



**BOROUGH OF LEONIA**  
**Leonia Planning Board**  
MINUTES

**September 13, 2023**

**7:30 PM**

**LEONIA HIGH SCHOOL**

The Borough of Leonia Planning Board held its special meeting on SEPTEMBER 13, 2023 at 7:30 p.m. located at 100 Christie Heights St, Leonia, NJ.

**MEMBERS PRESENT:** Chairman Michael DeGidio, Vice Chair Ira Gold, Councilman Pasquale Fusco, Patrick Botten, Timothy Ford, William Russell, Sean Thompson, Ron Wolf, Haeseok Ko, Damee Choi.

**MEMBER(S) ABSENT:** Mayor Judah Zeigler.

**ALSO PRESENT:** Attorney – Dan Steinhagen, Sanyogita Chavan – Borough Planner.

Meeting called to order at 7:30 PM.

**FLAG SALUTE**

**ROLL CALL**

**PRESENTATIONS**

Chair DeGidio briefly spoke on the layout of the meeting for the night explaining how it would continue. He then recused himself of the matter in regards to the Redevelopment Plan, and turned the meeting over to Vice Chair Ira Gold.

Vice Chair Gold asked the Board Attorney, Dan Steinhagen, to make a statement about a particular property.

Mr. Steinhagen spoke on the lawsuit filed against the Borough in reference to the properties on Station Parkway. He made a recommendation to the board about the properties and whether or not they should be discussed or have action taken on them tonight.

Motion to exclude the two litigation properties from all discussions and action taken tonight made by: Mr. Ford and Seconded by Councilman Fusco:

On roll call, the vote was recorded as follows

Mayor Zeigler:	N/A	Chair DeGidio:	N/A	Councilman Fusco:	Yes
Vice Chair Gold:	Yes	Mr. Russell:	Yes	Mr. Ford:	Yes
Mr. Botten:	Yes	Mr. Thompson:	Yes	Mr. Wolf:	Yes
Mr. Ko:	Yes	Ms. Choi:	Yes		

Ms. Chavan, Borough Planner, gave a presentation about the new draft of the Redevelopment Plan and changes made to the Plan from its initial presentation.

Ms. Choi asked a question about the extent of the change for what is current and what is being proposed, and Ms. Chavan confirmed that there is minimal change to the existing. Ms. Choi also asked about the town home standards and pointed out that in order for a developer to create they would need to purchase multiple properties. Ms. Chavan confirmed this. Ms. Choi asked another question about the mixed-use district and asked for clarification on it being an overlay zone. Ms. Chavan explained.

Councilman Fusco thanked Ms. Chavan for her work and asked about the limiting recommendations and brought up the possibility of parking issues and the need for underground structured parking. He also asked about the possibility of flooding in that zone. Ms. Chavan explained that the new projects would have stricter flood elevation guidelines to match the state guidelines. She also spoke on the parking and explained that there is room in the recommendations to include lower-level parking. Ms. Chavan also offered that she is amenable to adjusting the plan if the board believes it necessary.

Mr. Ko asked a question about the decisions the planner made about the numbers used and where they come from. Ms. Chavan explained her process in evaluating and making decisions about parameters.

Vice Chair Gold asked if the Light Rail is impacting the Redevelopment Plan at all, and Ms. Chavan confirmed that it is not impacting the plan. He then asked a question about the town home district and expressed concerns for the impact it would have on Spring Street. Ms. Chavan answered that they would have very little impact on Spring Street as the town homes would be facing Grand Avenue. They had a discussion over the current and possible future look of this area in reference to Spring Street.

Mr. Thompson joined the discussion and explained the concern as based on the difference in elevation between Spring Street and Grand Avenue. Ms. Chavan explained how this would work and that the concerns are understood and the plan accommodates for them. Ms. Chavan, Mr. Thompson, Ms. Choi and Mr. Steinhagen deliberated on the public's concern regarding Spring Street and came to a consensus of creating something to show the public what it might look like.

With no further questions from the board, Vice Chair Gold opened up the public question and comment period.

#### **PUBLIC QUESTION / COMMENT PERIOD**

Arthur Zayat, 125 Reldyes Avenue, asked a question to the planner about the changes between the previous plan and the current. He also made a comment stating that certain areas in the plan should not be included and that the target area should be the area of Fort Lee Road and Grand Avenue. He also stated that he did not believe four stories should be allowed.

Ms. Chavan explained briefly the changes from the first plan and confirmed that the area that was mentioned is the area they are focusing on, she also corrected Mr. Zayat that the area he was speaking of was not the four-story area.

Mr. Steinhagen suggested that the board speak to the public on the point of the meeting.

Vice Chair Gold and Mr. Steinhagen briefly explained to the public the point of the meeting of the Planning Board. Stressing that the board has been directed by the governing body to prepare a plan, and so a plan has to be made and moved forward. Vice Chair Gold and Mr. Steinhagen had a discussion about the function of the planning board and what are appropriate questions and concerns that can be raised at this stage. Ms. Chavan also clarified their role and decision making in this stage of the process.

