

**STAMFORD PLANNING BOARD
APPROVED MINUTES - TUESDAY, MARCH 12, 2024
REGULAR MEETING
VIA THE INTERNET & CONFERENCE CALL
6:30 P.M.**

ZOOM WEBINAR
Webinar ID: 856 6708 4562
Passcode: 602803

Stamford Planning Board Members present were: Voting Members: Theresa Dell, Chair; Jay Tepper, Vice Chair; Jennifer Godzeno, Secretary and Michael Totilo. Alternates: William Levin and Stephen Perry. Absent: Michael Buccino. Present for staff: Vineeta Mathur, Principal Planner and Lindsey Cohen, Associate Planner.

Ms. Dell called the meeting to order at 6:35 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 27, 2024: After a brief discussion, Mr. Tepper moved to recommend *approval* of the Planning Board Regular Meeting Minutes of February 27, 2024; Mr. Perry seconded the motion, and passed unanimously with eligible members present voting, 5-0 (Dell, Levin, Perry, Tepper and Totilo). (Ms. Godzeno was ineligible to vote as she was absent at the February 27, 2024 meeting.)

March 4, 2024 (Special Meeting - Capital Budget): After a brief discussion, Mr. Tepper moved to recommend *approval* of the Planning Board Capital Budget Special Meeting Minutes of March 4, 2024; Mr. Levin seconded the motion, and passed unanimously with eligible members present voting, 4-0 (Dell, Levin, Totilo and Tepper). (Ms. Godzeno and Mr. Perry were ineligible to vote as they were absent at the March 4, 2024 Capital Budget Special Meeting.)

March 4, 2024 (Special Meeting - Site Visit 800 Long Ridge Road): After a brief discussion, Ms. Godzeno moved to recommend *approval* of the Planning Board Special Meeting Minutes of March 4, 2024; Mr. Totilo seconded the motion, and passed unanimously with eligible members present voting, 5-0 (Dell, Godzeno, Perry, Tepper and Totilo).

ZONING BOARD REFERRALS:

1. **ZB APPLICATION #223-38 - 800 LONG RIDGE ROAD, LLC - 800 LONG RIDGE ROAD - Site & Architectural Plans and/or Requested Uses and Special Permit:** Applicant is proposing a redevelopment consisting of 354 apartments and approximately 9,394 sq. ft. of commercial space along with associated landscaping and site improvements. Applicant is requesting: [a] Final Site Plan Approval; [b] Special Permit approval for multifamily residential use of the property and a 5 ft. sidewalk requirement in lieu of 6 ft.; and [c] Special Permit exemption from the sidewalk requirements for the Long Ridge Road frontage to the south of the entrance to the property.

There is a false notion that the Master Plan does not address Stamford's suburban office parks. The Master Plan does address what to do with the suburban office parks: allow for adaptive reuse. On Page 64, the Master Plan correctly predicts that office vacancy rates will remain around levels in 2015 (they have risen from ~27% to ~30%) and there will be a stronger demand for Downtown office space and weaker demand for suburban office parks. To address this, the Master Plan calls for concentrating office

development in the Downtown and redeveloping underutilized office space in suburban style office parks for mixed-use development (Page 69, Policy 3B.2). The Master Plan goes one step further recommending zoning changes to encourage the redevelopment of office parks, which the Planning Board and Zoning Board approved when allowing residential and other uses in C-D Districts by Special Permit. In addition, in the Newfield/Turn of River/Westover section of the plan, one of the implementation strategies under the goal of “Preserve, protect and enhance neighborhood character and quality of life” is “Strategy NTW1.4: Explore the feasibility of rezoning certain vacant or underutilized commercial/office properties along Long Ridge Road for multifamily residential and mixed-use development.” The proposed project is clearly aligned with these implementation strategies and steps taken by the City, respective Boards and Master Planning efforts in 2015 prepared for projects such as these.

