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**CITY OF STAMFORD**  
**HISTORIC PRESERVATION ADVISORY COMMISSION**

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**(FINAL) Minutes of the Historic Preservation Advisory Commission (HPAC)**

Date: Regular Meeting held: August 1, 2017  
Location: Government Center, 888 Washington Blvd., Stamford CT 06901  
6th Floor Safety Training Room  
Present: Lynn Drobbin, Anne Goslin, David Woods, Barry Hersh, Rebecca  
Shannonhouse, Elena Kalman

**REGULAR MEETING**

**I. Call to order** (Meeting called to order 7:14 p.m.)

A motion was made to approve R. Shannonhouse and E. Kalman to serve as voting members for the meeting, and to fill the vacant seat.

(The motion was moved by B. Hersh and seconded by D. Woods, and carried unanimously.)

**II. Approval of Minutes**

There were three items of note that Lynn Drobbin asked to be added to the minutes, as clarification of her thoughts.

1. Under item B-3, (Hoyt-Barnum House Relocation) Lynn asked to add the words: *"There is no letter required. However, if Barry would like to write the letter, he has the support of the Commission."*
2. Under item C-2, (Proposed Revisions to the Demolition Delay Ordinance) Lynn asked to add the words: *"The 50 year old standard requirement/limitation for what constitutes an historic building cannot be removed because then the City would not be in compliance with National Register guidelines. Lynn said that there should be strengthening of the language in this section. The City of Stamford, with the Historic Preservation Advisory Commission in place, is a Certified Local Government (CLG). The CLG's must be in compliance with the National Register guidelines. The National Register criteria states that a property can be eligible for the National Register if it is under 50 years old and if it is of exceptional significance. There are several important modernist buildings in the City (one of which is coming up shortly for review) that are significant and may not be, as of yet, 50 years old."*
3. Under Item C-17, (Proposed Revisions to the Demolition Delay Ordinance), Lynn asked to add the words *"in accordance with National Register guidelines, the entire tax lot is considered the boundaries of a property. Allowing site work, such as removal of landscaping, the installation of paving, etc. would compromise an historic property's context and the context of a resource is important in maintaining its historic significance..."*



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A motion was made to approve the minutes of the July meeting with the additions.

(The motion was moved by L. Drobbin and seconded by A. Goslin and carried unanimously.)

**III. New Business**

**A. 3 High Ridge Park**

Participants: William Hennessey, attorney; Jason Klein, attorney; of Carmody Torrance Sandak & Hennessey, representatives for the owners.

1. L. Drobbin introduced the project as a referral from the Planning Board which has requested that HPAC review the Text Change for the site at No. 3 High Ridge Park. It is in the High Ridge Park corporate center. She further noted that there is a letter from SHPO that the building is significant. (The letter will be added to the meeting notes.) The letter indicates that the High Ridge Park is "eligible" for listing on the National Register. Lynn confirmed that it is not currently listed. Lynn also noted that since it is eligible for listing it has the same protection as listed properties. D. Woods asked again about the term "eligible" as that implies only an opinion and not a confirmed listing. Lynn said she will get documentation that shows when a property is eligible it has the same protection as a listed property.
2. W. Hennessey (Bill) asked if he could introduce the project. He said that High Ridge Park is owned by George Comfort & Sons. He said that a Text Change is pending. The office park sits in a C-D zone. This zone is mapped in about 6 places around town. It is a very old zone designation. It was first designed as a flexible larger parcel zone. At one time it was a retail zone. It was reinvented in the 1960s to include large office park parcels. There was urban renewal going on at the time. The C-D zone developments have slowed down over time. The current agenda for the City is to support center city office commercial development. The parks have struggled for tenants. The City's last Master Plan recommended that changes be allowed to C-D zones. He said that the City has been approached to convert a C-D zone to housing under a different proposal.
3. Bill noted that these larger parcels need to find new uses for unoccupied buildings. There have been some recommendations that C-D zones might be changed to housing, if they are not on a highway. He further noted that there is an excess of office space in many of these parks. There is more density now in commercial office interiors. There is also more desire and a trend for office spaces to be located in the central business district. All these issues are making the office parks of the past have more vacancies.
4. Bill also said that the owners have made improvements to this park. The buildings were designed by Victor Bisharat. Building 3 is a Bisharat design originally and was occupied by Frontier for many years. It has been empty for two years. Many of the Bisharat buildings have been altered or changed over time to address modern needs. Many buildings are now multi-tenanted and have good occupancy.



