

SCRANTON CITY COUNCIL

PUBLIC HEARING

IN RE: FILE OF COUNCIL NO. 74, 1993, AS AMENDED,  
 ENTITLED "CITY OF SCRANTON ZONING ORDINANCE OF 1993",  
 BY CHANGING THE ZONING MAP DESIGNATION OF THE JOHN J.  
 AUDUBON SCHOOL FROM R-1A (MEDIUM LOW DENSITY  
 RESIDENTIAL) TO INS-G (GENERAL INSTITUTIONAL) IN THE  
 CENTRAL PLANNING AREA IN THE EASTERN PORTION OF THE  
 CITY OF SCRANTON.

HELD:

Thursday, December 18, 2014

LOCATION:

Council Chambers  
 Scranton City Hall  
 340 North Washington Avenue  
 Scranton, Pennsylvania

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CITY OF SCRANTON COUNCIL:

ROBERT MCGOFF, PRESIDENT

PATRICK ROGAN, VICE-PRESIDENT  
(Not present)

WAYNE EVANS

JOSEPH WECHSLER

WILLIAM GAUGHAN

LORI REED, CITY CLERK

JAMIE MARCIANO, ASSISTANT CITY CLERK

AMIL MINORA, SOLICITOR

1 MR. MCGOFF: I'd like to call this  
2 public hearing to order. Roll call, please.

3 MS. MARCIANO: Mr. Wechsler.

4 MR. WECHSLER: Here.

5 MS. MARCIANO: Mr. Rogan. Mr.

6 Evans.

7 MR. EVANS: Here.

8 MS. MARCIANO: Mr. Gaughan.

9 MR. GAUGHAN: Here.

10 MS. MARCIANO: Mr. McGoff.

11 MR. MCGOFF: Here.

12 The purpose of the said public  
13 hearing is to hear testimony and discuss the  
14 following:

15 AN ORDINANCE - REPEALING FILE OF THE  
16 COUNCIL NO. 11, 2014, AS AMENDED AN  
17 ORDINANCE AMENDING FILE OF COUNCIL NO. 74,  
18 1993, AS AMENDED, ENTITLED "CITY OF SCRANTON  
19 ZONING ORDINANCE OF 1993", BY CHANGING THE  
20 ZONING MAP DESIGNATION OF THE JOHN J.  
21 AUDUBON SCHOOL FROM R-1A (MEDIUM LOW DENSITY  
22 RESIDENTIAL) TO INS-G (GENERAL  
23 INSTITUTIONAL) IN THE CENTRAL PLANNING AREA  
24 IN THE EASTERN PORTION OF THE CITY OF  
25 SCRANTON.

1 I'd first like to ask Attorney  
2 Hailstone to speak on behalf of the  
3 legislation.

4 MR. HAILSTONE: Gentlemen, this  
5 matter was here once before, it involves an  
6 expansion of an existing general institution  
7 district across street to include the  
8 Audubon School. The Audubon School was  
9 closed some time ago by the Scranton School  
10 District because it's condition didn't allow  
11 it to be used for children anymore. There  
12 is public building, Geisinger/CMC placed the  
13 high bid and is prepared to close as early  
14 as tomorrow if this legislation passes.

15 The matter has been reviewed by the  
16 Scranton Planning Commission and approved,  
17 reviewed by the Regional Planning Commission  
18 of Lackawanna County and approved. All of  
19 the appropriate notices have been given, and  
20 I would like to put in the record at this  
21 time a copy of the zoning officer's  
22 affidavit that on December 4 he posted in  
23 the neighborhood of the John J. Audubon  
24 School and a certificate for me which under  
25 108-G of the ordinance requires that on

1           behalf of the applicant, which is here,  
2           Geisinger/CMC, that I sent out certified  
3           mail to a list of neighbors, actually the  
4           ordinance requires only those who abut or  
5           are across the street, but we expanded it to  
6           a larger area in the neighborhood and these  
7           should both become part of the record. It  
8           was also advertised by city council in the  
9           Scranton Times, so that all of the  
10          appropriate notices have been given, mail,  
11          advertisement and posting.

12                        This was explained on May 22 when we  
13          had our last public hearing. If you have  
14          any questions we have a plot plan, but I  
15          submit to you that it is appropriate, it is  
16          in best interests of the entire City of  
17          Scranton and the entire community, and I ask  
18          you that again amend the ordinance to allow  
19          Audubon School to be zoned as general  
20          institution. Thank you.

