

**MINUTES OF THE REGULAR MEETING**  
**CITY OF STAMFORD, CONNECTICUT**  
**URBAN REDEVELOPMENT COMMISSION**  
**THURSDAY, DECEMBER 9, 2010**

1. At 6:05pm, Chairman Stephen C. Osman called the meeting to order. The following were in attendance:

Commissioners:

Stephen C. Osman, Chairman  
James I. Nixon, Vice Chairman  
Joel P. Mellis, Secretary/Treasurer  
Jackie Heftman  
Christopher D. Meek

Staff:

Christopher L. Bergstrom, Executive Director  
Rachel Goldberg, General Counsel  
Durelle Alexander

Attendees:

Daniel Doern, Architect/URC Consultant  
William J. Hennessey, Jr. Esq., Sandak Hennessey & Greco  
Jackie Olschan-Kaufman, Esq., Sandak Hennessey & Greco  
Lisa Louer, Esq., Sandak Hennessey & Greco  
Philip Koether, Philip Koether Architects  
Rick Redniss, AICP, Redniss & Mead, Inc.  
Andrew Montelli, Fairfield Residential LLC  
Alex Ching, Vice President, Greenfield Partners  
Elizabeth Kim, Stamford Advocate

Commissioner Nixon made a motion to address the agenda items out of order. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Mellis and carried unanimously.

6. Mill River Corridor

(b) **75 Tresser Boulevard/Stamford Advocate Site** - Chairman Osman noted that the Commission had retained Dan Doern, at the developer's expense, as a design review architect to assist the Commission in assessing the proposed project's conformity with the Mill River design guidelines. Mr. Doern was selected on the basis of his previous work on the Archstone project and his expertise in designing high quality wood frame buildings in urban settings. His findings, attached as part of these official minutes, were previously distributed to the Board.

Attorney Hennessey introduced the project's architect, Philip Koether, noting that he would give the Commission a brief overview of the proposed plan. Mr. Koether said, "350 rental apartments and approximately 11,000 square feet of ground floor live/work space are planned for the two and three-quarter acre site located on the corner of Tresser & Washington Boulevards, adding some 600 residents to the neighborhood. The difficulty in accommodating 350 apartments was in finding appropriate massing ... so we divided the massing into two perimeter blocks with a central linking element. We are working with stick construction, five stories or seventy feet maximum. Following the design guidelines set forth in the Mill River Plan, building heights and facades will vary as the building wraps around the more residential sections of Tresser Boulevard and Clinton Avenue."

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Mr. Koether showed the setbacks, changes in massing, varying roof heights, differentiation in materials, and the completely concealed parking for five hundred cars on the schematics and answered questions. He continued, "Since the Washington Boulevard side of the building will not attain the height suggested by Sasaki in the Mill River Plan, we have added an additional mezzanine floor and created what we refer to as an 'architectural event' – an 86-foot vertical light beacon that will slice through the building. This prominent light feature will rise above the roof creating a lantern on top and also be evident down the sides of the building. If the emphasis on Washington is about height, then Clinton Street will be about intimacy, with attractive sidewalks and landscaping."

Chairman Osman asked, "Is there retail on Clinton?" Mr. Koether responded, "No, the retail space fronts Washington Boulevard and Tresser Boulevard." The Chairman asked, "Are you going into more detail about the live/work space?" Mr. Koether responded, "It's really flexible right now – flex space – that is space with the fewest amount of structural encumbrances." Attorney Hennessey noted that "we are only at the general development plan level now."

Executive Director Bergstrom said, "Before the discussion continues, it is important to note that the Commission has two very different types of design authority: (1) where the Commission owns the land and is reviewing a proposed design under a Land Disposition Agreement with a developer, its design review is extensive; and (2) if a property falls within the boundaries of the Mill River Corridor Project Plan, the Commission has the authority to review the design of proposed projects for conformity with the design guidelines of the Plan. This proposal falls under the second, lesser type of design review authority and the Commission's review needs to be limited to a judgment as to whether the proposal conforms to the Mill River design guidelines. This is in the form of a referral from the Zoning Board in their role of approving a General Plan of Development for a specific project site."

