



City of Stamford
Zoning Board

STAFF REPORT

TO: CITY OF STAMFORD ZONING BOARD
FROM: VINEETA MATHUR, PRINCIPAL PLANNER
SUBJECT: ZB #222-03 & 222-04, 441 Canal Street, Zoning Map Change, Special Permit, Site and Architectural Plan and Requested Uses
DATE: May 5, 2022

MASTER PLAN: Master Plan Category 9 (Urban Mixed Use)

ZONING: M-G (General Manufacturing)

REQUESTED ACTIONS:

222-03	Zoning Map Change	Change from M-G to R-HD
222-04	Site and Architectural Plan and Requested Uses	4.B.11.m.(4)(a) and Section 19.D
	Special Permits	Subsection 4.B.11.m.(4).(c).(i) Authorized Uses Subsection 4.B.11.m.(4).(c).(ii) Base Height Subsection 4.B.11.m.(4).(c).(iv) Front Setback Subsection 4.B.11.m.(4).(c).(v) Side Setback Subsection 12.A.3.b Garage Ramp design

Introduction

The Applicants First National Joint Venture, LLC (“FNJV”) and Canal Street Fund LLC (collectively “the Applicants”) are requesting approval of related applications including Zoning Map Change to R-HD district, Special Permit and Site and Architectural Plan and Requested Uses Applications to facilitate the redevelopment of properties located at 441 Canal Street, 481 Canal Street, 0 Canal Street and 50 John Street to construct an eighteen story (18) story building with a total of 401 dwelling units, 429 parking spaces and approximately 7,000 sf of retail space.

Background

The site is located within walking distance of the Stamford Transportation Center and in close proximity to Stamford Downtown. The South End Neighborhood Study (SENS) recommended redevelopment of sites along Dock Street including this location for high density development. The current proposal will allow for the implementation of the recommendation of the neighborhood study and update the zoning for the site to match the underlying Urban Mixed Use Master Plan designation.

Site and Surroundings

The Site fronts on Dock Street, Canal Street and John Street and is approximately 2.23 acres in size. It is currently vacant. It was previously occupied by retail and office uses. The site is currently in the M-G zoning district which reflects the predominant uses of this site in the past.

Proposed Development

The Applicant proposes to construct an 18 story building with 401 residential units and ground floor retail use along Dock Street. The proposed building is thoughtfully designed and aims to create a welcoming streetscape along all three frontages while fulfilling the design requirements of the R-HD zoning district. A large landscaped plaza with seating is designed at the corner of Dock Street and John Street. The frontages along John and Canal Street are lined with ground floor residential units which are set back from the street and have private landscaped terraces fronting the sidewalk. The proposed design screens the parking garage from all street frontages. The building steps back with height and narrows to two towers on a podium.

The following approvals are needed to facilitate the development:

222-03 - Zoning Map Change

The Applicant requests a change from the current M-G designation to the R-HD zoning designation. The R-HD district is a transit oriented high density, high rise zoning district for sites within Master Plan Categories 5, 9, 11 and 16. The subject site is in Master Plan Category 9 and fits the objective of this zoning district due to its location. The site also meets the minimum size criteria of 40,000 sf for designation as R-HD. The subject parcel is 97,052 sf.

222-09 Site and Architectural Plan and Requested Uses & Special Permit

Access

The vehicular access to the building will be through two (2) two-way driveways, one each on Canal and John Street. The entrances are located towards the southern end of the building on both sides thus allowing a continuous pedestrian area along the three frontages of the building on Canal, John and Dock Street.

The main pedestrian access to the building is from the lobby located at the corner of Dock Street and John Street. This allows convenient access to the train station and the Urban Transit Way. A second lobby is located along Canal Street.

Unit Distribution

The proposed unit mix is as follows:

Studio – 31 units (avg. 560 sf)

One-bedroom – 276 units (avg. 770 sf)

Two bedroom – 61 units (avg. 1,155 sf)

Three bedroom – 28 units (avg. 1,375 sf)

Duplex – 5 units (avg. 1,535 sf)

Parking

The Applicant proposes 429 parking spaces in a five level above grade garage wrapped by residential apartments on three sides.

