



City of Stamford
Zoning Board

STAFF REPORT

TO: CITY OF STAMFORD ZONING BOARD
FROM: VINEETA MATHUR, PRINCIPAL PLANNER
SUBJECT: **ZB #222-25, 222-26 and 222-27 0 Walton Place, 80 Prospect Street, Zoning Map Change, Zoning Text Amendment, Special Permit, Site and Architectural Plan and Requested Uses**
DATE: September 08, 2022

MASTER PLAN: Master Plan Category 11 (Downtown)

ZONING: R-H (Residential High Density), C-L (Limited Commercial)

REQUESTED ACTIONS:

222-26	Zoning Text Change	Amendment to Section 6 Publicly Accessible Amenity Space
222-27	Zoning Map Change	Change from R-H, C-L to R-HD (Residential High Density Design District)
222-25	Site and Architectural Plan and Requested Uses	Proposed 224 unit residential building, preservation of church and related site improvements

Introduction

The Applicants Walton Place LLC & Prospect Street Partners LLC (Collectively the “Applicant”) are requesting approval of related applications including Zoning Map Change to R-HD district, Zoning Text Amendment, Special Permit and Site and Architectural Plan and Requested Uses Applications to facilitate the redevelopment of properties located at 0 Walton Place and 80 Prospect Street.

Background

The site is located in Stamford Downtown and fronts on Prospect Street, Walton Place and Bedford Street. The property 0 Walton Place is occupied by the building of the former First Congregational Church and 80 Prospect Street which was formerly occupied by a retail store and food market. Both buildings are currently vacant. The existing 60” wide City storm sewer pipe that runs underneath the site and through this block has been a constraint in the development of this site for several years. The City of Stamford is currently working on a grant application in partnership with the Applicant which would facilitate the relocation of the pipe from under the site to the street while also provide significant funding for pedestrian and traffic improvements for the area around Latham Park.

Proposed Development

The Applicant proposes to construct a 15 story building with 224 residential units, two levels of amenity space and a four level parking garage. The proposal retains the historic church in the foreground with the new building setback from Walton Place to maintain a coherent street wall. The new building is designed to maintain a lower scale adjacent to the historic building and rises up towards the north of the property.

The following approvals are needed to facilitate the development:

222-26 Zoning Text Amendment

The Applicant proposes a text amendment to Section 6 to add Section 6.D with alternative means of compliance with the PAAS requirement. Staff recommends the following alternative language which fits better with the current structure of Section 6.

Add 6.B.13 to the General Requirements for all PAAS as follows:

13. In zoning districts where there is a PAAS requirement, such requirement may be satisfied, in whole or in part, by a fee-in-lieu cash contribution to a City of Stamford account dedicated to pedestrian and open space improvements, as designated by the Director of Administration, pursuant to Special Permit approval the Zoning Board.
 - a. Granting of any such Special Permit is at the sole discretion of the Zoning Board. In making its decision, the Board shall consider (i) the nature and location of the subject property, including its existing and proposed uses, and (ii) the proximity to, and condition of, existing public open space, amenity areas or pedestrian infrastructure.
 - b. Where a fee-in-lieu cash contribution is utilized, applicant shall not be eligible for any Bonus Floor Area that may be associated with the provision of a PAAS.

- c. Where the provision of waterfront access is required by these or other regulations, a fee-in-lieu cash contribution may not be utilized.
- d. The fee-in-lieu cash contribution shall be calculated at a rate \$35 for each square foot of required PAAS area. The fee per square foot shall be automatically adjusted annually on January 1st of each year by the Construction Cost Index, as published by the Engineering News Record (ENR), with January 2022 as the base.
- e. All fee-in-lieu payments under this section must be received prior to issuance of a building permit.

This language establishes the fee in lieu formula for PAAS through a Special Permit and provides the findings when reviewing such a Special Permit. The language proposed by staff increases the fee in lieu to \$35 per sf instead of \$100 per 5 sf in the applicant's proposal.

- a. Where a proposed development includes publicly accessible sidewalks within the boundaries of the subject property, such sidewalk areas may be counted toward any PAAS requirement, as determined by the Zoning Board in consultation with the Land Use Bureau and the Transportation, Traffic and Parking Bureau; provided, however, that the sidewalk area counted towards the PAAS requirement shall not exceed 5% of the required PAAS area.