Discussion ensued. The Executive Director said, "One of the issues that we need to be cognizant of and put in our transmittal to the Zoning Board is that we're looking at schematic designs now that were done May 24<sup>th</sup> and we like what we see. Sometimes between schematic drawings and a final site plan, there is slippage and some of the elements that are so critical to us and are the basis for our finding of conformity get cost engineered out. We need to say to the Zoning Board that if you find that it's in conformity, we think you should make it a condition of your approval of the General Development Plan that if there is any significant change in the key design elements and materials between the General Development Plan and the final Site Plan, you will refer it back to the URC for another check on conformity to the guidelines. My recommendation would be that: (1) you find the project is in conformity with the design guidelines and, (2) that you ask the Zoning Board to make it a condition of their approval that if there is a substantial change in the materials or the key design elements, they refer back to us for another round of review." Executive Director Bergstrom suggested that the letter of transmittal to the Zoning Board have attached to it both the Director's staff recommendation and Mr. Doern's review report. (Executive Director's report attached as part of these official minutes.)



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The Commission asked Mr. Doern if he thought the project conformed to the Mill River design criteria. He responded, "Yes. I think it conforms and very well. The height on Washington Boulevard is not attained but I believe they have made a tremendous gesture to amp up the effective height through use of a tall prominent light feature, complying with the spirit of the Mill River guidelines and creating a strong presence on Washington Boulevard." Chairman Osman asked if Mr. Doern should continue to work on the proposed project. Executive Director Bergstrom responded, "If the final site plan comes back and it is a faithful execution of the schematic design, we wouldn't have any further involvement." It was the sense of the Board that Executive Director Bergstrom and Mr. Doern attend the Public Hearing to endorse the proposed project.

Following further discussion, Commissioner Heftman made a motion to find the project proposed for 75 Tresser Boulevard (the former *Advocate* site) in conformance with the design guidelines of the Mill River Corridor Project Plan, subject to the following request to the Zoning Board: that to ensure that the schematic designs reviewed and approved on this date are carried through to the final designs that will be submitted to the Zoning Board as part of its approval of the final site plan, the Commission requests that the Zoning Board condition its approval on the consistency of the key design elements and materials; further, if they determine a substantial change exists, the Zoning Board will agree to refer back to the URC for another round of additional design review. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Nixon and carried by unanimous vote.

The Chairman called for a brief recess at 6:50pm. Commissioner Heftman left the meeting at this time. The meeting was resumed at 6:55pm.

2. Approval of Minutes

(a) **July 28, 2010 Special Joint Public Hearing** – Attorney Goldberg recommended waiving the requirement for a voting quorum in order to approve the minutes. Commissioner Nixon made a motion to waive the normal Commission requirement that only those attending a meeting can vote in order to get the July 28, 2010 minutes approved. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Mellis and carried by unanimous vote. Commissioner Nixon made a motion to approve the minutes. The motion was seconded by Chairman Osman and carried (2 in favor, 2 abstentions).

(b) **October 14, 2010 Annual Meeting** – Commissioner Meek made a motion to approve the minutes. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Nixon and carried (3 in favor, 1 abstention).

(c) **October 14, 2010 Regular Meeting** – Commissioner Nixon made a motion to approve the minutes. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Meek and carried (3 in favor, 1 abstention).

3. Correspondence

None at this time.

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4. Announcements

None at this time.

5. Southeast Quadrant/Park Square West

Action on this agenda item was tabled.

7. Old Business

(a) **RPA Report** – Executive Director Bergstrom reported that the final version of the report by the Regional Plan Association (RPA) of the Joint URC/DSSD Downtown Rezoning Project will be completed shortly. It will be distributed to the Commission and the URC's consultant, David Kooris, will be asked to present the final version to the Board at its next regularly scheduled meeting.

8. New Business


None at this time.

9. Adjournment

The next regular meeting is scheduled for Thursday, January 13, 2011 at 6:00pm.

There being no further business before the Board, Commissioner Nixon made a motion to adjourn. The motion was carried by unanimous vote and the meeting was adjourned at 7:08pm.