Residential Parking

The parking requirement stated by the applicant on the zoning chart is 427 (417 for residential and 10 for retail). A breakdown of the parking requirement by unit type is forthcoming from the applicant based on the request by the Zoning Board at the public hearing on April 25th.

The requirement per unit set in Section 12 Table 12.7 for Parking Category 1 is as follows:

Studio – 0.75 space, one bedroom – 1 space, two bedroom – 1.25 spaces, three bedroom - 1.5 spaces.

The parking requirement for BMR units is as follows:

Studio – 0.5 space, one bedroom – 0.75 space, two bedroom – 1 spaces, three bedroom - 1.25 spaces.

Non Residential Parking

Per Section 4.B.11.e (Parking) within the R-HD regulations, parking requirement for the non-commercial use is 2 spaces per 1000 sf of floor area (excluding the first 2,500 sf). The non-residential floor area is 6,794 sf resulting in a requirement of 10 spaces. The project provides 10 spaces for non-residential use.

Electric Vehicle spaces

The garage includes 44 electric vehicle (EV) spaces where only 22 EV spaces are required. All 44 EV spaces count towards the parking requirement given they are twice the number of required EV spaces per Section 12.L.2.b.

Bike spaces

The development has 110 Class A bike spaces and 40 Class B bike spaces compared to 48 Class A spaces and 55 Class B spaces required.

Landscaping and Open Space

The development includes both usable open space as well as Publicly Accessible Amenity Space.

Publicly Accessible Amenity Space (PAAS)

The R-HD district requires 5% of the lot area to be designated as PAAS per section 4.B.11.h. This development includes a significant amount of Publicly Accessible Open Space, totaling nearly 1.7 times the required PAAS. The total PAAS provided is approximately 10,000 sf (10.6% of lot area) compared to 4853 sf required (5% of lot area) per the open space diagram submitted on 04/27/22. The PAAS will be required to meet the General Requirements of Section 6 including signage, accessibility, design of landscaping and amenities. A public access easement and a landscape maintenance agreement will need to be recorded. No bonuses are sought for the PAAS and therefore additional requirements for certain PAASs (Section 6.C) are not applicable.

Usable Open Space (For use by residents only)

The development provides more than double the amount of required Usable Open Space. A total of 56,671 sf of Usable Open Space is provided for the residents. Of the total, ground floor usable open space for residents totals 11,381 sf and comprises of private terraces and common landscaped areas. The remainder of the Usable Open Space is provided as amenity deck (20,910 sf) and private balconies and terraces (24,380 sf). This amenity far exceeds the requirement of 30,075 sf of Usable Open Space required based on 75 sf per unit.

Below Market Rate Housing

The development has a requirement to provide 40.1 Below Market Rate units at 50 % of Area Median Income. The Applicants have proposed to provide 40 units on site with a fractional fee in lieu at this time. They have also indicated that they will explore alternative means of compliance with this requirement in the near future in consultation with the community.

R-HD Architectural Design standards

The site meets and exceeds the design standards of the R-HD zoning district as indicated below:

Building Elements

R-HD district recommends a clear base, middle and top. The proposed building achieves this by use of setbacks, terraces and changes in material at various levels. The major breaks in the building are after level 5, level 8 and level 11. Further the tower portion of the building includes variations as it rises up to the highest residential level.

Building Height and Volume

The R-HD standards encourage buildings to be designed so as to reduce their perceived height and bulk by incorporating various architectural strategies such as dividing the mass into smaller scale components and providing articulation of all facades. The proposed building achieves this by stepping the building, breaking it into two offset towers, having balconies and terraces at multiple levels and articulating the façade around windows in both the brick and stucco portions. The vertical metal panel sections along Canal and John Street further break the massing of the building along the long frontages.

Facades and Materials

The building base encompasses the first five stories and is clad in brick while upper stories use stucco. The use of articulation of the brickwork around the windows creates visual interest. This design strategy is continued on the upper levels.

