

**STAMFORD PLANNING BOARD
APPROVED MINUTES - TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 27, 2024
REGULAR MEETING
VIA THE INTERNET & CONFERENCE CALL
6:30 P.M.**

ZOOM WEBINAR
Webinar ID: 813 1698 6061
Passcode: 891641

Stamford Planning Board Members present were: Voting Members: Theresa Dell, Chair; Jay Teppar, Vice Chair; and Michael Totilo. Alternates: William Levin. Absent: Jennifer Godzeno, Secretary and Michael Buccino, Voting Members and Stephen Perry, Alternate. Present for staff: Anthony Romano, Management Analyst, Office of Policy & Management and Lindsey Cohen, Associate Planner.

Ms. Dell called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m.

Ms. Dell introduced the members of the Board and staff present and introduced the first item on the agenda.

PLANNING BOARD MEETING MINUTES:

February 13, 2024: After a brief discussion, Mr. Teppar moved to recommend *approval* of the Planning Board Regular Meeting Minutes of February 13, 2024; Mr. Totilo seconded the motion, and passed unanimously with eligible members present voting, 3-0 (Dell, Teppar and Totilo). (Mr. Levin was ineligible to vote as he was absent at the February 13, 2024 meeting.)

Ms. Dell announced that there are two Capital Budget items from the Mayor's office that need to be "Walked on" with the first item being Government Center EV Infrastructure - Project #001348. Ms. Dell stated that Anthony Romano, Management Analyst, Office of Policy & Management and Lou Casolo, Engineering Bureau Chief/City Engineer, were in attendance to speak about the items.

Ms. Dell called for a motion to "Walk on" the Government Center EV Infrastructure - Project #001348.

Mr. Teppar made a motion to "Walk on" the Government Center EV Infrastructure - Project #001348; Mr. Totilo seconded the motion, and passed unanimously with eligible members present voting, 4-0 (Dell, Levin, Teppar and Totilo).

Ms. Dell introduced Mr. Casolo.

- 1. GOVERNMENT CENTER EV INFRASTRUCTURE - PROJECT #001348 - TOTAL REQUEST \$860,566.00:** This request is for the design, procurement, and installation of multiple Level 2 and Level 3 electric vehicle (EV) chargers in the Government Center parking garage. This project aligns with Mayor Simmons' Climate Executive Order No. EO-005-230417-Climate in which the City of Stamford has committed to support the growing adoption of battery electric vehicles (BEVs) and enhancing the reliability and accessibility of electric vehicle service equipment (EVSE) on City-owned property.

Lou Casolo, Engineering Bureau Chief/City Engineer, along with Brandon Mark, Sustainability & Energy Manager, made a presentation and answered questions from the Board.

After a brief discussion, Mr. Levin recommended approval of the Government Center EV Infrastructure - Project #001348 with a Total Request of \$860,566.00. This request has been reviewed pursuant to Connecticut General Statute Section 8-24 and the City Charter Section C6-30-13 and finds this request to be consistent with CGS Section 8-24, and the City Charter Section C6-30-13, as well as consistent with the adopted 2015 Master Plan; Mr. Totilo seconded the motion and passed unanimously with eligible members present voting, 4-0 (Dell, Levin, Tepper and Totilo).

Ms. Dell introduced Mr. DeRubeis.

2. **GOVERNMENT SAFETY COMPLEX ASSESSMENT - PROJECT #001391 - TOTAL REQUEST \$500,000.00:** The Simmons administration is requesting a Needs Assessment be conducted to assess the potential for building a new Public Safety Complex at the 805 Bedford Street site. This site is City-owned and currently vacant and we would like to explore the potency of bringing multiple public safety functions to one central location.

Louis DeRubeis, Director of Public Safety, Health & Welfare, made a presentation and answered questions from the Board.

After a brief discussion, Mr. Tepper recommended approval of the Government Safety Complex Assessment - Project #001391 with a Total Request of \$500,000.00. This request has been reviewed pursuant to Connecticut General Statute Section 8-24 and the City Charter Section C6-30-13 and finds this request to be consistent with CGS Section 8-24, and the City Charter Section C6-30-13, as well as consistent with the adopted 2015 Master Plan; Mr. Totilo seconded the motion and passed unanimously with eligible members present voting, 4-0 (Dell, Levin, Tepper and Totilo).

NOTE: As Ms. Dell did not call for a motion to “Walk On” Item No. 2 (Government Safety Complex Assessment - Project #001391), the vote taken does not count. A Special Meeting will be held on Monday, March 4, 2024 at 8:45 a.m. to recast the vote.

