



City of Stamford
Zoning Board

STAFF REPORT

TO: CITY OF STAMFORD ZONING BOARD
FROM: VINEETA MATHUR, ASSOCIATE PLANNER
SUBJECT: **ZB #220-45, 46 & 221-19, 821-833 East Main Street, 27 – 29 Lafayette Street, Zoning Map Change, Special Permit, General Development Plan, Site and Architectural Plan and Requested Uses**
DATE: June 14, 2021
MASTER PLAN: Master Plan Category 9 (Urban Mixed Use)
ZONING: MX-D (Mixed Use), C-I (Commercial- Intermediate)

Introduction

The Applicants 819 East Main Street LLC & 831-833 East Main Street LLC are requesting approval of several related applications including Zoning Map Change to MX-D district, General Development Plan, Special Permit and Site and Architectural Plan and Requested Uses Application to facilitate the redevelopment of properties located at 27 and 29 Lafayette Street, 821, 825 and 831 East Main Street to construct a five (5) story building with a total of 85 dwelling units, 85 at grade parking spaces and approximately 2950 sq.ft. of retail space.

Background

A previous application (218-35 & 36) involving four of the five properties was reviewed and approved by the Zoning Board in September 2018. The applicant requested a Zoning Map Change, General Development Plan, Special Permit at that time. The previously approved GDP comprised of 63 dwelling units, 79 parking spaces and 2501 sq.ft. of retail space. The Applicant has since acquired an adjoining vacant property 831 East Main Street and incorporated it as part of the development. The Applicant submitted applications 220-45 (Zoning Map Change) and 220-46 (General Development Plan and Special Permit) in November 2020 and subsequently submitted 221-19 (Final Site Plan and Requested Uses Application) in April of 2021.

Site and Surroundings

The Site is currently improved with two multi-family buildings (4 units in total), one single family building, a single story retail building containing multiple tenants and a vacant lot (831 East Main Street). The Site is approximately 34,562 sq.ft and is located on the southeast corner of Lafayette Street and East Main Street. Most of the site area is currently paved with building and parking.

The Site is surrounded by a mix of multi-family residential buildings, restaurants, neighborhood scale retail stores, auto service establishments, a bicycle shop, tutoring classes, car and truck rental establishment, and tile shop among several other commercial uses. The surrounding area consists of Master Plan Category 9 (Urban Mixed Use) to the North, East and West, and Categories 11 (Downtown) and 13 (Industrial – General) to the south. Neighboring zoning districts include R-H and C-N to the north, C-I to the east, M-L to the south, and R-MF to the west.

Proposed Development

The Applicant proposes to demolish the existing buildings on the site and construct a new 85 unit apartment building with 85 parking spaces.

The following approvals are needed to facilitate the change:

220-45 - Zoning Map Change

The Applicant requests a change from the current C-I designation to the MX-D designation for 831 East Main Street. This Zoning Map Change will ensure a coherent zoning designation for the entirety of the development site with four properties already being in the MX-D district. The following criteria needs to be met for the MX-D designation.

- a. The proposed development is consistent with the Master Plan and the objectives of comprehensive municipal plans for redevelopment, renewal, or neighborhood preservation and rehabilitation.

*The mixed residential and retail medium density development is consistent with the objectives of Master Plan Category #9 in terms of uses and density. The development is consistent with the East Side Corridor neighborhood plan as well as the East Main Street Corridor Neighborhood Plan. **Satisfied.***

- b. The proposed development consists of housing and such other uses as will be supportive of and contribute to the vitality of the Downtown Land Use Category.

*The development consists of 85 units of housing and infills an area surrounded by similar scaled development including Glenview Houses and Eastside Commons. The added residential units as well the proposed retail use will be supportive of the Downtown. **Satisfied.***

- c. The proposed development consists of such proportions as are most appropriate to its functional integration into the neighborhood.

*The proposed development is in scale with the surrounding recent development including the five story Glenview Houses and Eastside Commons. **Satisfied.***

- d. The proposed development site plan is so designed in its space allocation, orientation, materials, landscaping and other features as to produce a stable and desirable character, complimentary to the surrounding neighborhood.

