



City of Stamford
Zoning Board

STAFF REPORT

TO: CITY OF STAMFORD ZONING BOARD
FROM: VINEETA MATHUR, PRINCIPAL PLANNER
SUBJECT: ZB #221-24, Old Town Square LLC, 160 Atlantic Street, Special Permit, Site and Architectural Plan and Requested Uses
DATE: December 2, 2022

MASTER PLAN: Master Plan Category 11 (Downtown)

ZONING: CC (Center City)

REQUESTED ACTIONS:

222-24	Site and Architectural Plan and Requested Uses	Proposed 11 story hotel with 82 rooms and 10 suites.
	Special Permits	Appendix B, Table IV, note 23 to permit a hotel with a maximum F.A.R. of 6 in the CC district subject to special standards and limitations. Appendix B, note 7 to allow 0' front setback for the existing structure and 10' setback for the new structure Appendix B, note 7 to allow 0' rear setback Section 12.C.3 to allow the use of existing condition vs. construction of new sidewalk. Section 19.F. for Large Scale Plan Review of new non-residential building with more than 20,000 sf of floor area

Introduction

The Applicant Old Town Square LLC (“Applicant”) is requesting approval of Special Permit and Site and Architectural Plan and Requested Uses Applications to facilitate the development of a new eleven (11) story hotel with 82 rooms, 10 suites, ground floor restaurant, banquet/meeting rooms and roof terraces at 160 Atlantic Street. The proposed hotel will incorporate the existing 56’ tall two (2) story former bank building on the site and build nine (9) stories above it.

Background

The site has been occupied by a bank building which was built approximately in 1939. The building has been vacant since First County Bank vacated the premises in 2018. The applicant received approval of a text amendment (ZB # 218-63) in 2019 to amend Appendix B, Notes to allow any façade articulation which does not constitute occupiable floor area to extend over public property. Preliminary designs for the subject building were presented to the Zoning Board at the time of the text amendment application. The Applicant was encouraged to refine the design of the building so as to best integrate with the historic building and surrounding buildings and to ensure activation of the ground floor space.

Site and Surroundings

The site is located in Downtown Stamford at the intersection of Atlantic Street and Main Street adjacent to Veteran’s Park. The existing historic building is flanked by Town Center Drive and a ramp to the Mall parking garage on the south side. The Mall parking garage is located to the rear of the subject property. The lot area is 9,246 sf and comprises of 160 Atlantic Street (approx. 0.17 acre) and 0 Atlantic Street (approx. 0.04 acre). The existing building is approximately 5,641 sf. In size. The two lots 0 and 160 Atlantic will require consolidation prior to the issuance of a Building Permit.

Proposed Development

The Applicant proposes to construct a new 11 story hotel comprising a total of 82 rooms and 10 suites incorporating the existing building. The existing bank building is a contributing building part of the Downtown Historic District and is built in the Georgian Revival architectural style with a rectangular two story form, brick façade, limestone trim and an emphasis on symmetry and order. The hotel is designed to complement the existing building by the use of similar materials and rhythms in architectural elements.

The proposed project will retain the basement, main level and a second/mezzanine level of the existing building and then continues up nine floors for a total of eleven (11) stories and 155’.

The ground floor will contain the hotel reception area, lounge area, a public restaurant and related amenities. A door on the North West corner of the building will lead to an outdoor patio overlooking Veteran's park. The rear portion of the site will be used for various service activities including loading/unloading, handicap parking, bike storage and trash area and will be screened by a brick wall on either side with terraces above.

The second level contains a mezzanine floor and a catwalk on the ends of the building and a vaulted space in between. The third floor contains a banquet hall, related amenities, and a private room. This level will have three outdoor terraces one located in the front of the building and two on the sides of the private room. Floors four through ten comprise of a total of seventy-seven (77) hotel rooms and seven (7) suites. The eleventh floor will have five (5) hotel rooms and three (3) suites. One of the suites on this level will also have access to an outdoor terrace. The roof will contain an approx. 2,118 sf accessible terrace with the remaining area sectioned off for mechanical equipment which will be set back at least 10 ft. from the south and west side of the building façade and more than 22 ft. from the north and east side.