ZONING BOARD REFERRALS:

1. **ZB APPLICATION #224-08 - SUMMER STREET EQUITY, LLC - 1600 SUMMER STREET - Map Change:** Applicant is proposing to rezone 1600 Summer Street from the current RM-F (Multiple Family Residence Design) and C-L (Limited Business) to the proposed C-G (General Commercial).

The property is in Master Plan Category #9 (Urban Mixed-Use). Directly to the south of this site is Master Plan Category #5 (Residential - High Density Multifamily), to the west is Scalzi Park in Master Plan Category #14 (Open Space), to the north and east is Master Plan Category #4 (Residential - Medium Density Multifamily). This is an area of transition categorized as a mix of land uses not as intense as that of the Downtown to the south, but more intense than the single-family only areas to the north.

In 2023, the U.S. office vacancy rate surpassed 20% for the first time in decades. In Stamford, the office vacancy rate has been at 30% for several years. The multi-tenant office building at 1600 High Ridge Road is mostly physically empty and many leases are expiring in 2025 with no intent to renew. This is a further indication of a declining demand for office space. Consideration here is not to say the Board should act favorably to line the pockets of the developer, but rather to look at the surrounding land uses for compatibility, look at the overall trends that are an indicator of consumer demand, and think about how vacancies could impact our City in terms of vibrancy and economic development.

The Land Use Bureau supports opportunities to reduce nonconformities. The Property is out of compliance with several current Zoning Regulations that have changed since the building’s development. The zone change to C-G will cure nearly all existing nonconformities. The C-G Zone will permit a versatile and desirable mix of uses including multifamily residential, medical, educational, retail and other service uses. The permitted uses in the C-G Zone align with the intent of Master Plan Category #9 (Urban Mixed-Use).

Master Plan Category #9 (Urban Mixed-Use) is meant to “encourage redevelopment” which aligns with the intention of this Map Change. With the existing nonconformities and lack of demand for this type of office space, redevelopment is challenging. While there is no future program determined for this site, the Map Change would encourage redevelopment as intended by this Master Plan Category. This Category includes “a full array of uses including high-density residential uses and the primary use...supported by a dynamic mix of neighborhood retail and services uses, office, and recreational uses.” The Map Change, from two applicable districts to one and from R-MF and C-L to C-G, would allow for a wider array of uses as described in this Category. The intention is to better activate the site with users, which aligns with the Master Plan goal to improve pedestrian connections between the Downtown and neighboring communities. The proposal is also aligned with the following Master Plan strategies:

- Strategy 3A.3: Increase economic resiliency and diversity by encouraging modernization of office space and allowing for adaptive reuse.
- Strategy 3B.4: Manage growth by encouraging the reconfiguration of existing office and retail space to accommodate market trends and potential new users.

Ms. Cohen made some introductory comments and then introduced Mr. Redniss.

Richard Redniss, Redniss & Mead, along with Raymond Mazzeo, Redniss & Mead and Lisa Feinberg, Carmody Torrance Sandak & Hennessey, LLP; made a presentation and answered questions from the Board.

Ms. Dell stated that Ms. Godzeno had sent comments regarding this application and read them into the record as follows:

“I’m supportive of the zone change for 1600 Summer St. I think it’s proactive planning to better align with Master Plan Category 9 and is beneficial for the applicant to be considering this before a specific new use or development proposal is before us (avoids the perception of “spot zoning” that sometimes comes up as a critique). I expect more rezonings like this will follow the comprehensive plan process and its evaluation of how to address excess office space inventory.”

After a brief discussion, Mr. Tepper recommended **approval** of **ZB Application #224-08** and found this request to be in general harmony with Master Plan Category #9 (Urban Mixed-Use); Mr. Levin seconded the motion and passed unanimously with eligible members present voting, 4-0 (Dell, Levin, Tepper and Totilo).

1. **ZB APPLICATION #224-05 - STAMFORD ZONING BOARD - Text Change:** Applicant is proposing a Text Change seeking to better align the Purpose Section of the City of Stamford Zoning Regulations with the updated regulations of Section 8-2 of the Connecticut General Statutes. Section 8-2 was amended by Public Act 21-29, which was approved on June 10, 2021.

Changes in the State Statute (Public Act 21-29 [aka HB 6107]) included the addition of energy efficiency, protection of historic, cultural and environmental resources and the provision of housing to address equity issues. It deleted references to neighborhood character and property values which have been used in the past to justify exclusionary zoning practices and perpetuated inequities. Section 1.A. was updated accordingly.

