

PLANNING BOARD MEETINGS

May 14, 2024

June 11, 2024

ZB APPLICATION #224-11

River Bend Center, LLC - Text Change (HT-D)

PUBLIC COMMENTS

SUPPORT

May 14, 2024

Theresa Dell, Chair, and members of the Planning Board

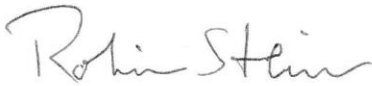
Re: ZB Application 224-11, River Bend Center LLC

I would like to express my support for the above-captioned application. I have been a resident of Belltown since 1981, which is not far from the subject property. I am also keenly aware of the property and its development, due to my prior tenure as staff to the Planning Board.

The proposed amendment is consistent with the Master Plan, which encourages the redevelopment of office parks, outside the Downtown, for mixed use including infill new residential development. In addition the amendment is consistent with the Belltown/Glenbrook/Springdale Neighborhood Plan, which encourages mixed-use development around the Springdale (and Glenbrook) train stations.

River Bend is a perfect candidate for mixed use development, including housing, due to its location adjacent to the Springdale Railroad Station. It is also served by Connecticut Transit. Its setting is ideal for the addition of housing, as it borders the Noroton River with its park setting, and is adjacent to the Hope Street commercial corridor.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Robin Stein".

Robin Stein
67 Leonard St.

From: Cottontails Daycare <cottontailsstamford@gmail.com>

Date: June 4, 2024 at 11:51:00 AM EDT

To: "Dell, Theresa" <TDell@stamfordct.gov>

Subject: Riverbend

Please see attached letter supporting the project at Riverbend Park

Cottontails Childcare

To the Planning Board:

I am a long-time Springdale resident who owns and operates the Cottontails Childcare & Learning Center in River Bend Center. In 2023 Mayor Simmons cut the ribbon at our grand opening at our new, state of the art facility that provides high quality childcare to 82 children daily, ranging in age from 6 weeks to 3 years. Our growth has been entirely in Springdale so we know the neighborhood and its family needs well. We started as a small family childcare operation in 2006. In 2014, we grew from serving 6 children daily to a group home serving 12 children. We expect to continue to grow in River Bend Center to serve even more families in Stamford.

River Bend is the perfect location for multi-dwelling residential housing. The park is a safe environment next to the Noroton River with a nature trail and pond. Traffic is limited and orderly. We are aware the alternative for River Bend management is to lease the park to industrial tenants that would mean large trucks driving through the park throughout the day. This would be most unwelcome by our business, and for the families we serve. We also know that for many young families starting out, affordability is a primary concern. Approving River Bend's application would be a big step in creating affordable housing solutions for these young people. Please approve River Bend's application.

Thank you very much.

Director, Cottontails Childcare & Learning Center

From: bargaintours@aol.com
Date: June 3, 2024 at 6:51:18 AM EDT
To: "Dell, Theresa" <TDell@stamfordct.gov>
Subject: Multi-Family Residential

To the City of Stamford Planning Board,

I write to support the text change of the River Bend Park district to allow for multifamily residential. I am a long-time Springdale resident who has seen the neighborhood's economy evolve over the decades. For it to serve the needs of future generations, it will need to continue to adapt.

Regarding the number of units, 470 may sound like a lot. But I am familiar with the Park and it is large. There are wide open spaces now. Assuming some of the vacant buildings there now come down, there will be even more room.

I understand that no specific development has been proposed. The text change will allow the owner to propose building designs that will have to be approved by the City of Stamford. That process is exactly what Springdale needs. Just saying "no" to any possibility of bringing in much-needed housing, especially next to a train station, is unwise. Thank you for your consideration.