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5. Bill also gave some background on history with C-D zones. He said the Master Plan notes that office parks will need to be developed differently. But the City has also indicated that they do not want destination retail and entertainment.
6. A Lifetime Fitness development is being proposed for the Building 3 site. They are a developer of a different kind of product. It is an upscale membership oriented fitness facility. The one in Harrison has squash courts. They have proposed a Text Change to allow the project to proceed. After the Text Change then there will be design work for the building and the site. They intend this to be a “non-entertainment” destination.
7. The owners and Lifetime Fitness have met with neighbors. The proposal shows that a Lifetime Fitness building will replace Building 3. It is the last building in the park. Parts of the building are below grade. It is difficult to develop. The floors are low. All mechanicals need to be ripped out. It has been on the market and there is no interest. The building is very hard to rehabilitate as it will cost too much in this market. They want to “reskin” the building. Bill further said that the building design that is on the sheets is a “prototype” only, and not an actual design for that site.
8. The neighbors are worried about sound, light, noise, traffic, etc. Lynn asked if the developers would have an interest in making a new building compatible with the other park buildings. Bill said after the Text Change is resolved, the developer can discuss how to make it compatible.
9. Barry asked how big the proposed building will be. Bill said it will be about 110,000 sq. ft. It may be further from residences and a little closer to the senior center. Barry also asked if the project goes ahead will the demolition permit be subject to the 180 day delay. The group was generally not sure of this and needs to be clarified. Bill said he does not have the answer. Lynn said that it is an “eligible” district and therefore subject to the standard delay. (All generally agreed that clarification is needed).
10. Barry said that he is concerned that when the building is demolished, the replacement may or may not be compatible. The Text Change will probably result in the demolition of Building 3. Bill agreed. Bill said that there is no market for the existing building. Barry said that Building 3 is not great. Lynn said that it is a contributing structure in an eligible district. Barry thinks there are two options: (A) not to support the Text Change; or (B) support the Text Change with the hope that they will make a compatible building. He also noted that the owners may choose to demolish the building regardless.
11. Elena asked if there can be an assurance that the other buildings will remain if we allow this one to come down. Bill and all generally agreed that there is no assurance that others won't be demolished. He added that the Text Change is being proposed for all C-D districts. The same standard will then be in effect at the other locations around the City.



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12. Elena also said that the commission may not be able to encourage the building be designed so it is compatible with the existing structure, and with the other Bisharat buildings in the park. That is a very hard thing to do. The recreation type building will need to be much bigger and a different shape than the existing Building 3. David agreed. He said that it will be almost impossible to enforce a compatible design on the developers. There will also be too many opinions of what it means to be compatible. He also noted that the Commission will only have the ability to comment about some of the details. The shape and structure of the recreation building will need to be different. They are a very specific building shape, by the use.
13. Rebecca asked, why have the other buildings been able to get tenants and this one has not? He said that Frontier moved out and there have not been other single users. ONS did look at it for a mini "hospital". There was concern for a medical use in the park.
14. Lynn opened the discussion up to other interested parties in the room: Jackie Kaiko of the North Stamford Association said that lighting, noise, and the outdoor pool, is significantly different than the current use and is more like a recreation use. The association does not support the Text Change. Helen Devin, also on the North Stamford Association, asked if the Text Change will affect other development sites. Bill said that the Text Change would apply to every C-D zone in the City. Jackie said once this change takes place then there could be significant changes in other locations. There should be concern with the uses as suggested by the Master Plan. The group has not been in favor of making the change at the BLT site on the Long Ridge C-D zone proposal. Helen added that this is a huge change to this zone.
15. Rebecca asked if there are tax credit options or if tax incentives could be used to save the building. She also asked if the owners will be more likely to save it if there is a tax incentive. Bill said that they have not reviewed those options. David said that he has more concern with the use change. The new building has outdoor recreation that is not compatible with the office park as it stands. He also said that there may be good options for the owners to renovate and multi-tenant the building to allow for the smaller office areas that are more popular now. He said he is not sure if the owners have considered the renovation options. He further noted that office parks are not in the difficult shape that Mr. Hennessey has said. There is still a need for these office sites. They are very appealing.

**Discussion of Resolution**

The Text Change is Zoning Board Application No. 217-01. Lynn noted that the SHPO letter states that the office park is eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places. All HPAC members generally agreed they are against the Text Change because it may open the door to the demolition of this and other buildings in the park. All agreed that a letter addressed to the Planning Board should state that the Text Change may allow demolition of buildings on the site, as well as demolition in other similar districts in the City. HPAC agreed that the letter should note that because the park is eligible for listing; it may also be eligible for state and federal tax credits. Other options to demolition may be available to the owners. All generally agreed that the letter should not cover the change in uses on the site as that is outside of HPAC jurisdiction. It was noted that most are against allowing recreation in commercial C-D districts. It could further endanger the other buildings.



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(L. Drobbin made a motion to approve the letter with the language noted. It was seconded by E. Kalman and it carried unanimously.)

**IV. Old Business**

There were no old business items discussed.

**V. Adjournment**

Ms. Lynn Drobbin adjourned the meeting at 9:15 p.m.

Drafted by: David W. Woods AIA - Secretary - August 10, 2017  
Stamford, Historic Preservation Advisory Commission

Meetings are normally on the second Tuesday of the month starting at 7:00 p.m. in the 6th Floor Safety Training Room. The next meeting will be Tuesday, September 12, 2017 in the Small Conference Room adjacent to the Safety Training Room where HPAC usually meets.