Deana Coleman, 9698 Maple Street, brought up a concern about traffic and asked if it has been taken into consideration to change the street traffic direction. Ms. Chavan explained that changing the streets is not something that can be proposed in this type of plan. Ms. Coleman asked if there could be signage added, and Mr. Steinhagen explained that these concerns would be addressed at the time when an actual site plan is brought to the board after this plan is approved.

Richard Hlavacek, 350 Summit Avenue, raised a concern about the four corners at the center of Grand Avenue and Fort Lee Road. Ms. Chavan explained that this area is the core of the Redevelopment Area. She further explained the process and how this will encourage developers to come forward and want to buy up and use the vacant properties.

George Giaquinto, 56 Paulin Boulevard, asked a question about the ability to give tax breaks, and Mr. Steinhagen explained that the governing body or a selected entity can enter into agreements for this, but the Planning Board does not decide that. He then asked a question about Spring Street and Ms. Chavan answered that the area in question is not a part of the plan. Mr. Steinhagen informed that the area he is asking about was never included in the plan. Mr. Giaquinto made a final statement that the plan does not create enough advantageous position to encourage developers.

Dierdre Mitchell, 156 Spring Street, raised concerns about the townhouses in the overlay zone on Grand Avenue along Spring Street. Ms. Chavan explained to her the requirements and number of allowed units based on the plan. She also explained the many requirements needed to be met by a developer. Mr. Steinhagen and Ms. Chavan explained that the parking would not be affected because the townhomes would be required to supply off street parking. Ms. Mitchell also raised a concern about the loss of land and the problem with storms and water. Ms. Chavan explained that all the new constructions have to meet much higher standards from the Department of Environmental Protection in regards to Storm Water.

Vito Mazza IV, 430 Grandview Terrace, raised concerns about contradictions on the plan and asked a few questions about clarification on various aspects of the plan. Mr. Steinhagen answered his questions and explained the process of redevelopment. Mr. Mazza asked if there is anything requiring Redevelopment in a Municipality, and Mr. Steinhagen confirmed there is not. Mr. Mazza stated concerns over the harm overdeveloping the area could cause unintentionally.

Lydia Maurice, 392 Grand Avenue, offered an idea that the plan could encourage more red and brown brick design standards. She asked another question about a specific corner in the plan and asked about the time frame of when the plan would be moved to the governing body. Vice Chair Gold answered that the board would most likely vote to move the plan on tonight.

Gordon Coleman, 328 Allaire Street, asked if the board is going to vote on the plan tonight, would they include the properties not being discussed. Mr. Steinhagen stated that it is up to the board and his recommendation is not to, but it will be decided if the board makes a motion one way or the other.

Councilman Fusco asked the attorney about whether the board would send the entire plan, or if the intention is to pick it apart, and Mr. Steinhagen offered that the board can do either, and that it is up to the board to decide.

Arnold Trachtenberg, 140 Lakeview Avenue, asked a question about the properties not being discussed, asking when they were added to the Area in Need of Redevelopment. Mr. Steinhagen and Ms. Chavan answered the question about the timeline of the Redevelopment. Mr. Trachtenberg raised concerns over traffic. Vice Chair Gold explained that the board and the mayor and council are aware of the traffic and will be considering it in their decision. He also asked a question about liquor licenses and was informed that it is not a planning board matter.

Motion to close the public portion and take a 5-minute break made by: Mr. Botten and Seconded by Mr. Wolf:  
All in Favor – Motion Passed

The Meeting went on break at 9:27 pm.

The Meeting resumed at 9:35 pm.

Motion to transmit the plan subject to the revised discussion regarding the townhouse zone involving setbacks on spring street and to remove the age restricted district and a recommendation in the document concerning that area to the Governing Body made by: Mr. Botten and Seconded by Mr. Russell:

On roll call, the vote was recorded as follows

Mayor Zeigler:	N/A	Chair DeGidio:	N/A	Councilman Fusco:	Yes
Vice Chair Gold:	Yes	Mr. Russell:	Yes	Mr. Ford:	Yes
Mr. Botten:	Yes	Mr. Thompson:	Yes	Mr. Wolf:	Yes
Mr. Ko:	Yes	Ms. Choi:	Yes		

Chair DeGidio rejoined the board. He thanked Vice Chair Gold for his work in running the meetings on a very difficult issue.

**PLANNING BOARD ATTORNEY REPORT**

**PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD – CORRESPONDENCE**

**CLOSED SESSION**

**ADJOURNMENT**

With no further business presented, a motion to adjourn the meeting was made by: Vice Chair Gold and seconded by Mr. Thompson.

All in Favor – Motion Passed

The meeting was adjourned at 9:39 PM.

Respectfully Submitted,

Michael Greco  
Planning Board Secretary