Dominick Pelli
Reside 123 Highview Avenue Springdale
Owner
Uhaul Stamford in Springdale
Bargain Moving and Storage

From: **Jerry Silber** <silberjerry@gmail.com>

Date: Tue, May 21, 2024 at 10:44 AM

Subject: River Bend Center

To: StamfordLandUse@stamfordct.gov <StamfordLandUse@stamfordct.gov>

Dear Planning Board

I am writing you to request that you support the zoning text change to allow housing at River Bend Center. The text change would help make this office park, which is right next to the Springdale train station, much more walkable, bikeable, and transit oriented. It would also help to address our massive housing shortage, reduce car-dependency and congestion, and improve air quality in Stamford.

This “Transit Oriented development” is exactly what Stamford needs!

Thank you,
Jerry Silber
290 Club Road

From: plopath@teclens.com <plopath@teclens.com>

Sent: Friday, June 7, 2024 9:52 AM

To: Stamford Land Use <StamfordLandUse@StamfordCT.gov>; Dell, Theresa <TDell@StamfordCT.gov>; Capp, Lesley <LCapp@StamfordCT.gov>

Subject: Support of the proposed zoning change at Riverbend Park

To the Stamford Planning and Zoning Boards,

I am a resident of Stamford's Belltown neighborhood. I am also a Co-founder and the Chief Operating Officer of a growing medical device business located in Riverbend Park, close enough to my home for me to often bike and sometimes walk to the office. When the proposal to convert some of the Park to multi-family residences was first made, management of Park personally came around to inform me and to hear any concerns I might have. I thought that was very professional and respectful. I did not see any issues then, and do not foresee any problems going forward.

When my partners and I co-founded TECLens, I looked at many locations to base our office and lab space. I wanted to be in Stamford, and our business aspirations necessitated both a professional environment and an area zoned so we could potentially manufacture our ophthalmology devices on site. There are few areas in Stamford zoned to allow manufacture, with the strip on the East Side running from Viaduct Rd/Research Dr north to Camp Ave best fitting our requirements. We selected Riverbend because management in the Park has avoided business such heavy industry that would bring truck traffic, and other, let's say, 'less than desirable' types of business that populate the zone just to our south along Viaduct and Poplar.

As the pandemic has nudged a change in office space usage everywhere, we recognize that rental spaces have had to adapt. As both a tenant and a resident, I would hate to see River Bend have to adapt in a way that aligns the usage of the Park more with the zone to our south. My company would likely have to look elsewhere for our next lease. Unfortunately, given the scarcity of appropriately zoned space in Stamford, I may have to give up my personal aspiration to stay local in lieu of a more appropriate environment for a high-tech medical device business. A shift in the Park toward some residential space instead of these other types of business will maintain the professional and quiet environment that we want for TECLens.

I support the proposed change that would allow for multi-family residential in the Park. I do not feel that even the possible maximum of 470 units will pose any issues given that these residences will be replacing buildings that are now mostly or entirely empty. I hope you approve the change.

Very Respectfully,

Patrick D. Lopath | COO

TEOLens

9 River Bend Drive South

Suite 9A

Stamford, Connecticut 06907

From: Ron's Deli <ronsdelistamford@gmail.com>

Sent: Friday, June 7, 2024 11:57 AM

To: Dell, Theresa <TDell@StamfordCT.gov>; Capp, Lesley <LCapp@StamfordCT.gov>; Stamford Land Use <StamfordLandUse@StamfordCT.gov>

Subject: Riverbend center text change

To the City of Stamford Planning Board:

As a Springdale resident for many years who is also the owner of Ron's Deli at 725 Hope Street, I support the proposed text change that would bring residential apartments to nearby River Bend industrial park.

Over the years, there has been a steady loss from River Bend large businesses that employed many hundreds of employees. This has negatively impacted my business not only as we have lost significant lunchtime clientele but also a good amount of corporate catering. Add to this the fact that more people are working from home since Covid. This means that fewer people are driving into Springdale to work, and so they are not patronizing local delis and restaurants. It's clear the large high technology businesses like Omega, Xerox and Cervalis and others are not coming back to River Bend, and neither are their hundreds of employees. And it is clear from increasing vacancies over many years that other companies are not coming in to replace them.