Respectfully submitted,

  
Joel P. Mellis  
Secretary/Treasurer

DANIEL DOERN  
ARCHITECTURE + DEVELOPMENT

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REVIEW OF SCHEMATIC DESIGN  
75 Tresser Boulevard, Stamford, CT  
Architect: Philip Koether  
September 22, 2010

Project materials reviewed:  
Schematic Design package dated May 24<sup>th</sup> 2010  
Wire-frame 3 dimensional presentation

Architects prior work reviewed:  
Pepperidge Farm Apartments, Norwalk, CT  
The Beatrice Apartments, NYC

OVERALL PROJECT

This project complies with much of the Mill River District's urban design guidelines. It employs many sensible urban design principles such as an engaging street level, intelligent site planning, and visual variety. While its new residents will naturally help to invigorate the downtown area, this projects outward emphasis (large windows, many balconies, sidewalk-level apartment entries, gardens and shops) will connect it in a more engaging manner than a standard residential project. Though, due to the nature of the wood-frame construction method proposed here, the Washington Boulevard side of the building will not attain the heights suggested in the Sasaki Corridor Study. The architect has endeavored to add emphasis and presence on this side of the building with an additional mezzanine floor and a tall, prominent light feature. This monumental feature addresses the primacy of the Washington Boulevard side while the Clinton Avenue side of the building is lower in height and visually calmer. Through this gesture and its overall massing, the project successfully responds to its surrounding context and creates an urban building appropriate for this location.



## PROGRAM AND SPATIAL CONFIGURATION

The project is generally configured in a sensible and urban manner: entries, resident amenities, some shops, a public amenity space, and some townhouse style units surround concealed parking on the ground floor. One below grade level contains parking. The street level on Washington Boulevard and the eastern part of Tresser Boulevard is lined with "Live/Work" units. The street level on Clinton Avenue and the western part of Tresser is lined with apartments. These apartments have individual entries off the sidewalk and front gardens, much like a townhouse. The upper five floors contain apartments, many with balconies overlooking the surrounding streets, and private courtyard spaces for the residents. The sidewalks are treated with what appears to be attractive and inviting landscaping.

The townhouse units seem like they will enliven the street along Clinton and part of Tresser and are a great feature. I suggest that the front windows be less storefront-like and more home-like with a higher sill, allowing the residents an intermediate privacy option. With a storefront window, the interior of the apartment will be entirely visible from the street, encouraging the resident to draw a curtain over the entire front to obtain privacy and canceling out much of the urban design benefit of having an apartment on the ground floor. A higher window will offer the resident some privacy from the sill height down and they will be more likely to leave the window uncovered, creating a more dynamic street scene. At times, for complete privacy, the resident will draw the blinds but will not feel compelled to do so at all times.

I suggest that the architect to undertake with his client a thorough review of the Live/Work units, the residential entry location and the amenities space. The Live/Work units are an excellent idea – if they are economically feasible. The rendering is certainly compelling. However, it seems that in their current configuration they are not likely to be used for their intended purposes but rather as a regular apartment. As configured - a one-story unit of approximately 25' wide by 35 or 40 feet deep – these are unlikely Live/Work units as they do not allow a storefront and a place to live, the rear of the unit being windowless. Perhaps these seven units are not living space but the row becomes an arts incubator where artists and craftspeople have cooperative workshops open to the street and sell their wares in these studios. A food cart on the corner plaza would

complete a terrific little enclave and attract pedestrian traffic. However, if this scenario ends up not being feasible, the City will be left with seven conventional ground floor apartments whose blinds will likely be drawn all the time and whose residents will likely enter from the interior of the building and not Washington Boulevard. Perhaps the Clinton side ground floor apartments could continue along to the corner of Washington Boulevard, but the street level on Washington should be something more than regular apartments. If the Live/Work units were combined into one commercial space and there was market demand for it, it would be a good alternative, but this seems unlikely. Live/Work spaces are an excellent idea if they can be made feasible (perhaps by combining them into a duplex with the apartment above they will become attractive to a wider range of professionals and craftspeople.) It's also feasible that the residential amenities – lounges, fitness center, leasing office, etc – could array along Washington Boulevard and animate the street level. They would be private spaces and not an optimal solution, but if a pedestrian-oriented use were determined to be infeasible, some sort of activity would be better than a dead wall of drawn curtains. I look forward to several alternatives for the important Washington/Tresser Boulevards corner of the building from the development team.