*The proposed sidewalks along East Main Street and Lafayette Street will be a vast improvement over current conditions. The ground floor retail and amenity space and the screened parking garage will further enhance the pedestrian experience. The curb cuts will be significantly reduced and on-street parking will be increased and better organized. **Satisfied.***

- e. The proposed development includes active or passive recreational amenities that will provide a superior living and working environment for the residents and employees therein.

*The proposed GDP includes residential amenity space and retail along East Main Street which will both be beneficial to the residents of the development. **Satisfied.***

Criteria for designation of site for MX-D infill

- i. At least twenty-five percent (25%) of the area of the site shall have been legally used for commercial purposes or vacant at the time of application for re-designation; Office buildings previously converted to residential use shall also satisfy this requirement.

*The subject property 831 East Main Street is entirely vacant. **Satisfied.***

- ii. Site area of at least 20,000 square feet; Site area of at least 10,000 square feet may be allowed in the Downtown when contiguous to existing MX-D zoned land, provided that such sites shall be limited to a floor area ratio of one and one-quarter (1.25) as further described in b-ii below.

*The property 831 East Main Street being added to the existing MX-D property is 11,561 sq.ft. and will be added to existing MX-D site. The combined site area of the MX-D project is 34,562 sq.ft therefore the condition is met. **Satisfied.***

- iii. At least fifty (50) lineal feet of street frontage;

*The lot frontage of 831 East Main Street is 50 linear foot along East Main Street. **Satisfied.***

iv. At least fifty percent (50%) of the site frontage shall be either vacant or used for parking at the time of the application, provided that the Zoning Board may waive such requirement when the proposed Infill Development requires the preservation and enhancement of existing housing and/or historic buildings and diminishes the effect of commercial uses on the residential character of the site and surrounding streets. Office buildings previously converted to residential use shall also satisfy this requirement.

*The entire property 831 East Main Street is currently vacant. **Satisfied.***

220-45 General Development Plan

The General Development plan was submitted in advance of the Final Site Plan application. Staff recommends approval of the General Development Plan which facilitates the redevelopment of the underutilized site. Further discussion of the site plan is in the Final Site Plan/Special Permit Section below.

221-19 Site and Architectural Plan and Requested Uses & Special Permit

The applicant proposes to build a five story structure with retail/restaurant use along East Main Street and residential amenities along Lafayette Street.

Building Design

The proposed project is similar to the previously approved development on the site with the primary change being that the current proposal is a five (5) story building with a larger footprint versus a six (6) story building with a smaller footprint along East Main Street.

The building façade is broken into the base, middle and top by way of material finishes. The base (ground floor) will have Drivit Limestone finish, floors two through four have a STO Creative Brick finish and the fifth (top) floor has Azek sheets on the façade. The fifth stories units have balconies which provide relief to the façade. The corner of Lafayette Street and East Main Street is shown with a distinct window and elevation design emphasizing this corner.

Access

The site will be accessed by a 24' wide two way driveway along the southern portion of the site along Lafayette Street. This entrance accesses the basement level parking garage and the at grade parking lot at the rear of the building.

Below Market Rate Housing

The Applicant proposes 10 Below Market Rate units at 50 % of Area Median Income. Further discussion is included in the Special Permit section.

Parking

The Applicant proposes 85 parking spaces for the 85 dwelling units proposed on the site. The one to one parking ratio for 2 bedroom or less was permitted under Section 12.D.1.c. The applications were filed under the old regulation.

The Applicant has submitted a Parking Management Plan which proposes various measures to increase parking supply if needed including shared parking arrangements with neighboring retail uses.

Landscaping and Open Space

Ground floor open space totals 4,350 sq.ft. of area and comprised of streetscape amenities, perimeter plantings and parking island in the rear parking lot. A 4000 sq.ft. roof deck is proposed as a residential amenity. A white vinyl screening fence is proposed on the south and east property boundaries. The applicant should submit details of the roof deck prior to a Building Permit for further review by staff.

Unit Distribution

The units are evenly distributed between one and two bedrooms with 43 one bedroom units and 42 two bedroom units proposed.

Special Permit

A. Below Market Rate units (Section 7.4.C.1.k)

Pursuant to Section 7.4.C.1.k, Applicants request Special Permit approval to provide 10 BMR units at 50% of AMI.