The proposed project includes small investments into public transit - adding a crosswalk near a bus stop, improving a nearby bus shelter. More should be done at the City and State level during the Comprehensive Planning process to make public transportation more palatable to people traveling along the Ridges and to make service more frequent. The 2015 Master Plan talks about providing express and direct priority bus service along the Ridge Roads which is a policy that should be further developed. Staff opposes the Special Permit for exemption from the sidewalk requirements for Long Ridge Road south of the entrance to the Property. A network of sidewalks can be developed piecemeal if the requirements are enforced. This Special Permit request does not align with Policy NTW2: Improve Mobility and Circulation, Strategies NTW2.1 and NTW 2.4., and should be further studied to understand if the identified constraints can be overcome.

This project is in Master Plan Category 8 (Mixed-Use Campus) which “is intended to provide for and protect low-density office parks . . . by allowing limited expansion and adaptive reuse of compatible office, research and development, residential, government, educational and medical uses.” This project fits the Category because it is proposing adaptive reuse by residential purposes with commercial space for support businesses such as a medical office. Staff argue that residential use, even multifamily, is more compatible with this residential neighborhood than office use. The Category intends for “development in this category to be at densities, height and bulk far below those in Downtown,” which this is. As such, Staff recommends approval of this application except for the Special Permit for the sidewalk exemption.

There are other important consistencies with the Master Plan including:

- Policy 6A.1 Balance new development with preservation of existing residential communities.
[This development is reuse of a brownfield, not new use of a greenfield, so it is preserving the open space that is in this community. Adding some townhomes or stepping down the height of the building may be a bit more balanced in terms of the residential character in this area trending towards single-family homes; however, the campus like setting shields the multifamily buildings from views from surrounding neighborhoods.]
- Policy 6B: Preserve existing and create new affordable housing. [Creates 35 new BMR units.]
- Policy 6C.2: Promote development of a variety of housing types.
[This is an area that is surrounded by single-family homes and condos. Apartments would add variety.]
- Policy 6C.4: Continue encouraging conversion of vacant office buildings to residential use.

Ms. Dell noted for the record that 80+ letters were received from the public, mostly in opposition, regarding this project. Ms. Dell stated all the correspondence received has been forwarded to the Zoning Board and will be made part of the public record.

Ms. Cohen made some introductory comments then introduced Ms. Feinberg.

Lisa Feinberg, Carmody Torrance Sandak & Hennessey, LLP, along with Daniel Chapple, Carmody Torrance Sandak & Hennessey, LLP; Tim Hollister, Hinkley Allen; Mark Bertucci, Fuss & O'Neill and David Stewart, EDI International; representing the applicant, made a presentation and answered questions from the Board.

Ms. Godzeno noted there would be the same density of units if townhomes were developed instead of an apartment building.

Ms. Dell noted the RM-1 District would have a lower height.

Ms. Feinberg noted while the height would be lower the setbacks would also be greater.

Ms. Godzeno discussed the tradeoff between apartments and townhomes with townhomes leading to more sprawl comparatively.

Mr. Totilo expressed concern about the height of the building and the density of the project.

Mr. Levin discussed sidewalks, maintenance of open space existing on the site and providing a variety of housing types.

Mr. Perry discussed traffic generation.

Ms. Feinberg discussed the traffic study.

Ms. Dell discussed homeownership units versus rental units, apartment building design versus townhouse building design. Ms. Dell noted surrounding land uses are single-family and townhouse-style cluster developments with amenities such as tennis courts and clubhouses.

Ms. Feinberg noted land use regulations determine the use of land but not the character of the user. Fair housing regulations prohibit municipalities from regulating sale or rental.

After considerable discussion, Mr. Levin recommended **approval** of **ZB Application #223-38** with the recommendation that sidewalks be provided throughout the project for easier accessibility to Long Ridge Road and to restrict the commercial uses to those which would service the residents of the complex. The Board found this request to be in general harmony with Master Plan Category #8 (Mixed-Use Campus); Ms. Godzeno seconded the motion and passed unanimously with eligible members present voting, 5-0 (Dell, Godzeno, Levin, Tepper and Totilo).