### MASSING

The Washington Boulevard side is taller, more prominent than the other sides, and is enlivened with an exciting "light slice" that rises above the roof creating a lantern on top and is planned to be evident down the sides of the building. This is appropriate and helps create a "presence" along Washington Boulevard. I have encouraged the architect to make this side as prominent and impressive as possible.

The wire-frame flyover rendering reveals a number of setbacks, changes in massing, varying roof heights, and an overall well-modulated treatment. The Tresser Boulevard façade is very long. It has been animated with a large opening for the garage entry, distinct, though subtle bay treatments, and a bridge over the entry with a roof terrace proposed for its top. These gestures are successful but the roofline could use some more attention. It seems long and flat in the elevation. I have asked the architect to show it in 3-D context, as it will be seen. If it seems too low and flat, I suggest that more variety in height be introduced. This is a challenge in a wood framed building of this length, but possible to achieve.

## DESIGN DETAILS

The project is on its schematic phase so most details are naturally sketchy at this point. Generally, I've commented to the architect that if something can't be executed well in the language of wood frame construction, he should look for other details that can be. Better to develop good, feasible details now than value engineer them out later and end up with an unsatisfactory compromise. Certain details should be commented on at this point.

The apartment balconies don't feel right. I think its because they are shown with an edged slab and glass railings that seem commercial. They are also too long. They fill the entire bay, which is good in many ways, but bad in that that rhythm evokes a hotel. I suggested that the architect modify them to alter this perception.

The light feature is terrific. If executed well, this could become a well-noted feature of the Stamford skyline. It adds tremendous presence along Washington Boulevard and will greet those arriving from the train and highway with an exciting, bold beacon. Its execution is critical so the City should work closely with the development team to ensure its potency.

The ground floor apartment gardens and entries are critical to the success of the project. The development team is off to a good start but subtlety matters in details like these and poor execution could be tragic. The City must pay close attention as these develop.

## MATERIALS

Though it's too early in the process for a detailed review, the architect has indicated a fairly rich level of detail and a good array of materials in the sketches. The architect's general idea is that solid feeling, more textured materials will be on the lower level and the materials will get simpler and lighter as the building rises. This is a good approach – both visually and practically. We must stay aware that, all to often, ambitious materials palettes get value engineered out and replaced with fewer and cheaper selections that look terrible. I've encouraged the architect to keep it real with materials and their costs and work hard to find good, durable, attractive materials that fit in the budget. There is a wide world of great new materials out there that have a quality feel, are made from new



combinations of materials and look modern and great. The look of the building wants to be modern so a modern palette makes sense. Again, the City should remain involved to ensure that what gets approved is feasible so that the end product will look as good as possible. I look forward to the development of the materials palette.

### PHILIP KOETHER ARCHITECTS

This architect has a portfolio with a range of work. His prior project with this developer was conceived to be appropriate to its context and its market. The style of that project is not appropriate to the Advocate site. His work in New York City, most recently the Beatrice Apartments, reveals a modern and sophisticated aesthetic. He shows a good grasp of materials. His design of a restaurant in the building is thrilling and innovative. If the developer is comfortable with his ability to design and execute a wood frame building within their budget, I'm comfortable with him being able to deliver an exciting, forward-looking project.

### SUMMARY

This project is off to a good start. It demonstrates many of the features that are important to the URC. The spatial configuration is generally good, the massing interesting and the light feature is exciting. There are certain aspects that need to be refined, as described above, but their resolution seems to be attainable within the realm of the normal design development process.

DATE: December 9, 2010  
TO: Urban Redevelopment Commission  
FROM: Kip Bergstrom  
RE: 75 Tresser Boulevard & 68 Clinton Avenue

A proposal by SG Stamford LLC to develop a 350-unit, "wood-frame" residential project at the above referenced site, formerly the home of the Stamford Advocate, is on the agenda of tonight's Commission meeting. The Commission needs to review the proposed design of the project for conformity with the design guidelines of the Mill River Corridor Project Plan. I am writing to recommend a finding of conformity with the Mill River design guidelines.

