a stagnant PDF document that lives on the website because it is not easy to look at this document. Director Pezzullo stated that this is an interesting idea. He agrees that it is not an easy document to read. This is something that, if we get the document approved by the State, he thinks if we want to talk about user friendliness and how this document gets disseminated easier and more kinds of ways of presenting the data, they are all for that, but that will be after it is done and approved by the State.

Councilwoman Renzulli addressed the approximate 1,500 properties that are mis-zoned and asked if there is a plan to fix that because she would think that that would be part of this process. Director Pezzullo stated that after the Phase II process there is going to be a lot of rethinking about how we do Zones and what the Zones are and do people generally conform to Zoning. The biggest problem that he sees in our Zoning Code is that approximately 90% of our houses do not conform to Zoning. The same goes for those houses in Industrial Zone. It is going to be a costly proposition to do that many rezoning with public hearings and the notices. It adds up. We just do not have the resources, but if we want to do this, we can allocate it and plan for it. This is probably the biggest challenge.

Councilman Paplauskas stated that in reading this document, Chapter 10 mentions the Festival of St. Ann and St. Mary. Director Pezzullo stated that this should be a correction. Councilman Paplauskas stated that it also mentions Meshanticut as well. it mentions one of the challenges of Meshanticut is the traffic backing up under Reservoir Ave. He thinks it was meant to state Phenix Ave. or Cranston St. Director Pezzullo asked Councilman Paplauskas to forward those corrections to him and those changes can be made Thursday.

Councilman Ferri asked if there is anything within the Plan that points directly to the fact that we need to have more affordable housing in Cranston. Director Pezzullo stated, yes, the housing element has specific goals and policies and action items to get us more affordable housing.

Councilman Donegan asked if there are any changes specifically to the different Zones and overall to the Zoning and minimum lot requirements that might help address housing development and affordability. Director Pezzullo stated that they are definitely thinking of that for the next Phase. Since they were not changing policy, they did not change that, but that is definitely going to be in the next round of discussion about changing the Zones and changing the minimum areas and things like that.

Councilman Donegan stated that Table 13.5 on page 13-7, page 190 of the PDF, looking at Zoning Districts and minimum lot requirement, B-1 for two-family dwelling minimum lot area is 6,000 sq. ft. in this document, but Municode states 8,000. Director Pezzullo stated that this looks like a typo. You need 8,000 sq. ft. for two-family, but still 60 ft. of frontage. This can be corrected. Councilman Donegan suggested taking a look at all of those lot requirements that are there, because it looks like some of them were reduced down from what he sees in Municode. Director Pezzullo stated that they will look at that and if there are discrepancies, they will be corrected and brought back before the Council on Thursday.

VIII. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at 6:55 p.m.

Rosalba Zanni
Assistant City Clerk/Clerk of Committees