Elevations

All the architectural elements of the existing building will be preserved. The materials used in the new portion of the building will be color matched to the existing building including the full depth brick and the cast limestone. The proposed addition features double column-like vertical cast limestone fascia which extrude the lines of the columns of the existing building. The three bays of window on the new building similarly retain the three bay pattern of the two lowest stories. The façade has a horizontal break with the use of cast stone nand after the eighth story which adds to the interest of the building. The roofline will feature a tall cornice with vertical articulation. The use of full brick and cast stone material in conjunction with inset windows will ensure that the façade is articulated and not flat/monotonous. The outdoor patios in the front and rear of the building will also enhance the appearance from public view. The southern façade of the existing building is currently masked by a windowless brick wall with a mural which was likely erected at the time when the adjoining garage access ramp was constructed. In the event that the ramp is removed in the future, the applicant intends to remove the plain brick wall which is likely to reveal arched windows and columns similar to the north elevation on the original façade.

Pedestrian Access

The hotel will be accessed from the main entrance of the existing building on Atlantic Street. A secondary access for the lounge and restaurant is located on the north-west side of the building leading to an outdoor sitting area. The eastern side of the building (rear) will also have a door allowing access from the service area in the back.

Vehicular Access and parking

The vehicular access to the building is limited to a drop-off area in the rear of the building with access from Town Center Drive to the south. Future potential removal of the garage ramp may allow a larger valet drop-off area in the rear of the building. The Applicant has submitted a draft parking agreement with the City of Stamford to allow parking of 60 vehicles in the Bell Street garage.

Special Permits

The Applicant seeks the following Special Permits to facilitate this project. A detailed Statement of Findings related to the Special Permits is included in the application.

A. Special Permit pursuant to Appendix B Footnote 23 for a hotel in the CC district to allow an FAR up to 6.0 FAR.

The proposed hotel meets the standards and limitations (1) through (8) associated with this Special Permit.

Subject to the issuance of a Special Permit, parcels within the CC district may be developed as hotels and/or extended stay hotels with a maximum above grade FAR of 6.0, subject to the following standards and limitations:

The proposed hotel has a FAR of 5.9 (Floor area 54,900 sf) and therefore requires a Special Permit pursuant to this footnote.

(1) no commercial office or residential floor area shall be permitted;

The proposal does not include any office or residential floor area. **COMPLIES**

(2) all above grade structured parking area shall count toward the FAR total;

No structured parking is proposed. **COMPLIES**

(3) on Ground Floor Retail Streets, ground floor retail and/or ground floor hotel common areas must be provided;

A ground floor restaurant (1,250 sf) along with ground floor hotel common areas (1,650 sf) are proposed including a lounge, reception and private dining/meeting room. **COMPLIES**

(4) facade features such as flag poles, canopies, lighting fixtures, balconies, façade articulation which does not include occupiable floor area, cornices, eaves, and other similar ornamental features may extend over public property, including but not limited to sidewalks and property owned by the Urban Redevelopment Commission, provided they are not less than eight (8) feet above grade (except for balconies which shall not be lower than the second story) and set back a minimum of three (3) feet from the curb where overhanging a sidewalk and do not restrict the free flow of pedestrian or vehicular traffic; and provided further that with the exception of flag poles, canopies, and lighting fixtures, such façade features referenced above shall not exceed eighteen (18) inches beyond the property line;

The proposed building will be designed to be fully within the property boundaries. The south wall of the existing building extends approximately 3” over the property line however the building is grandfathered as an existing condition. **COMPLIES**

(5) Building coverage may equal 100% of the lot area with no rear yard, and no at grade open space;

The proposed building coverage is 97.9 %. No at grade open space is provided. **COMPLIES**

(6) Parking may be provided at a rate of 0.5 spaces per hotel room for hotels and 0.75 spaces per hotel room for extended stay hotels within five hundred (500) feet of a public garage, where 24-hour shuttle services are provided, the terms of which are determined by the Zoning Board, and hotel conferencing and/or banquet facilities do not exceed 5,000 square feet;