21                        MR. MCGOFF: Thank you, Attorney  
22          Hailstone.

23                        Paul Narkoonis.

24                        MR. NARKOONIS: Good evening, ladies  
25          and gentlemen. Thank you for allowing me to

1 speak. My name is Paul Narkoonis, I live in  
2 the downtown Scranton and I'm concerned  
3 about this unchecked spreading of the  
4 nonprofits in the Hill Section. Pretty soon  
5 the Hill Section is going to become  
6 institutionalized, it's going to become one  
7 big nonprofit. Thank goodness that Moses  
8 Taylor and Regional Hospital they are now  
9 paying their fair share of property taxes,  
10 which is a great. Geisinger/CMC doesn't.

11 Audubon was a gem up there in the  
12 Hill Section, it was a part of the flavor of  
13 the neighborhood. It has been there for  
14 many years, a lovely building, so,  
15 unfortunately, it had some problems.  
16 Unfortunately, if Geisinger/CMC wanted to be  
17 a good neighbor they could have said, "Look,  
18 here is something we can do, we can help you  
19 out with this us, we don't want this to  
20 die."

21 But they didn't. They let it die.  
22 They watched it die. Now, it's to tear it  
23 down, and it's another architectural piece  
24 that's gone from the neighborhood and more  
25 institutional spread of nonprofits. They

1 have some buildings, houses on the 200 block  
2 of Colfax Avenue, they tore them all down  
3 and put up parking lots in spite of having  
4 two parking lots, two parking garages, those  
5 are parking lots now that's spread. Those  
6 are people that -- it could have been  
7 houses, they are off the tax rolls now.  
8 This spread has to stop. It's becoming out  
9 of hand.

10 The University of Scranton is  
11 becoming out of hand, it's spreading and  
12 spreading and spreading. We are losing the  
13 flavor of the Hill Section and somebody, the  
14 neighbors, small businesses were driven out  
15 of the Hill Section because of this  
16 unchecked growth rate on nonprofits, and I  
17 urge you not to change this zoning. Thank  
18 you for letting me speak.

19 MR. GAUGHAN: Thank you.

20 MR. MCGOFF: Anyone else who would  
21 like to speak to council?

22 MR. SCACCHITTI: Edmund Scacchitti,  
23 attorney, former city solicitor, former city  
24 solicitor to the Scranton Zoning Hearing  
25 Board, resident of 425 Arthur Avenue. From

1 the back deck and the rear of our home I  
2 could see the back end of the Audubon  
3 School.

4 I was here the last time you were  
5 all were here, well, some of you were here,  
6 I don't know, is Mr. Rogan planning on  
7 attending this evening?

8 MR. MCGOFF: He is going to be late.

9 MR. SCACCHITTI: Well, he was late  
10 last time and, frankly, I was offended by  
11 that because he showed up after all of the  
12 objectors had made their presentation, I  
13 believe this is his committee, isn't it,  
14 that's involved with the zoning change?

15 MR. MCGOFF: I'm sorry?

16 MR. SCACCHITTI: Isn't this his --  
17 the chairmen of the committee that is  
18 involved with the zoning change here this  
19 evening?

20 MR. MCGOFF: He is the chair of  
21 Community Development.

22 MR. SCACCHITTI: Well, that's what I  
23 thought, but be that is it may, I don't want  
24 to really go through my argument last time,  
25 but I think it's pertinent to note that in



1 the newspapers in the City of Scranton the  
2 last few days we have seen how giveaways by  
3 the City of Scranton have crippled the city  
4 financially, particularly with regard to the  
5 pension. Past well-meaning, but short-sided  
6 legislators in this community have done  
7 things that now we have to deal with  
8 financially. We had a massive tax increase  
9 last year, we are going to have another tax  
10 increase this year, and the strength of any  
11 community is it's tax base. If any of you  
12 had an opportunity to drive down Gibson  
13 Street, east Gibson Street starting at I  
14 believe it's North Webster, the vicinity of  
15 the synagogue, and see how much real estate  
16 is gone, which has been acquired by I  
17 believe it's Commonwealth Health, which is  
18 now is Moses Taylor and Scranton Regional,  
19 these properties arguably are still tax  
20 producing because there hasn't been any  
21 change in their use, however, it was only a  
22 matter of time before there is going to be a  
23 project before this body of the zoning board  
24 that's going to develop that land and that's  
25 all of that land is going become.