The main entrance to the building at the corner of Dock Street and John Street has been given special emphasis by use of glass on the exterior of the two story lobby, a wood canopy and planting. The use of glass for the retail and lobby areas allows visibility into the building further enhances the pedestrian experience. The project uses high quality materials throughout including brick, metal and stucco complemented by articulate application.

Screening of Roof top mechanicals

Level 19 and 20 of the building comprise of enclosures for mechanicals and elevator/stair towers. The enclosures are setback from the façade of the two towers and will have minimal visual impact from the street level.

Building Entrances

The primary entrance to the building is oriented to the street and not a parking area. Locating the main entrance at the corner of Dock and John Street ensures high visibility and convenient access to the train station.

Storefronts

The building meets and exceeds the standards for storefront design prescribed in the R-HD district based on review of the architectural plan. These include minimum floor to ceiling height of the retail store (12' required, 15' provided), minimum height of windows (6' required, > 10' provided), maximum window sill height from floor (3' required, < 2' proposed), glazing of facade (minimum 75% required, > 75% provided).

The Applicant is preparing a summary showing the compliance with this standard.

Ground Floor Residences

The development has residences on the ground floor along John Street and Canal Street. These units are setback from the sidewalk along both streets with a planted buffer along the sidewalk and wide private terraces fronting the units. These features provide substantial screening for the units allowing them privacy. The Applicant is seeking a Special Permit to allow Ground floor residences along John Street and within 100' of Dock Street.

Special Permit

A. Authorized Uses - Section 4.B.11.m.(4).(c).(i)

Pursuant to Section 4.B.11.m.(4).(c).(ii), Applicants request Special Permit approval to allow residential the building base to be set back from John Street and Canal Street

The proposed uses are compatible with the neighborhood and adequately screened from the adjacent sidewalk with landscaping and private terraces. The 7000 sf ground floor retail use proposed along Dock Street sufficiently provides activation along the three street frontages. The proposed landscaped area between the private terraces and the public sidewalk allows separation between the public and private realms while providing an attractive streetscape.

B. Base Height - Section 4.B.11.m.(4).(c).(ii)

Pursuant to Section 4.B.11.m.4.c.ii the Applicant requests modification of the requirement of providing the designated Building Base within 15' of the curb line.

The Zoning Board may modify the Base Height of a Building if such modification allows for better alignment with existing Buildings and Structures, or for design features that improve the overall appearance or quality of the Building.

The terraces proposed along John and Canal Street necessitate a setback of the building base more than 15' along these frontages.

C. Front Setback from Curb Line - Section 4.B.11.m.(4).(c).(iv)

Pursuant to Section 4.B.11.m. (4).(c).(iv) to allow a setback from the Curb Line greater than 30ft on John and Dock Street. The Special Permit is subject to the satisfaction of one of the following criteria:

- Allows for better alignment with existing Buildings and Structures, or for design features that improve the overall appearance or quality of the Building;
- Allows for landscaped exterior Courts or other Building or public open space elements that enhance the streetscape; Allows for drives or access to required off-street parking or pick-up and drop-off for Building residents or their guests; or
- Allows for the rational development of the site because of specific site conditions and constraints.

The proposed front setbacks meet all three findings including providing design features which improve the overall appearance of the building (public and private terraces on all three street frontages); exterior landscaping on all three street frontages (allowing for infiltration) and finally the optimum building footprint for a large site with three fronts while wrapping a parking garage with residential use.

D. Side Setback - Section 4.B.11.m.(4).(c).(v)

The side yard setback required is a minimum of 15 feet beyond 70 feet of the Street Line. Pursuant to Section 4.B.11.m.(4).(c).(v) the Applicant seeks to modify the side setback required along the southerly for two small portions indicated on the ‘Special Permit Exhibit’ dated April 22, 2022.