Provision of sidewalk on private property will be a permanent public benefit to areas where the roadway dimensions currently do not allow the creation of adequately sized sidewalks.

222-27 - Zoning Map Change

The Applicant requests a change from the current R-H and C-L 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 11 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 84,942 sf.

222-25 Site and Architectural Plan and Requested Uses & Special Permit

Access

Vehicular access to the parking garage is on the southwest side of the property off of Bedford Street through a two way driveway leading to a garage with one level of underground parking and three levels of above grade parking. This level also contains Electric Vehicle charging stations and handicap spaces. The two way driveway along Prospect Street will serve the six (6) at grade parking spaces and the loading area. A circular drop-off area is located off Walton Place.

Parking

The Applicant proposes a total of 262 parking spaces where 242 spaces are required for the 224 residential units based on the requirements for Parking Category 1. The total parking count (262) includes 12 sets of tandem spaces, 24 sets of self-operable vehicle stackers and counts each EV space as 0.5 parking spaces as permitted by Section 12.

Landscaping and Open Space

The development includes at grade open space as well as terraces and balconies contributing towards the open space on the site.

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. Pursuant to the proposed text amendment, the Applicant is requesting the approval of a fee-in-lieu of the required Publicly Accessible Amenity Space. The fee proposed in the original text is \$100 for every 5 square feet of required PAAS (i.e. \$20 per square foot), which would adjust annually. Staff recommends a fee of \$35 per square feet which would result in \$148,400 for this project.

Usable Open Space (For use by residents only)

The site does not require ‘Usable Open Space’ because it is located within 500’ of Latham Park. However, the project includes approximately 34,000 sf of Usable Open Space including the at grade landscaped areas, roof terraces and balconies. This is approximately double the amount of Usable Open Space that would be required if the project was greater than 500’ from a park.

The Walton Place frontage of the property includes a landscaped plaza area off the drop-off. In addition to paving this area includes synthetic turf. Staff recommends removing synthetic turf and replacing with natural grass. The Applicant should also specify the name of the ‘ornamental tree’ in the plaza area in the final landscape plan.

Unit Distribution

The proposed unit mix is as follows:

Studio – 37 units

One-bedroom – 89 units

Two bedroom – 86 units

Three bedroom – 12

Total number of units = 224.

R-HD Architectural Design standards

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

Contextuality

R-HD district recommends the architectural design of new buildings to be coordinated and compatible with architectural context of the site and prevailing character of the surrounding area. The proposed development achieves this goal by maintaining a lower scale of building adjacent to the church and maintaining open space on three sides of the church building. The proposed two story townhouses along Prospect Street further respond to the scale of the adjoining buildings on Prospect Street. The overall development will be a total of 15 stories which is similar in scale to nearby high rise buildings in Downtown Stamford such as Bedford Towers (440 Bedford Street) – 10 stories, ‘Sofi at Forest Street’ (50 Forest Street) – 15 stories, The Classic (25 Forest Street) – 17 stories, Highgrove (70 Forest Street) – 17 stories).

Building Elements

R-HD district recommends a clear base, middle and top. The proposed building has a total of fifteen stories with a small portion a two story base, ten story middle and a three story top portion. The building is L shaped wrapping around the church building.

The proposed building has a two story base with large windows on both Bedford Street and Prospect Street. The middle portion of the building is 10 stories and designed with concrete panels and full height windows. The final three stories will have aluminum cladding large aluminum windows. The Prospect Street portion referred to as ‘The Cube’ also has aluminum cladding along with full height wide windows that is proposed for the top floors.

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 development varies the height and mass of the building as it wraps around the historic church.

The historic church building is setback 65’ from Walton Place. The new building maintains the same setback from Walton Place. The south east portion of the building is two stories fronting on Prospect Street and Walton Place and goes up to 12 stories towards the middle of the property.

The rest of the building stretches west to east along the rear property line and goes up to 12 stories and then 15 stories after setback. The proposed building is articulated in several ways including balconies/terraces associated with a majority of the units, extruding vertical elements along Bedford and Prospect Street and stepping of the building at the third and twelfth story.