“Character” is an important term in the 2015 Master Plan. The Comprehensive Plan update will exclude references to “character” not only due to association with exclusionary zoning practices but also because of State Statutes. Specifically, HB6107 deletes “character” and replaces it with “physical site characteristics.” A Board cannot deny a project “unless such character is expressly articulated in regs by clear and explicit physical standards for site work and structures,” which is where our plans and regulations will trend toward.

Ralph Blessing, Land Use Bureau Chief, made a presentation and answered questions from the Board.

After a brief discussion, Mr. Levin recommended **approval** of **ZB Application #224-05** and found this request to be in general harmony with the 2015 Master Plan; Mr. Totilo seconded the motion and passed unanimously with eligible members present voting, 4-0 (Dell, Levin, Tepper and Totilo).

ZONING BOARD OF APPEALS REFERRALS:

1. **ZBA APPLICATION #046-23 - FRANK WAYNE RANHOSKY - 35 TERRACE AVENUE - Variance of Table III, Appendix B:** Applicant owns this one (1) acre parcel improved with a single-family dwelling and is seeking to subdivide into two (2) one-half (½) acre lots. Proposed Lot #1 will have 85 ft. frontage and proposed Lot #2 will have 30 ft. frontage. Applicant is requesting allowance for a lot to be created with a 30 ft. street frontage in lieu of the 75 ft. required.

The subject property is in Master Plan Category #2 (Residential - Low Density Single-Family). This Application is for the approval of a condition that would allow for a subdivision and does not constitute an application for or approval of a subdivision. When thinking about whether the request at hand (a reduced lot frontage) would be aligned with the Master Plan Category, it is important to consider surrounding patterns of development. Most lots in this area meet the frontage requirement. The proposed lot configuration appears like an accessway lot; however, such a lot is not proposed and the lot would meet a reduced frontage requirement. Accessway lots were at one time permitted in the R-7½ District and there are several such lots surrounding this property on Deacon Hill Road and High Ridge Road and directly adjacent on Terrace Avenue. Most lots in the area are significantly smaller than this lot. This lot is four times the size of the minimum lot area in the R-7½ District. Allowing a reduced frontage to permit a two-lot subdivision in this area would bring this property in closer alignment with the lot size of the surrounding properties. The proposal would support the single-family neighborhood by allowing for another single-family home to be built on an oversized lot in a relatively dense single-family neighborhood and, thus, is generally aligned with the intent of this Master Plan Category #2.

Ms. Cohen made a brief presentation and answered questions from the Board.

After a brief discussion, Mr. Tepper recommended **approval** of **ZBA Application #046-23** and that this request is in general harmony with Master Plan Category #2 (Residential - Low Density Single-Family); Mr. Levin seconded the motion and passed unanimously with eligible members present voting, 4-0 (Dell, Levin, Tepper and Totilo).

2. **ZBA APPLICATION #006-24 - LUZ CASTRO - 45 NICHOLS AVENUE - Variance of Table II, Appendix B:** Applicant owns a two-story single-family dwelling and is proposing a 222 sq. ft. second floor addition to create a bedroom and balcony. Applicant is requesting: **[a]** a front yard street line setback of 36 ft. in lieu of the 40 ft. required; **[b]** a front yard street center setback of 61 ft. in lieu of 65 ft. required; **[c]** a side yard setback of 4.6 ft. in lieu of the 10 ft. required; and **[d]** a side yard setback for both sides of 14.6 ft. in lieu of the 20 ft. required.

The Subject property is in Master Plan Category #2 (Residential - Low Density Single-Family). The existing house was built in 1935, prior to the enactment of Zoning Regulations, and is legally noncompliant. The existing home is approximately 20-25 ft. setback from the front lot line where 40 ft. is required. The proposed addition to the rear of the building does not cover the whole building footprint and would be setback further than the current front of the house. The existing home is 4.6 ft. setback on one side and has a 14.6 ft. combined side yard setback. The proposed addition would be aligned with the two sides of the existing home. Height and building lot coverage are compliant. The proposal is in general harmony with the intent of this Master Plan Category #2 to “provide for and protect a suitable environment for single-family dwellings...” and Policy 6A to maintain residential neighborhood character.

Ms. Cohen made a brief presentation and answered questions from the Board.

After a brief discussion, Mr. Levin recommended **approval** of **ZBA Application #006-24** and that this request is in general harmony with Master Plan Category #2 (Residential - Low Density Single-Family); Mr. Tepper seconded the motion and passed unanimously with eligible members present voting, 4-0 (Dell, Levin, Tepper and Totilo).