1 I happened to be involved, and we  
2 were last time my neighbor, Rick Jones, who  
3 was chairmen of the committee that did the  
4 last comprehensive zoning change in this  
5 community in 1993 talked about why we have  
6 institutional zones. The corner block of  
7 Arthur, Colfax, both sides, and the five are  
8 some of the highest income tax producing  
9 real estate in the city except for certain  
10 neighborhoods in East Mountain and in  
11 Greenridge.

12 I don't have to tell you, you have a  
13 esteemed member of the realty community on  
14 your board that by permitting this zoning  
15 change and allowing Geisinger/CMC to cross  
16 Mulberry Street into a residential district  
17 is going to undermine the fabric of that  
18 residential area not only to the extent that  
19 now we have a footprint outside of the  
20 original footprint intended to be governing  
21 all of the institutions within the city  
22 years ago, but the immediate consequences to  
23 every piece of real estate on that block and  
24 probably a fourth of Arthur is going to be  
25 devalued, and you don't have to take my word

1 for it, I'm sure that Mr. Evans is going to  
2 agree with that.

3 But getting back to my point  
4 earlier, the city is drowning in its own  
5 debt. Elected officials have to make  
6 decisions that are going to enure to the  
7 benefit of the citizens who live here and  
8 who pay the bill. My real estate tax bill  
9 for the coming year is probably going to be  
10 close to \$7,000. If I'm not paying it, the  
11 services that the city provide are not going  
12 to be provided. If you continue to permit,  
13 as that gentleman pointed out, the erosion  
14 of the residential tax base in that  
15 community, then let the last person leaving  
16 the city turn out the lights because that's  
17 essentially where we are headed, but from a  
18 legal standpoint what concerns me the most  
19 about this project is my esteemed colleague,  
20 Attorney Hailstone, appeared here again this  
21 evening and said this is in the best  
22 interest of the City of Scranton, but he  
23 hasn't articulated how. Clearly what's not  
24 in the best interest is the residents, the  
25 immediate residents in the neighborhood of

1 Geisinger Community Medical Center, those  
2 residents of four of Colfax, the four of  
3 Arthur. I don't know what the benefit is to  
4 the City of Scranton? Have they guaranteed  
5 that if they build something that all of the  
6 people who are going to be employed there  
7 are going to come from the city? All of the  
8 people are going to be hired and work in the  
9 city? You know that's not the case. So I  
10 don't know how it benefits the city, but  
11 what concerns me from a legal standpoint is  
12 this is another giveaway. You are giving  
13 Geisinger Community Medical Center a zoning  
14 change for a property that they have no  
15 plans for so if they decide in two years to  
16 build an infectious disease specialty center  
17 on that location is anybody going to be  
18 happy with that? If they decide to build a  
19 building to treat acute alcohol and drug  
20 addiction, is that going to be compatible  
21 with the immediate neighborhood? This is  
22 what you are allowing them to do. It's note  
23 as they are coming here tonight and saying  
24 to you "Gentlemen, here is the drawing, here  
25 is the plan, here is what we are doing, here

1 is how many people we are going to employ,  
2 here's how we are going to blend in the  
3 neighborhood."

4 Nothing. Gentlemen, this is a  
5 giveaway. Don't fall into a long line of  
6 the predecessors who have given this city  
7 away by allowing the zoning change to occur.  
8 I don't think that it's in our interest  
9 certainly, but I don't know how anyone  
10 sitting in front of me can tell me how this  
11 is going to benefit the City of Scranton.  
12 Thank you very much.

13 MR. MCGOFF: Thank you. Anyone else  
14 who wishes to address speak? If there is no  
15 one else, public hearing is closed.

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C E R T I F I C A T E

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3 I hereby certify that the proceedings and  
4 evidence are contained fully and accurately in the  
5 notes of testimony taken by me at the hearing of the  
6 above-captioned matter and that the foregoing is a true  
7 and correct transcript of the same to the best of my  
8 ability.  
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12 CATHENE S. NARDOZZI, RPR  
13 OFFICIAL COURT REPORTER  
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