Facades and Materials

The proposed building maintains a grey color palate which matches the existing church. The length of the façade is broken into segments through change of material and horizontal articulation of the façade. The proposed materials including concrete panels, metal panels and aluminum windows are all well suited for a building of this scale and befitting the existing conditions.

Screening of Roof top mechanicals

The mechanical units are located behind a screen at the roof level and are significantly set back from the property line so as to not be visible from the streets.

Building Entrances

The development has well-designed entrance including a circular drop-off with a water fountain acting as an inviting focal features. The drop-off leads to a stone paved courtyard through a pergola. The courtyard is lined with perimeter landscaping and a synthetic turf lawn in the center. Staff recommends changing the artificial turf to grass. The primary access to the residential units is located on the east side of the courtyard through a lobby and amenity area. The church building is proposed to be used as an amenity area and has direct access from the Walton Place sidewalk through a pedestrian pathway. The proposed development meets the requirement for building entrances as stated in Section 4.B.11.k.(8).

Ground Floor Residences

The development has townhouses fronting along Prospect Street with direct access to the sidewalk allowing the activation of the street. A landscaped area varying from 6.5' to 9.5' in width provides the required buffer between the sidewalk and the residences. The ground floor units are elevated approximately two feet above the curb level further enhancing the privacy of the units.

Special Permit

The following Special Permits are requested to facilitate the project. The Applicant has provided a Statement of Findings to support the requests.

A. Front Setback pursuant to Section 4.B.11.m.4(c)(iv)

While the proposed building complies with all minimum setback requirements, portions of the building exceed the maximum front setback requirement of 25'.

With approximately 800' of street frontage on 3 sides of the property, it is impractical for a building face to be located within 25' of all frontages. Rather, the south face of the proposed building is aligned with the historic church structure.

The Zoning Board may modify the Front Setback if it finds that 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 proposed building setback allows for the new building to better align with the existing church.

- *allows for landscaped exterior Courts or other Building or public open space elements that enhance the streetscape;*

A landscaped courtyard with a visual connection to Latham Park is proposed along Walton Place requiring the building to be setback further than the maximum 25' required.

- *allows for drives or access to required off-street parking or pick-up and drop-off Building residents or their guests; or*

The applicant also proposes a circular drop-off along Walton Place requiring a larger setback of the building.

- *allows for the rational development of the site because of specific site conditions and constraints*

The proposed setbacks allow for the rational development of the site given the context of the church building and relationship with the surrounding streets and parks. A larger setback respects the scale of the church building as well as Latham Park.

B. Street wall Setback pursuant to Section 4.B.11.m.4(c)(iii)

The building generally complies with the 15' Street Wall Setback, except for a single point where the property line jogs in along the Prospect Street frontage where the distance is 11'.

The proposed street wall remains consistent along the Prospect Street frontage and is preferable to one which would maintain a 15' setback from property line.

C. PAAS fee-in-lieu pursuant to Section 6.D.4

Applicant requests a Special Permit pursuant to the companion Text Change application to permit a fee-in-lieu of providing onsite Publicly Accessible Amenity Space. Based on the site area, the PAAS requirement is 4,240 sf, which, if provided onsite, would be located between the church and Bedford Street. With the site located directly across from Latham Park, the onsite public access brings little value. More likely, it would become an attractive nuisance for the owner and residents of the property. Additional funding for improvements to Latham Park and/or surrounding Downtown streetscapes is a much more worthwhile investment. With the amended fee in lieu formula described above, the total contribution will be \$148,400.

D. BMR Alternative means of compliance pursuant to Section 7.4.D.1

The Applicant requests a Special Permit to allow the BMR requirement of 10% (22.4) units to be satisfied offsite at 'The Morgan' apartments.

The proposed larger BMR units at the Morgan will result in BMR units which better serve the affordable housing need compared to smaller units located on site within the proposed building.