These trends translate into fewer opportunities for Springdale business owners who have invested, and continue to invest, to serve the Springdale neighborhood. They also mean the local tax base is threatened and therefore the burden will fall onto other businesses and residents. At the same time, there is increasing demand for affordable apartments and condos. River Bend's location next to the Springdale train station is perfect for this use.

I am familiar with the traffic problems on Hope Street. If residential development of River Bend is linked with improvements to Hope Street's traffic flow it will be a win-win for existing and new residents and businesses alike. On the other hand, if River Bend has no choice but to fill up with trucking and heavy industrial company it will make congestion much worse as well as being a big lost opportunity for the neighborhood. Thank you for your consideration.

Mark Thomas

June 9, 2024

Stamford Planning Board
Stamford Government Center
888 Washington Blvd, 7th Floor
Stamford, CT 06901

Re: Letter in Support of River Bend Center Text Change

Dear Members of the Planning Board:

I write in support of the text change for the River Bend Center to allow portions of this HT-D industrial commercial space to convert to homes. The region and Stamford have a massive housing shortage which has driven up both rents and home prices. An April 2024 [Consumer Affairs article](#) rated CT as the worst state for renters, driven by a ridiculously low 3.5% vacancy rate. The [FHFA House Price Index](#) from March 2024 ranked CT as the 7th highest percent change by state at 9.64% over the past year. These statistics are a reflection that the demand for homes is high, but the supply is low. Unfortunately, the market forces that could replenish the supply have been artificially constrained by anti-home forces who block development via lawsuits and petitions. The people most affected by this are low to middle income residents, many of whom are essential workers who nurse us, feed us, educate us, and protect us. With the departure of Omega Engineering, River Bend has a vacancy rate of 65% according to an April 8, 2024 [Stamford Advocate article](#). This is a macro trend affecting the nation as more workers work remotely. Stamford is not immune to these trends as commercial vacancy rates increase in the City's office parks. The unmistakable long-term effect is to shift the tax burden from businesses to homeowners and renters, exacerbating the cost of living in Stamford. The February 2024 article in The Hill, [Empty office buildings: Here is how It could affect you](#), spotlights how local governments which rely on property taxes to pay for services will be affected.

Stamford also has a driver behavior problem made worse by poor street design. Reengineering streets will result in better traffic flow and safe movement for all. River Bend Center will directly address this by being a catalyst for a walkable, bikeable Springdale. At the heart of this project is one of the transit gems of the city, the Springdale Train Station. A Brookings research paper, [Transit Access and Zero Vehicle Households](#), found that 90% of zero-vehicle households in large metropolitan areas are in neighborhoods with access to transit service which contributes to their above-average access to jobs via transit. Bottom line is many people who will live at River Bend will rely on transit to get to work and everyone will "shop local", helping local businesses and our local economy.

In the Barry Place application before the Planning Board, I was happy to see unanimous approval for the Master Plan change to allow 268 new homes. I hope that the Planning Board will apply the same logic in support of River Bend given its comparative advantages. One, the Barry Place application required changes to the Master Plan map designations because it deviated from what the 2015 Master Plan contemplated for the site while the River Bend application, on the other hand, is in line with the Master Plan, even keeping areas for industrial use. Two, the proposed density for Barry Place is 28 units per acre while River Bend is actually half as dense at 13 units per acre. Interestingly, when I attended the April 24th River Bend open meeting someone asked, "Why are you limiting density to just 13 units an acre?" That's a fair question since River Bend is a true TOD application. Three, Barry Place has significantly less transit options compared to River Bend which is located at a train station and has 3 bus stops right in the complex. Finally, traffic arguments against housing have not proven to be valid. In both these applications, creating walkable, bikeable neighborhoods is better for traffic than more commercial/ industrial vehicles jamming our streets.