The base BMR requirement for the 85 unit project is 8.5 based on a 10% requirement. Based on existing market rate affordable housing, an additional BMR unit at 65% AMI is required for every 2 market rate affordable units removed. This results in an additional 2.5 BMR unit requirement at 65% AMI. The applicant requests to use the equivalency in the regulations to provide the units at a lower AMI level (50% AMI) and therefore provide 1.5 BMR units in addition to the base 8.5 BMR unit requirement. Therefore the total BMR units proposed are 10 BMR units at 50% AMI. Staff supports this Special Permit request which provides the additional units at lower affordability.

B. Retail and Restaurant Uses

Pursuant to Sections 9.C.3 and 9.C.6.a, in order to maximize flexibility and potential success of the retail space, Applicants request approval for all retail and restaurant type uses allowed in the zone.

Allowing flexibility in terms of retail and restaurant uses within the scope of those permitted in the MX-D district is essential for ensuring that the space is successfully occupied.

C. Setbacks

Pursuant to Section 9.C.4.h, Applicants request approval of the proposed setbacks as depicted on the Zoning Location Survey and site plans.

The front setbacks along Lafayette Street (3.6') and East Main Street (7.5') allow for an adequate sidewalk on both streets and allows a strong street presence for the building. The MX-D district allows for 0 front setbacks under this Special Permit.

D. Reduced Parking Ratio

Pursuant to Section 12.D.1.c, Applicants request Special Permit approval to provide parking at a ratio of 1.0 spaces per unit and potentially share parking with future retail uses, subject to future administrative approval by the Zoning Board.

While the application is consistent with the parking ratio in the regulations at the time of submission, the parking requirement increased for the area subsequently. Staff recommends that the Applicant employ shared parking arrangement with neighboring retail uses to move closer to the new parking ratio.

E. Location of parking close to residential building.

Pursuant to Section 12-B-1, Applicants request Special Permit approval to permit parking within 5' of the proposed residential building.

As required under previous Section 12, this condition is acceptable as long as the residential units are greater than 5 feet above grade of the parking spaces which is satisfied under the current proposal.

Referral Comments

Stamford Planning Board

The Stamford Planning Board, during its regularly scheduled meeting held on December 22, 2020 recommended approval of the applications for Zoning Map Change, Special Permit and General Development Plan and found the request to be compatible with the neighborhood and consistent with Master Plan Category #9 (Urban Mixed Use).

City of Stamford Engineering Bureau

In a letter dated December 18, 2020, Willetta Capelle, Coordinator of Site Plan Reviews and Inspections at the Engineering Bureau in response to 220-45 stated that the proposed Zoning Map

Change has no impact on the authority of the department. With reference to Application 220-46, General Development Plan, the Applicant shall be required to meet the requirements of the Stamford Drainage Manual.

Fire Marshall

Fire Marshall Walter Seely in an email dated November 19, 2020 regarding Application 220-45 & 46 stated that he did not see any issues with the development and recommended a Full NFPA 13 fire sprinkler system with a wall hydrant in the basement parking garage. In a second email dated April 30, 2021, in response to Application 221-19, the Fire Marshall confirmed that he did not have any concerns regarding the five story building.

Traffic Transportation and Parking Bureau

The Traffic Transportation and Parking Bureau provided preliminary comments to the applicant in a memo dated November 18, 2020 addressing the proposed density at the location and stated that additional traffic study is not required. In a letter dated February 21, 2021, Frank Petise provided several comments on the proposal including recommending removal of on-street parking spaces on East Main Street, a one-way circulation for the parking lot, relocation of the existing fire hydrant, coordinate location of street lights with the Traffic Bureau, recommended provision of a traffic signs and pavement marking plan and reiterated the \$35,000 contribution for a traffic signal cabinet at the corner of Lafayette and East Main Street among other changes.

Summary

Staff believes that the proposed project will improve this section of the East Side neighborhood. Building on the previously approved development, the current proposal enhances retail and housing opportunities as well as increases the walkability along Lafayette and East Main Street. The addition of ten (10) Below Market Rate units will further increase affordable housing. Staff recommends approval of the project and recommends that the Applicant address outstanding comments from the Traffic Bureau and formalize shared parking arrangements with nearby commercial uses.