

## Vote on Reed-Putnam changes may come Tuesday

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NORWALK — The Common Council could vote as early as Tuesday night on whether to approve — in principle — filling out the last dozen acres the city's Reed Putnam Urban Renewal Plan with an office-anchored, mixed-use development rather than a monolithic office park.

An approval would guide Redevelopment Agency staff in altering the existing land-disposition agreement for the three parcels off West Avenue and Interstate 95, which have sat vacant for years, and send their development into high gear. The council, at a later date, would vote on the altered agreement.

On Thursday night, the council's Planning Committee unanimously approved agency recommendations to move away from 1 million square feet of office space and 50,000 square feet of retail, to 475,000 to 600,000 square feet of offices; 75,000 to 150,000 square feet of retail; a 130-room hotel; 250 to 350 housing units; and a "public cultural" facility.

"The committee overwhelmingly seems to support the concept of changing the use and proceeding along this line," said Matthew T. Miklave, committee chairman. But "this is a big change over what has already been agreed to. Before we make that fundamental change, I believe it is prudent we get the sense of the council."

As such, the Planning Committee has asked agency staff to explain to council members prior to Tuesday night's council meeting the recommended changes, and afford them the opportunity to study market analyses leading to those recommendations.

"I would certainly think that an up-or-down vote should be held at that meeting," Miklave said.

During the public participation portion of the meeting, Golden Hill Association President James Del Greco and South Norwalk architect Nicholas Pacella urged advancement of the mixed-use development.

Spinnaker Cos.-led 95/7 Ventures LLC is the city approved developer for the three parcels. Spinnaker Cos. Principal Clayton H. Fowler indicated that the project is poised to move forward.

"We're pleased. We think this is progress. It's a good step and there was a lot of research and due diligence done," said Fowler, referring to market analyses.

The recommended changes for the last undeveloped portions of the urban renewal plan — drafted in 1983 — rest upon months of studies projecting the office, retail and residential markets over the next decade.

Those studies suggests that 1 million square feet of office space might be overly aggressive.

Darren J.A. Mochrie of RKG Associates Inc. outlined to Planning Committee members the net economic impact of four build-out scenarios on city schools, services and property taxes. Those scenarios ranged from 1 million square feet of office space, as now on the books, to 485,000 square feet of offices, 225,000 square feet of retail, the 130-room hotel and 310 condominiums.

"All the scenarios are a net benefit to the city of \$4.3 million to \$5 million-a-year," Mochrie said. But "caution should be exercised relative to adding large chunks of office space to the market place."

Committee members reached different conclusions on the two-tiered affordable housing plan recommended by the Redevelopment Agency. Under it, 10 percent of the housing units would be targeted at households earning at or less than 80 percent of the state median income — now about \$81,000 for a four-person household; 5 percent would be aimed at those making at or less than 100 percent of the area median income — now \$111,000 for a family of four.

"The people (working) in the hotel and the retail, can they afford to live in one of these affordable units?" asked committee member Douglas E. Hempstead.

Miklave asked if the city would be creating jobs where people would have to commute to Bridgeport to live.

"The intellectually honest answer is that it depends on what jobs they hold in those facilities, and whether they're a couple or single," answered John L. Burritt Jr., agency assistant director.

A two-person household earning about \$50,000 could afford to live in the affordable-priced units. A single person working at minimum wage in retail would not, Burritt Jr. said.

Committee member Nicholas D. Kydes praised the two-tiered approach. He said he does not consider households earning \$110,000 to be "rich people." They also should be able to live in Norwalk, he said.

Phyllis Bolden, however, said a household making \$110,000 "does not strike me as someone in need of affordable housing.

Committee members unanimously supported the agency recommendation to set aside 2 percent to 4 percent of the project area for a public cultural use.