

City of New Haven
Journal of the Board of Aldermen
Legislation Committee

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Monday, January 12, 2009

7:00 PM

Aldermanic Chambers

ALDERMANIC NOTICE - NEW HAVEN

THE LEGISLATION COMMITTEE WILL MEET ON MONDAY, JANUARY 12, 2009 AT 7:00 P.M. IN THE ALDERMANIC CHAMBER OF CITY HALL 165 CHURCH STREET TO HEAR:

ORDINANCE AMENDMENT ADDING A NEW CHAPTER 37 TO THE NEW HAVEN CODE OF ORDINANCES ESTABLISHING A GRAND AVENUE SPECIAL SERVICES DISTRICT.

THIS ITEM IS FILED WITH THE CITY CLERK, ROOM 202, 200 ORANGE STREET, WHERE IT IS AVAILABLE FOR PUBLIC INSPECTION. PER ORDER ROLAND LEMAR, CHAIRMAN; ATTEST: RON SMITH, CITY CLERK.

IF YOU NEED DISABILITY RELATED ACCOMMODATION, PLEASE CALL THREE BUSINESS DAYS IN ADVANCE OF THE MEETING: 946-8122 (VOICE) OR 946-8582 (TTY).

MINUTES

Legislation.

January 12, 2009

Chairman Lemar called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. in the Aldermanic Chamber of City Hall. Also present were Committee members Perez, Antunes, Lehtonen, Sandman and Plattus. Aids. Joseph Rodriguez and Erin Sturgis-Pascal also attended.

Ordinance amendment adding a new Chapter 37 to the New Haven Code of General Ordinances establishing a Grand Avenue Special Service District.

Speaking for were Aids. Joseph Rodriguez and Sturgis-Pascale; Chrissie Bonanno, Deputy Economic Development Administrator; Carlos Eyzaguirre of the Economic Development Corporation; and Gabriela Campos, Executive Director, Grand Avenue Village Association (GAVA); Angelo Reyes, Norma Franceschi and Rose Cimino, Fairhaven businesspeople and GAVA board members.

Ms. Campos introduced the proposal, telling the Committee that GAVA had worked for 9 years to bring it about. She said that GAVA has sponsored street sweeping and graffiti removal, façade improvements, children's programs and the farmer's market, participated in city-wide programs including the Festival of Arts and Ideas and other activities, and is now at the point where the Special Service District is needed to support continued neighborhood growth and improvement. Ms. Campos also said that she is also working with Yale School of Management on a marketing study of the area.

Ms. Campos then briefly described the proposal, describing the composition of

the board of directors and the budget process, noting that the recommended assessment would be about one percent - less than one-half of the other city Special Service Districts.

Ms. Campos acknowledged that it is difficult to ask for another tax during tough economic times, but said that it is necessary to maintain current services now coming from GAVA.

Responding to questions from Ald. Sandman, Ms. Campos and Ms. Franceschi said that GAVA board members worked to reach all property owners. She said that the proposal would not have been possible without their expressed support. Ms. Campos added that prospective members were given their proposed assessments, as well as an explanation of the voting process involved. She said that most members would pay about \$300, with the smallest at about \$42.00 and largest (a bank) paying about \$4,000.

Ald. Rodriguez said that the larger neighborhood, not just merchants, were involved in the process. Ald. Sturgis-Pascale agreed that most constituents were supportive; adding that the area needs the services to remain viable.

In response to further questions, Ms. Campos described the proposed SSD boundaries.

Chairman Lemar asked about the timeline for the referendum. Mr. Eyzaguirre said that he had been working with the city clerk planning for the referendum according to state law. After the anticipated vote by the Board of Aldermen on February 9, 2009, there would be 60 days in which to hold the referendum. Ms. Campos said she hoped for a vote by March 10, and have the board in place by the end of the month. She said the vote would be done by mail; and that at least half of the property owners - as well as 50% of the assessed property value - must be in favor for enactment.

Ald. Antunes asked about vacant storefronts in the area; and whether new businesses would be compelled to pay a new SSD assessment. Ms. Campos noted that new development has continued regardless of the recession, including two new businesses on Grand Avenue. She said that the SSD assessment would include some of the expected costs of doing business, adding that marketing, enhanced security service and other benefits are much cheaper than if purchased individually.

In response to a question from Ald. Lehtonen, Ms. Campos described how the assessment is billed and collected by the city for the SSD.

Ms. Campos said that the total annual budget for GASDD would be \$20,000 - \$40,000. She said that the tax would provide about half of that with the rest raised in grants.

Ms. Campos then presented a substitution amendment with the following changes:

- Adds "original incorporators" to Class B membership
- Raises the Class C contribution if the overall membership raises assessment.
- The property list has been changed to include only commercial space.

Ald. Sandman asked whether the city was obligated to be on the board. Ms. Bonanno said that the city presently has about \$20,000 in assessments in the district and has a presence on the board of the SSD based on its assessed interest. She added that any change in the city's assessment would have to come through the budget. In response to a question from Ald. Perez, Ms. Bonanno said that the \$20,000 contribution defining Class C membership on the board is in aggregate of all city interests. She said it is a "voluntary payment".

Public Testimony

Brian McGrath, Chapel West Special Service District spoke in favor. He said that New Haven started instituting SSD's in the 80's after authorization by the state in 1973. He said SSDs are the best way of providing "micro-services" - that the neighborhood knows better than the city what's needed at a given time. In response to an earlier question from Ald. Perez, Mr. McGrath said that only taxable entities are voting members of the SSD boards, but non-profits are invited to join and are valuable members.

Frank Alvarado, Spanish-American Association, Grand Avenue spoke in favor, noting the success of a similar SSD on Park Street in Hartford. He said that he works with businesses to help them understand how the SSD works for them.

Fereshteh Bekhrad, 195 Front Street, a developer in the area spoke in favor. She said that a design study is very important, as is a study of area uses to see what is needed and how to plan. She said it is important to include as much of the area elements as possible.

Chrissie Bonanno, Members Town Green SSD and Deputy Economic Development Administrator spoke in favor, using the experience of the TGSSD. She said that the most important considerations are cleanliness and safety. She said that the city must "have a seat at the table" to help address these concerns. Ms. Bonanno said that the city paying "its fair share" helps members feel good about their contributions.

Responding to a question from Ald. Perez, Ms. Bonanno stated that there is no obligation, however, for the city to pay.

Also responding, Ms. Campos added that the members understand that the city must pay to have a seat at the table.

Ald. Lemar asked what the city would get for \$20,000. Ms. Bonanno said that the "pressure would be off" the Parks and Public Works department to clean and maintain the area, as some of the costs would be covered. She added that (enhancement to) lighting and safety takes responsibility off the city to provide those services. She said that the city would do a cost benefit analysis to get support for this.

Gary DeBrizzi, Rizzi Enterprises submitted a letter of support to the Committee which stated, in part, it may attract more business development in my stretch of Grand Ave."

Committee action: Ald. Perez, seconded by Ald. Sandman, moved the substitution amendment. Ald. Perez then motioned to amend by clarifying that

Class C and Class D membership be defined by “aggregates” of dollar amounts. Ald. Perez asked that this amendment be done on the floor. Ald. Lemar said he would offer it at this time. The Committee unanimously voted to approve the substitution and then to recommend approval of the proposal, as thus amended, by the full Board of Aldermen.

The Committee voted to adjourn at 8:00 P.M.

Christina Plass, Legislative Aide.