BMR Calculation

Total Units		Affordability Level (AMI)	Conversion Rate (per §7.4)	Required BMR		Proposed BMR		Notes	
				Number of Units	Equivalency Units	Number of Units	Equivalency Units		
Studio	37	50%	0.33	10%	3.7	1.23	0	0.00	Complies. Special Permit per §7.4.D.1 for the dedication of existing units;
1BR	89	50%	0.50	10%	8.9	4.45	3	1.50	
2BR	86	50%	1.00	10%	8.6	8.60	15	15.00	
3BR	12	50%	1.33	10%	1.2	1.60	5	6.67	
TOTAL	224				22.4	15.9	23	23.2	

Off-site vs. on-site

Off-site The Applicant proposes 23 units at the ‘The Morgan’ distributed between one, two and three bedrooms equivalent to **23.2** units.

On-site Provision of the 22.4 units at 50% AMI on-site will be equivalent to **15.9** two-bedroom units at 50% AMI.

Therefore the proposal will result in an increase of **7.3** equivalent BMR units (23.2 – 15.9)

Advance availability of units

The units at ‘The Morgan’ will be available three years in advance of the completion of the proposed building. Therefore resulting an addition of 23 BMR units for 3 years = 69 BMRs.

Existing affordability of ‘The Morgan’ units

The 23 existing units at The Morgan are currently below 80% AMI in rent and will exceed 80% AMI rents once rehabbed. When fully rehabbed they would result in a BMR requirement of 11.5 units at 65% AMI (1 BMR per 2 market rate affordable units) or **6.9** units at 50% AMI.

After accounting for replacement BMRs (6.9 units), the proposal still exceeds the BMR requirement by **0.4 (7.3-6.9)**.

Staff recommends that the proposal eliminate one bedroom units from the mix of proposed units and add additional 2 bedroom units. The proposal will result in producing permanently deed restricted units which better align in terms of size with the demand in terms of unit size.

E. Driveway width modification pursuant to Section 12.A.3

Applicant requests modification of the dimensional requirements of the multi-level garage ramp from 28’ to 25’ in width. The proposed garage ramp is located along the northern property boundary and outside the garage itself. Given that the ramp does not have

bends/turns, the proposed width will be adequate for maneuverability of vehicles. The request has been reviewed by TTP who found it acceptable.

Referral Comments

Stamford Planning Board

The Stamford Planning Board, during its regularly scheduled meeting held on August 9, 2022 recommended approval of the applications for Zoning Text Change, 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 #11 (Downtown) and the following Master Plan policies.

- 3B.1 and 5A.1: Concentrate regional office, retail and entertainment uses and high-density residential development in the Downtown.
- 4C.3-c: Implement traffic calming strategies to improve pedestrian safety and comfort.
- 5A.6: Promote infill development on vacant sites within Downtown.
- 5B.1: Improve pedestrian connectivity within Downtown and between Downtown and adjacent neighborhoods.
- 5B.2: Implement streetscape and traffic calming improvements Downtown.
- 6B: Preserve existing and create new affordable housing
- 6D: Preserve Historic Structures and Districts
- 7B.1: Provide high-quality streetscape designs along principal streets
- 7C: Enhance open space management
- 7H Encourage infill development
- 7I.4: Vehicle charging stations
- 7Q.5: Protect, manage and expand the urban forest, which is comprised of trees in the City right-of-way and in City parks, and street trees.

Fire Marshall

Fire Marshall Walter Seely in an email dated August 4, 2022 regarding Application 222-25 stated that he did not see any issues with the project.

Traffic Transportation and Parking Bureau

The Applicant has coordinated with the Traffic Transportation and Parking Bureau on site plan related comments as well as pedestrian and traffic improvements needed in the vicinity of the site and the grant application for infrastructure improvements. In a letter dated September 8, 2022, TTP provided comments on the site plan as well as recommendations for traffic and pedestrian improvements to be coordinated between the City and the Applicant.

Summary

Staff believes that the proposed project will result in multiple benefits for the City of Stamford including the preservation of a historic and architecturally significant building on the site, partnership with the City in seeking a significant infrastructure grant from the State of Connecticut, provide needed market rate and affordable housing, improve streetscape and provide new amenities usable by residents of the subject project as well as surrounding buildings owned by the developer. Therefore, staff recommends approval of the related Zoning Map Change, Zoning Text Change and Site and Architectural Plan and Requested Uses and Special Permit applications (222-27, 222-26 & 222-25). The development meets and exceeds the design standards of the R-HD zoning district and is consistent with the policies in the City's Master Plan.