2. **ZB APPLICATION 224-01 - 31 MAPLE TREE, LLC - 31 MAPLE TREE AVENUE - Text Change:** Applicant is proposing to amend Section 7.3.C.3. Parking Standards to add a provision to allow the Zoning Board to reduce or waive the distance of parking areas from *Lot Lines* and *Buildings* and modify the dimensions of *Parking Spaces* used for residential use based on certain findings.

This Text Change is the same as a small portion of the Text Change request ZB #223-39 for 1911 Summer Street that has not been acted upon by the Zoning Board but has been recommended for approval by the Planning Board. The reasoning behind the Text Change is that it would help encourage rehabilitation of historic homes by allowing more flexibility in meeting zoning requirements for parking areas. This Text Change is narrower than #223-39 in that it would not impact open space or building setback requirements. Since the Text Change is being utilized in the Site Plan application, below, the applications should be considered together.

Jason Klein, Carmody Torrance Sandak & Hennessey, LLP, representing the applicant, made a presentation and answered questions from the Board.

After some discussion, Mr. Tepper recommended **approval** of **ZB Application #224-01** with the recommendation that all the conditions HPAC be followed and to make sure there is adequate room for emergency services to be able to turn around and found this request to be in general harmony with Master Plan Category #8 (Mixed-Use Campus); Mr. Totilo seconded the motion and passed unanimously with eligible members present voting, 5-0 (Dell, Godzeno, Perry, Tepper and Totilo).

3. ZB APPLICATION 224-02 – 31 MAPLE TREE LLC - 31 MAPLE TREE AVENUE - Site & Architectural Plans and/or Requested Uses, Special Permit and an application for approval for addition to the Stamford Cultural Resources Inventory (CRI): Applicant is proposing the reconstruction of a historic house and construct four (4) new townhouses to the rear along with landscaping and parking requiring: *[a]* application to include the historic home on the Cultural Resources Inventory, *[b]* text amendment to modify parking area requirements, *[c]* Site Plan approval and *[d]* Special Permit approval for seven items described in the application materials.

The Special Permit applications are all identified as options in the Zoning Regulations associated with the preservation of the historic structure and provide the necessary flexibility of Zoning Regulations that enable preservation. The property is in Master Plan Category 3 (Residential - Low Density Multifamily). Surrounding land uses are aligned with this category with Graystone Court (6 units) directly to the east and Maple Manor Estates (7 units) directly to the west. Condo developments line Maple Tree Avenue ranging in size from 6 units to 63 units with most between 6 units and 15 units. The rehabilitated historic home would have two (2) two-bedroom units and there would be four (4) three-bedroom townhomes built to the rear of the historic home for a total of six (6) units on the lot. The proposed number of units, which is associated with a Special Permit, aligns with the surrounding land uses. In addition, the site plan is similar to that of Graystone Court.

The property is within walking distance to the Glenbrook Metro North Train Station providing easy access to public transit for future residents. The Property is also close to the businesses and restaurants located along Glenbrook Road and Crescent Street. This centralized location will likely encourage pedestrian, rather than vehicular travel to and from the Property. Proximity to transit and commercial uses supports the Special Permit for parking requirement reduction and 50% increase in permitted units. The 50% increase in permitted units is supported by this Master Plan Category that intends to allow for increased density on projects with historic preservation. The Special Permits relating to setbacks are reasonable and not excessive.