3. **ZBA APPLICATION #007-24 - JACQUELINE KAUFMAN, CARMODY TORRANCE SANDAK & HENNESSEY, LLP representing KING SCHOOL, INC. - 1450 NEWFIELD AVENUE - Special Permit:** The Property is used as a School, Non-Public Use, which is a Special Permit use within the Zoning District, and is improved with lower, middle, and upper school buildings, a performing arts center building, administrative buildings, athletic fields and associated improvements, tennis courts, child play areas and associated recreational equipment, barns and storage structures, staff housing, driveways and parking areas, and landscaping and lighting. The Applicant proposes to renovate two (2) pre-kindergarten and two (2) kindergarten classrooms and enclose an existing 1,152 sq. ft. roofed walkway along the south wing of the lower school building. The proposed enclosed walkway will have a new 155 sq. ft. vestibule and an entrance from the central courtyard. The Applicant further proposes to renovate the existing playground area to the south of these classrooms. Specifically, the Applicant proposes to add new walkways, a synthetic turf play surface, seating, and landscaping. This area is dedicated for use by pre-kindergarten and kindergarten students and is separated by fencing from the larger playground that was constructed in 2012. No increase to the existing student enrollment is proposed.

The Subject property is in Master Plan Category #1 (Residential - Very Low Density Single-Family). Per Section 19.C.1 of the Zoning Regulations, when an existing use or Structure that is permitted only by Special Permit is proposed to be altered in a manner that would change the character or intensity of the use or feature, such proposed alteration shall be treated as a Special Permit. The changes in character or intensity of use or feature are minimal. The proposal is primarily adding walkways to a central area of the school where walkways currently exist, enclosing an existing open-air walkway, and adding a play space to an area that is currently lawn and trees. The proposed improvements are centrally located on the lot, not adjacent to any public right-of-ways, so they are hidden from views by the public. Given that the proposal would not impact vehicular trips to or from the King School, would be screened from views, and would enhance the Applicant's ability to have a Special Permit use support the very low-density single-family neighborhood in which it is located, the proposal is aligned with the intent of this Master Plan Category #1.

Ms. Cohen made a brief presentation and answered questions from the Board.

After a brief discussion, Mr. Tepper recommended **approval** of **ZBA Application #007-24** and that this request is in general harmony with Master Plan Category #1 (Residential - Very Low Density Single-Family); Mr. Levin seconded the motion and passed unanimously with eligible members present voting, 4-0 (Dell, Levin, Tepper and Totilo).

4. **ZBA APPLICATION #008-24 - JOHNNY CLARIZIO & DENA GARDELLA - 18 FOWLER STREET - Variance of Table II, Appendix B:** Applicant owns a two (2) bedroom, 2½-story wood frame single-family dwelling and is proposing a second-floor addition over the existing sunroom. Applicant is requesting a side yard setback of 4.6 ft. in lieu of the 6 ft. required.

The subject property is in Master Plan Category #3 (Residential - Low Density Multifamily). The existing house is non-compliant due to a sunroom that is 4.6 ft. setback in lieu of the 6 ft. required. The proposed addition would be on top of the sunroom and would be aligned with the exterior walls of the sunroom, specifically that facing the side yard. The request appears to be the minimum necessary to afford relief. The proposal is aligned with the intent of this Master Plan Category #3 to "provide for and protect a suitable environment for single-family dwellings..." and Policy 6A to maintain residential neighborhood character.

Ms. Cohen made a brief presentation and answered questions from the Board.

After a brief discussion, Mr. Tepper recommended **approval** of **ZBA Application #008-24** and that this request is in general harmony with Master Plan Category #3 (Residential - Low Density Multifamily); Mr. Totilo seconded the motion and passed unanimously with eligible members present voting, 4-0 (Dell, Levin, Tepper and Totilo).

Next regularly scheduled Planning Board meetings are:

- March 4, 2024 (Special Meeting-Site Visit - ZB #223-38 - 800 Long Ridge Road)
- March 12, 2024 (Regular Meeting)
- March 26, 2024 (Regular Meeting)

Ms. Dell noted that replacements have not yet been appointed for herself and Mr. Totilo and therefore, will be staying on until such replacements can be found.

Ms. Cohen stated that the March 12 meeting is being targeted to have the Transportation, Traffic & Parking Bureau come and speak about implementation of the Parking Study.

There being no further business to come before the Board, Ms. Dell adjourned the meeting at 7:45 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted
March 4, 2024

Theresa Dell, Chair
Stamford Planning Board

NOTE: These proceedings were recorded on video and are available for review on the Planning Board website at http://cityofstamford.granicus.com/ViewPublisher.php?view_id=20