Thank you,
Chris Dawson

From: Frank Ramppen <frank@bvacademy.com>
Sent: Sunday, June 9, 2024 9:25 AM
To: Dell, Theresa <TDell@StamfordCT.gov>; Stamford Land Use
<StamfordLandUse@StamfordCT.gov>
Subject: River Bend/BVSA

Dear Planning Board.

My name is Frank Ramppen, current resident of Springdale and managing partner of Bobby Valentine's Sports Academy. My team and I operate the Bobby Valentine Sports Academy (BVSA) in Springdale's River Bend Park. BVSA does not only contribute to Springdale's economy, we improve the quality of life of residents and families from Stamford and across lower-Fairfield County. We provide learning through sports by emphasizing a fun, safe, positive, energetic approach to building skills and improving health & wellness. Our clients range from small children to senior citizens participating in a variety of sports including baseball, softball, lacrosse, soccer, and others.

Adding multifamily residential to River Bend Park will result in more clients for our business and increased opportunities for our employees. I predict the same will be true for other Springdale businesses. As a Stamford property taxpayer, both personally and as a business owner, I know that adding multifamily residential will mean growing and spreading the tax base. I respectfully ask you to look favorably upon River Bend's application to add multifamily housing.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Frank Ramppen, President
Bobby Valentine's Sports Academy
4 Omega Drive
Stamford, CT 06907
frank@bvacademy.com

On Thu, Jun 6, 2024 at 6:16 PM Angelo Bochanis <angelob1999@hotmail.com> wrote:

Hello,

My name is Angelo, and I'm a Stamford resident. I wanted to take a minute to write to you about two text changes on your Agenda for your meeting on Tuesday, the 11th.

Regarding Application #224-19, on residential parking requirements, I wanted to voice my support for greatly reducing, or even eliminating, minimum parking requirements for residences in Stamford. Parking minimums are a relatively recent development, introduced in the back-half of the 20th century during the "urban renewal" period. Since then, it has been mandated that virtually anyone who wants to build anything has to also build an exorbitant amount of parking. The end result is that areas of Stamford designed after such requirements were forced to surrender huge chunks of valuable land, and demolish historic structures, to building seas of asphalt. This is land that could have been preserved, or be the site of affordable housing, major job centers, or retail destinations. Many of our most beloved parts of town could not have been built today with such mandates. Bedford Street, Summer Street, Glenbrook Road, Hope Street, and many other economically productive and charming corners of the city all predate parking minimums. Excessive parking supply also hurts walkability, by forcing buildings to be farther apart from each other, and farther from sidewalks, while creating more conflict points where cars can collide with each other, pedestrians, and cyclists. Furthermore, mandating the construction of excessive parking serves to drive up housing costs significantly. When all residences are forced to build needlessly large swathes of parking, regardless of whether prospective residents will want or use that parking, construction costs increase substantially. These high construction costs are then in turn passed on to residents and encourage other landlords and developers to charge more for housing.

The recommendations of the Stamford Citywide Parking Study are crystal-clear: Stamford does not need this much parking. The Study, which was adopted by the Planning Board, recommends the promotion of shared parking, increasing the usage of underutilized municipal garages, expanding Zoning Parking Category 1, reducing parking minimums for non-studio apartments throughout all Zoning Parking Categories, and more. All of these recommendations represent a positive step towards a more economically productive, walkable, and affordable Stamford. I urge you all to follow through with the Study's recommendations and reduce parking requirements for residences.

Regarding Application #224-11, on the proposed River Bend Center development, I wanted to voice my support for amending the Zoning Regulations to allow for residences on the site. Stamford is in the midst of a severe housing affordability crisis, where skyrocketing housing costs are burdens and displacing its residents and threatens to alter Stamford's fabric entirely. Converting underutilized office space represents a great opportunity to construct more of the below-market-rate housing needed to tackle this crisis. Both the 2002 Master Plan and the 2015 Master Plan alike call upon the city to encourage the conversion of underutilized office buildings to residences. The 2015 Master Plan even goes so far as to call upon the city to prioritize such conversions "within walking distance" to "jobs or transit".