### **Two Different Types of Design Review Authority**

The Commission has two different types of design review authority:

1. Where the Commission owns the land and is reviewing a proposed design under a Land Disposition Agreement with a developer, its design review authority is extensive, bounded only by the terms of the LDA and the Commission's judgment on how far it is reasonable to push the developer to achieve a high quality design.
2. If a property falls within the boundaries of the Mill River Corridor Project Plan, the Commission has the authority to review the design of proposed projects for conformity with the design guidelines of the Plan. This is a narrow authority and is the form of a referral from the Zoning Board in their role of approving a General Development Plan for a specific project site. A finding by the Commission of non-conformity does not prevent the Zoning Board from approving the GDP, but in such case, the Zoning Board must approve the GDP by a two-thirds vote.

The proposal by SG Stamford LLC falls under the second, lesser type of design review authority. The Commission's review needs to be limited to a judgment as to whether the proposal conforms to the Mill River design guidelines.

### **Architectural Review by Dan Doern**

To assist the Commission and staff in assessing the proposed project's conformity with the Mill River design guidelines, the Commission engaged, at the developer's expense, the services of Daniel Doern, AIA as a design review architect. Mr. Doern was selected because of his qualifications and the Commission's knowledge of his expertise in designing high quality "wood frame" buildings in urban settings.

Mr. Doern's review is attached. In summary, Mr. Doern finds that the SG Stamford LLC proposal, as expressed in the schematic design package dated May 24, 2010 and a wire frame 3-D model, meets the letter and spirit of the Mill River Corridor design guidelines in virtually all aspects, and meets the spirit of the design guidelines in the treatment of the Washington Boulevard frontage.

The project is generally configured in a sensible and urban manner: entries, resident amenities, some shops, a public amenity space, and some townhouse style units



surround concealed parking on the ground floor. The project includes a number of setbacks, changes in massing, varying roof heights, and an overall well-modulated treatment. Solid feeling, more textured materials will be on the lower level and the materials will get simpler and lighter as the building rises.

Due to the nature of the wood-frame construction method proposed by SG Stamford LLC, the Washington Boulevard side of the building will not attain the heights suggested in the Sasaki Corridor Study (which created the Mill River design guidelines). The architect has endeavored to add emphasis and presence on this side of the building with an additional mezzanine floor and a tall, prominent light feature. This monumental feature addresses the primacy of the Washington Boulevard side while the Clinton Avenue side of the building is lower in height and visually calmer. Through this gesture and its overall massing, the project successfully responds to its surrounding context and creates an urban building appropriate for this location.

### **The Need to Ensure that the Final Site Plan Meets the Promise of the GDP**

Mr. Doern's review, and the Commission's decision tonight, are based on schematic designs. All too often, ambitious initial design features and materials palettes get value engineered out and replaced with fewer and cheaper selections that look terrible. The Commission needs to ensure that the schematic designs it approves for conformity with the Mill River design guidelines are carried through to the final designs that will be submitted to the Zoning Board as part of its approval of the Final Site Plan. The Commission should request that the Zoning Board condition its approval of the GDP on consistency of the quality of materials and key design elements (active ground floor uses, articulated massing, light tower feature, mezzanine units) between the GDP and the FSP. The Commission should request that the Zoning Board refer the FSP to the Commission for a review of conformity with the Mill River design guidelines if the quality of materials or any key design elements change from the GDP to the FSP.

CITY OF STAMFORD, CONNECTICUT, URBAN REDEVELOPMENT COMMISSION

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## MEETING NOTICE

The next regular meeting of the City of Stamford, Connecticut, Urban Redevelopment Commission, will be held in the Commission offices on the 9<sup>th</sup> Floor of the Stamford Government Center, 888 Washington Boulevard, Stamford, Connecticut, on Thursday, December 9, 2010 at 6:00pm.

### AGENDA:

1. Roll Call
2. Approval of Minutes:
  - (a) July 28, 2010 – Special Joint Public Hearing
  - (b) October 14, 2010 – Annual Meeting
  - (c) October 14, 2010 – Regular Meeting
3. Correspondence
4. Announcements
5. Southeast Quadrant
  - \*(a) Park Square West Phase II
6. Mill River Corridor
  - \*(a) Status Report
  - (b) 75 Tresser Boulevard/Advocate Site
7. Old Business
8. New Business
9. Adjournment
  - (a) Discussion – Next Meeting Agenda
  - (b) Confirmation – Next Meeting Date (*January 13, 2011 at 6pm*)

*\*All or portions of this subject may require discussion in Executive Session\**