The Zoning Board may reduce the Side Setback for a shared lot line for buildings or portions of buildings not exceeding 5 stories or 60 feet, whichever is less, and which are exclusively used for parking, mechanical or storage space if it makes all the following additional findings:

- The adjoining property is located in a zoning district with less restrictive Side Setback requirements;
- The proposed Side Setback is at least as deep as required in the less restrictive district; and
- The reduced Side Setback would not reduce the Light and Air for residential uses on the adjoining property to less than is required under these Regulations.

The project meets all three of the above criteria. The property is located adjacent to an MX-D district which allows for 0’ side yard setback from the property line. The proposed side yard setback reduction will not affect the Light and Air requirement of the adjacent building at 44 John Street (previously known as 523 Canal Street) because this portion fronts the garage of the adjacent building.

E. Slope and Dimensional requirements of the garage ramp

Pursuant to Section 12.A.3.b the Applicant requests the approval of the ramp without the 2' center divider or 1' curb on either side. The ramp also has a slope of up to 14.5 percent versus 11% required.

The proposed modifications have been made in consultation with the Traffic Transportation and Parking Bureau and are necessary in order to design a functional five level ramp with limited lateral run.

Referral Comments

Stamford Planning Board

The Stamford Planning Board, during its regularly scheduled meeting held on April 19, 2022 recommended approval of the applications for Zoning Map Change, Special Permit and Site and Architectural Plan and Requested Uses and found the request to be compatible with the neighborhood and consistent with Master Plan Category #9 (Urban Mixed Use). The Planning Board recommended raising the AMI to 50 – 65% and to consider BMRs to be placed onsite.

City of Stamford Engineering Bureau

In a letter dated March 28, 2022, Willetta Capelle, Coordinator of Site Plan Reviews and Inspections at the Engineering Bureau in response to 222-03 stated that the proposed Zoning Map Change has no impact on the authority of the department. With reference to Application 222-04, Special Permit and Site and Architectural Plan and Requested Uses she provided comments on the submitted drawings and drainage analysis to be addressed prior to a Building Permit.

Harbor Management Commission

In a letter dated March 27, 2022 the Harbor Management Commission stated that the Commission had no objections to the proposal.

Fire Marshall

Fire Marshall Walter Seely in an email dated February 24, 2022 regarding Application 222-03 & 04 stated that he did not see any issues with the development.

Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (Office of Long Island Sound)

In the Coastal Site Plan Review comments checklist prepared by Karen Michaels, Environmental Analyst III, CTDEEP regarding applications 222-03 and 222-04, the department noted that the project is consistent with Coastal Area Management policies and recommended that the project comply with all local and FEMA floodplain management policies and provide a flood preparedness plan. In response to this request, the Applicant submitted a Flood Preparedness Plan prepared by Redniss and Mead dated March 15, 2022.

Traffic Transportation and Parking Bureau

The Applicant has had several meetings with the Traffic Transportation and Parking Bureau and has been preparing a response to preliminary comments from TTP including signal and geometric improvements to the adjoining roadways to mitigate any potential impact and to enhance the traffic and pedestrian experience. Final comments from the Traffic Transportation and Parking Bureau are expected prior to the next public hearing (May 9, 2022).

Water Pollution Control Authority

Ann Brown, Supervising Engineer in a letter dated March 28, 2022 stated that the department had no objections to application 222-03 and made technical comments on 222-04 to be addressed prior to Building Permit.

Summary

Staff believes that the proposed project achieves high standards in site plan and urban design and recommends approval of the Zoning Map Change, Site and Architectural Plan and Requested Uses and Special Permit applications (222-03 and 222-04). The development meets and exceeds the design standards of the R-HD zoning district and the requested Special Permit approvals are justified by the quality of the resulting public and private spaces. The development will contribute to the neighborhood and the City through high quality publicly accessible spaces, high quality of streetscape along three major streets, housing production including 40 units of affordable housing, well placed retail use and traffic and pedestrian improvements in adjoining intersections. The proximity of the building to the Stamford Transportation Center, Downtown and its location within South End are optimum for a mixed use building. The development meets the goals of Master Plan 2015 as well as the South End Neighborhood study.