The Property is within Master Plan Category 3 (Residential - Low Density Multifamily). Category #3 is “intended to provide for and protect single-family dwellings and the least intensive of multifamily developments (i.e., garden apartments or similar condominium type units...” The proposal, which will result in preservation of a historic home, maintenance of single-family appearance at the front, a four-unit multifamily building to the rear, is in keeping with the overall goals of Category #3. The proposal will also further the City’s larger policy goals of preserving historic structures and providing a diverse housing stock for City residents. This project went through HPAC who recommended approval with certain conditions. As such, staff recommends approval of this Application with the conditions recommended by HPAC as it is in general harmony with the Master Plan. The proposal also supports the following Master Plan strategies:

- Strategy 6D.3-a: Promote zoning incentives for historic preservation and adaptive reuse.
- Strategy 4D.3: Continue to evaluate opportunities to reduce parking ratios for development near transit.
- Strategy 6A.1: Balance new development with preservation of existing residential communities

After some discussion, Mr. Tepper recommended **approval** of **ZB Application #224-02** with the recommendation that all the conditions made by HPAC at their March 5, 2024 meeting be followed and to make sure there is adequate room for emergency services vehicles to be able to turn around. The Board found this request to be in general harmony with Master Plan Category #8 (Mixed-Use Campus); Mr. Perry seconded the motion and passed unanimously with eligible members present voting, 5-0 (Dell, Godzeno, Perry, Tepper and Totilo).

4. ZB APPLICATION #224-06 - STAMFORD ZONING BOARD - Text Change: Applicant is proposing a change to the Stamford Zoning Regulations intended to increase the supply of housing for seniors and people with disabilities. In addition, the proposed change would allow senior and disabled day services and would update and streamline regulations.

The proposed changes are intended to assure that Stamford's seniors will have a variety of affordable housing and care options as the share and number of seniors increases nationwide.¹ The proposed changes would:

- Add a New Definition for “Senior Housing” to Section 5.E. The new Senior Housing definition includes all single, two-, and multi-family housing that is deed-restricted to persons 55 years and older or people with disabilities. It would also include Assisted Living Facility, Memory Care, Nursing Home, Senior Housing and Nursing Home Facility Complex, and Independent Living Facility.
- Develop standards for the “Senior Housing.” The goal of the new development standards is to make senior housing more financially feasible especially in lower density neighborhoods, while blending in with the built environment in these areas.
- Add other new or updated definitions to Section 5.E for Independent Living Facility, Residential Care Facility, and Continuing Care Retirement Community to align different senior housing options better with State regulations definitions.
- Delete definitions and all references related to “Apartment Building for Elderly” and replace the terms “Elderly” in Section 5.E
- Add definitions for Disability and Proven Disability.
- Amend Section 12.D.3 Mobility to reflect new definitions and reduce parking requirements.
- Rename “Apartment Building for Supportive Housing” to “Supportive Housing” throughout.
- Permit Day Programs for Seniors and the Disabled.

Emily Gordon, Director of Housing and Community Development, made a presentation and answered questions from the Board.

After a brief discussion, Mr. Tepper recommended **approval** of **ZB Application #224-06** and found this request to be in general harmony with the 2015 Master Plan; Ms. Godzeno seconded the motion and passed unanimously with eligible members present voting, 5-0 (Dell, Godzeno, Levin, Tepper and Totilo).

5. ZB APPLICATION #224-07 - STAMFORD ZONING BOARD - Text Change: Applicant proposes to bring the ongoing reorganization of the Zoning Regulations to a conclusion by consolidating and re-ordering Zoning Sections. Cross-references across sections will be updated with the new section numbers, placeholders will be added for districts without standalone sections and the Table of Contents will be updated to reflect these changes.

¹ US Census Bureau: [U.S. Older Population Grew From 2010 to 2020 at Fastest Rate Since 1880 to 1890](https://www.uscensus.gov/newsroom/press-releases/2023/05/25/older-population-grew-from-2010-to-2020-at-fastest-rate-since-1880-to-1890), USCensus.gov (5/25/2023).

The Zoning Regulations would be reorganized according to the table below. It would also include the updating of cross references with the new section numbers. For Districts that currently have no standalone section in the Zoning Regulations (C-C, C-G, C-I, C-L and C-N) placeholders would be added in the new Section 5 that refer to the standards in Appendices A and B. The Table of Contents of the Regulations would be updated as well. No substantive changes to any of the regulations are proposed.