The proposed Zoning Regulation amendments that would enable residences at the River Bend Center are exactly the type the city should be pursuing. The site is located within walking distance to a number of major employment centers, commercial centers, and retail destinations, which the 2015 Master Plan cites as the ideal location for such conversions. Furthermore, the site is adjacent to multiple bus routes, and the Springdale Train Station. Housing near transit, also known as transit-oriented-development, can mitigate any traffic impact such new residences would have on the surrounding area. By locating housing in neighborhoods with high degrees of walkability and transit options, residents have the option to, and will almost certainly, take fewer and shorter car trips.

The Stamford Planning Board has an immense responsibility, where it can shape the development of the city. This upcoming meeting is of particular importance, and I thank the Board for taking the time to consider the proposals put forth before it. I highly encourage the Board to reduce residential parking minimums, in accordance with the Stamford Citywide Parking Study, and to enable the creation of much-needed housing at the River Bend Center. These steps would represent a significant advance in promoting Stamford's economic development, walkability, transit, and affordability, all of which set Stamford apart as Connecticut's premium destination to work and live in.

Thanks,
Angelo

From: Zachary Oberholtzer <obie717@gmail.com>
Sent: Monday, June 10, 2024 5:28 PM
To: Capp, Lesley <LCapp@StamfordCT.gov>
Subject: Support River Bend Rezoning

Dear Members of the Planning Board,

I am writing in support of rezoning River Bend to allow for by-right development of housing. Rezoning River Bend to allow for modest density near the train station is a no brainer. The city of Stamford (and CT generally) is facing a housing shortage, especially regarding missing middle housing. The key to eliminating that shortage is to provide a less onerous and more flexible regulatory environment to allow diversity of housing instead of the current luxury single-family only zoning which is a one-size fits all. Our existing mass transit infrastructure should be used as nucleation sites to promote mixed-use, walkable, density. The River Bend site provides a prime opportunity to create more walkable mixed used density and the use of the site for such purpose is consistent with the Master Plan.

Whenever a proposal for more housing comes up a cacophony of complaints usually arise that if taken seriously would mean the city would never construct any new housing. At the meeting proposing the rezoning it was demonstrated that Stamford and the River Bend site have plenty of water and sewer resources and our schools are not unduly burdened. To be clear, even if the city lacked sufficient infrastructure this would be an argument to expand capacity not to maintain exclusionary zoning.

Traffic concerns were brought up as a major problem during the community meeting on the proposed rezoning. Of course, traffic is an argument in favor of building more walkable mixed-use density next to a train station. If we want to alleviate traffic, we should be centering our development around transit networks, so people do not have to drive. Additionally, the owners of the River Bend site could, under current zoning and by-right, use the land for any number of heavy industrial uses that would result in heavy truck traffic or industrial equipment traveling down Hope Street. Any serious person would take the installation of a major warehouse or truck depot as more threatening and onerous to the surrounding community than housing next to transit. Finally, places that have pursued the policy of exclusionary zoning to control traffic typically get neither affordable homes nor lack traffic. Greenwich is such a town that has not increased its population in the last 50 years. No one that travels down I95 would say that Greenwich lacks traffic. Not building homes does not cause the people that would have lived in them to vanish. Those people have two options: 1) outbid current residents for homes, 2) live elsewhere. Those that are necessitated to live elsewhere still need to travel through the region but will have much larger commutes which leads to regional traffic issues. To reiterate, traffic is a reason we should build housing at River Bend.

Mixed-use walkable density outperforms single-family homes on infrastructure burden, traffic burden, and cost compared to single-family homes which can be constructed by-right throughout almost the entirety of the city. Please vote to support the rezoning of River Bend for housing.

Sincerely,

Zachary Oberholtzer