The proposed hotel includes 84 rooms and 7 suites thus resulting a total parking requirement of 46 parking spaces. The applicant has proposed 60 parking spaces in the Bell Street parking garage which exceeds the minimum requirement. **COMPLIES**

(7) access driveways shall be not less than twenty (20) feet in width between curbs for two-way operation;

The proposed building uses current access through Town Center Drive. **COMPLIES**

(8) Where parking and site access is provided on an adjacent lot(s), parking spaces and drive aisles may extend over common property lines, provided necessary easements are granted to the satisfaction of the Director of Legal Affairs.

The vehicular access to the site will be provided through Town Center Drive as is the current scenario. If any easements are deemed necessary to continue the current operations, they shall be submitted for review at the time of the Building Permit. **COMPLIES**

B. Special Permit pursuant to Appendix B, footnote 7 to allow 0’ front setback for the existing structure and 10’ setback for the new structure.

The existing building sits on the front property line and will remain unchanged. The addition will be setback 10’ from the front property line. This setback allows for separation between the existing and new façade while maintaining a cohesive relationship.

C. Appendix B, note 7 to allow 0’ rear setback

While the proposed building is close to the rear property line of 160 Atlantic Street, the proposal adequately meets the 20’ rear setback from the rear property line of 0 Atlantic Street or the future consolidated lot. Therefore this Special Permit may not be necessary.

D. Section 12.K.4 to allow the use of existing condition vs. construction of new sidewalk.

The sidewalk area fronting the site was recently renovated as part of the Veteran’s park reconstruction and thus does not necessitate refurbishment.

E. Section 19.F. for Large Scale Plan Review of new non-residential building with more than 20,000 sf of floor area

The proposed development is well designed, complies with the Zoning Regulations and meets the goals of the Master Plan.

Referral Comments

Stamford Planning Board

The Stamford Planning Board, during its regularly scheduled meeting held on December 14, 2022 recommended approval of the applications for Special Permit and Site and Architectural Plan and Requested Uses applications and found the request to be compatible with the neighborhood and consistent with Master Plan Category #11 (Downtown). The Planning Board recommended increasing the parking spaces leased at the Bell Street garage from 45 spaces to 60 spaces and to ensure that the liability for the parking is addressed.

City of Stamford Engineering Bureau

In a letter dated December 1, 2021, Susan Kiskan, Coordinator of Site Plan Reviews and Inspections at the Engineering Bureau provided comments on the submitted drawings and drainage analysis to be addressed prior to a Building Permit.

Environmental Protection Bureau

In a letter dated April 19, 2022, Jaclyn Chapman expressed no objection to the proposal and provided comments regarding protection of natural features during construction.

Fire Marshall

Fire Marshall Walter Seely in an email dated December 28, 2021 regarding Application 221-24 stated that he did not see any issues with the development.

Traffic Transportation and Parking Bureau

Mani Poola in a letter dated December 20, 2021 stated that no adverse traffic impacts are anticipated and provided comments related to future monitoring of traffic and parking.

Building Department

Bharat Gami, former Chief Building Official in a letter dated December 1, 2022 provided comments related to compliance with 2015 IBC to be addressed prior to Building Permit.

Historic Preservation Advisory Commission

David Woods, Chairman of the Historic Preservation Advisory Commission in a letter dated February 2, 2022 provided comments related to the building materials, requested clarification related to the south elevation and requested that any future changes to the building design be communicated to the Commission.

Summary

Staff believes that the proposed project will enhance this section of Downtown Stamford by reusing and expanding a historic building and bringing an active use adjacent to Veteran's Park. The proposal meets several policies of the City's Master Plan including Policy 5A: Support Downtown as a Regional Center, Policy 5.A.6: Promote in-fill Development on vacant sites, Policy 5.B: Make Downtown a more pedestrian friendly neighborhood among other Downtown policies. Staff recommends approval of the Special Permit and Site and Architectural Plan and Requested Uses application which will promote economic vitality and foster a vibrant public space.