The proposed new structure of the Zoning Regulations would be as follows:

New Section Title	Proposed Change
1. General Provisions	Unchanged
2. Approvals and Permits	Formerly Section 19
3. Definitions	Unchanged
4. Use Definitions and Standards	Formerly Section 5
5. Districts and District Regulations	Formerly Sections 4, 7.6 and 9; Districts would be listed alphabetically
6. Design Standards for Publicly Accessible Amenity Space	Unchanged
7. BMR Program	Formerly Section 7.4.
8. Historic Preservation	Formerly Section 7.3.
9. Sustainability and Resiliency	Formerly Section 15
10. Non-Conforming Uses	Unchanged
11. Signs	Formerly Section 13
12. Mobility	Unchanged

Lindsey Cohen, Associate Planner, made a presentation and answered questions from the Board.

After a brief discussion, Mr. Totilo recommended **approval** of **ZB Application #224-07** and found this request to be in general harmony with the 2015 Master Plan; Mr. Perry seconded the motion and passed unanimously with eligible members present voting, 5-0 (Dell, Godzeno, Perry, Tepper and Totilo).

ZONING BOARD OF APPEALS REFERRALS:

- 1. ZBA APPLICATION #009-24 - JOSEPH J CAPALBO II, ESQ. representing TFG WATERSIDE GP, LLC - 619 FAIRFIELD AVENUE - Variance of Section 3 (Definitions):**
Applicant owns a non-conforming two-family dwelling in the R-7½ Zone. Applicant is proposing to remove the existing non-conforming structure and subdivide the property into three (3) conforming single-family lots. Applicant is requesting: *[a]* allowance of three (3) lots to be serviced by one (1) accessway and *[b]* allowance of accessway lots in the R-7½ Zone.

The Subject property is in Master Plan Category #2 (Residential - Low Density Single-Family). This Application is for the approval of two conditions that would allow for a subdivision and does not constitute an application for or approval of a subdivision.

The current lot configuration is a result of Subdivision #3575 which required access easements in favor of 615 Fairfield Avenue and 631 Fairfield Avenue over the accessway serving 619 Fairfield Avenue. Allowing three (3) lots to be serviced by one (1) accessway in this case would result in five (5) lots to be serviced by one accessway. TTP, Engineering and the LUB have concerns about emergency service access, addressing, circulation and parking. Staff is supportive of allowing accessway lots in an R-7½ District because they support single-family homes and increase density in an area zoned for denser one-family residences. However, this lot is already an accessway lot in an R-7½ District. The unusual shape of the lot is the basis for the hardship. Creating more accessway lots would create more hardships. Therefore, approval of a variance to allow three (3) lots to be served off one (1) accessway is not recommended.

Ms. Cohen made some introductory comments then introduced Mr. Capalbo.

Joseph J. Capalbo II, Esq., along with Richard Redniss, Redniss & Mead, representing the applicant, made a presentation and answered questions from the Board.

After a brief discussion, Mr. Totilo recommended **approval** of **ZBA Application #009-24** with the recommendation the preliminary site plan reviewed by the Fire Marshal be used going forward as opposed to that presented to the Planning Board as part of the application materials. The Board found 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, 5-0 (Dell, Godzeno, Perry, Tepper and Totilo).

Next regularly scheduled Planning Board meetings are:

- March 26, 2024 (Regular Meeting)
- April 9, 2024 (Regular Meeting)
- April 30, 2024 (Regular Meeting)

Ms. Dell noted that she and Mr. Totilo will continue in their Board positions until advised that replacements have been found.

Ms. Godzeno provided comments on the upcoming 2025-2035 Comprehensive Plan (Master Plan) review on how the Zoning Regulations are written regarding density and site uses.

Ms. Cohen noted that if there are any questions on development in Stamford, the Land Use Bureau now has a Development question & answer section on the website.

There being no further business to come before the Board, Ms. Dell adjourned the meeting at 9:35 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted
March 14, 2024

Jennifer Godzeno, Secretary
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