



**City of Stamford
Zoning Board**

STAFF REPORT

TO: CITY OF STAMFORD ZONING BOARD
FROM: VINEETA MATHUR, PRINCIPAL PLANNER
SUBJECT: **ZB #223-38 800 Long Ridge Road, Final Site Plan & Architectural Plan and Requested Uses and Special Permit Applications**
APPLICANT: 800 Long Ridge LLC
DATE: June 10, 2024
MASTER PLAN: Master Plan Category 8 (Mixed Use Campus)
ZONING: C-D (Commercial- Design District)

REQUESTED ACTIONS:

223-38	Site and Architectural Plan and Requested Uses	Final Site Plan Approval (“FSP”) pursuant to §§ 9.G.5. and 19.D. of the Zoning Regulations to develop the proposed buildings, parking structures, and associated site improvements on the Property.
	Special Permit	Special Permit Approval pursuant to § 9.G.3. of the Zoning Regulations to permit the multifamily residential use of the Property. Special Permit Approval pursuant to § 12.K.4.a.(6)(a) of the Zoning Regulations to be exempt from the sidewalk requirements of § 12.K.1. for the Long Ridge Road frontage to the south of the entrance to the Property.

Introduction

The 800 Long Ridge LLC (Owner and Applicant) is requesting approval of the related Special Permit, Final Site Plan Application to facilitate the redevelopment of the property with a mixed use development consisting of 354 residential units, 9,394 sf of non-residential floor area on a 25.26-acre parcel located at 800 Long Ridge Road. The proposal will remove 300,000 sf of office space and a two level 512 space parking garage.

Background

The office building at 800 Long Ridge Road was constructed in 1975 and was occupied by the Xerox Corporation until 2007. The applicant purchased the property in 2006. The building was occupied by GE Capital's Energy Financial from 2007 till 2023 when it was vacated due to changes in their office needs.

The office vacancy in this building reflects the general trend of a decline in office occupancy in Stamford and the region. This decline in office occupancy is especially acute in suburban office parks given new office tenants prefer buildings which are close to downtown and the transportation center.

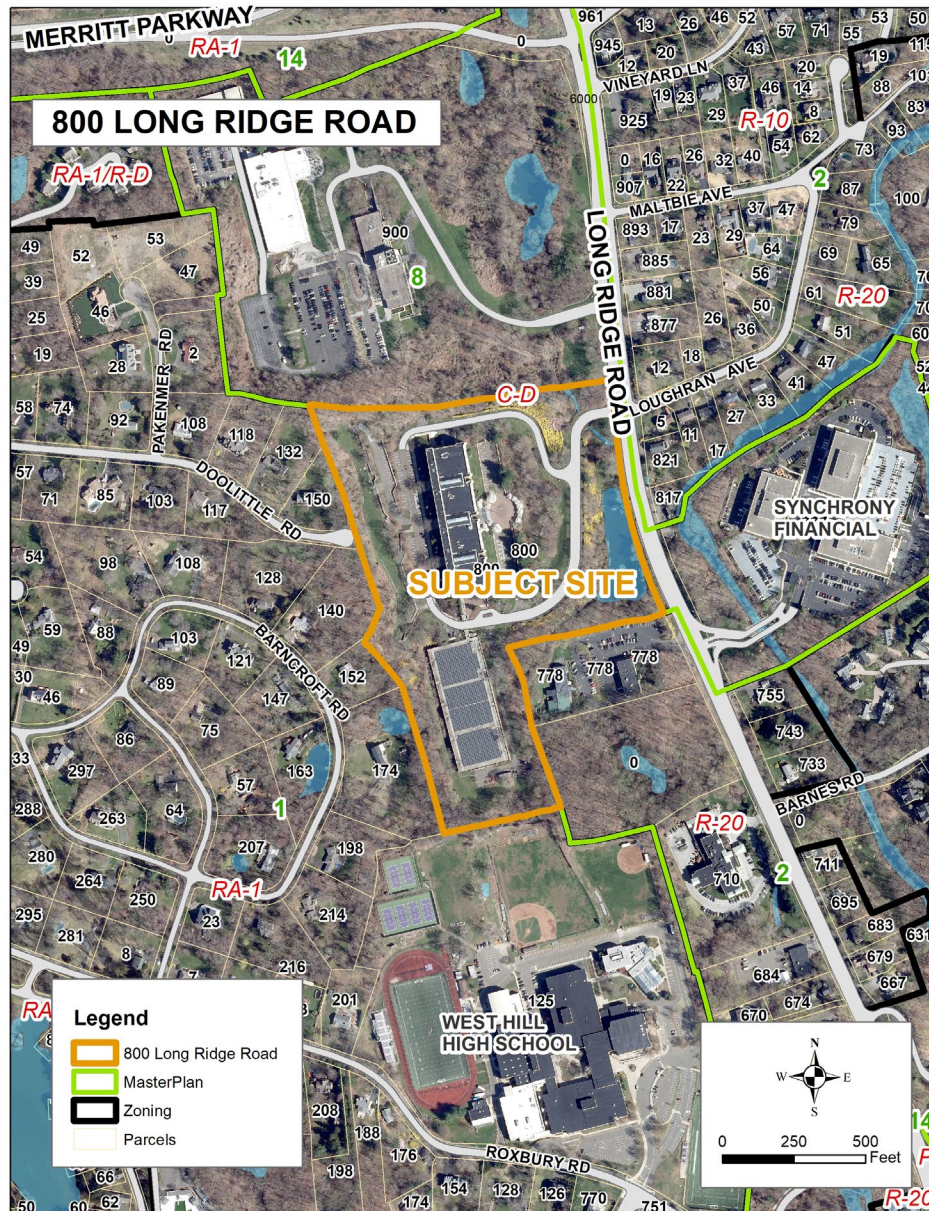
It has been widely stated that increasing housing supply is essential to ease the rent burden of households. Not only was this emphasized in Stamford's Housing Affordability Study¹ but also concluded by the Regional Plan Association in their report 'Impact Analysis of Housing Under Supply in the Region²'. Further, the 2015 Master Plan called for redevelopment of Stamford's office parks including allowing residential development. The former Dorr-Oliver mining company site was redeveloped as housing resulting in the successful Palmer's Hill development. Senior housing was constructed in the former office park located at 225 High Ridge Road while a senior housing project is in the pipeline for 210 Long Ridge Road. In December 2021 the C-D regulations were amended by the Zoning Board creating a uniform standard for residential, non-residential and mixed use development in the C-D district and required Special Permit approval for all uses. The current proposal fully complies with the current C-D regulations and redevelops the site minimizing the disturbance to the natural areas on the site.

¹ City of Stamford & HR&A Advisors, 2022, Stamford Housing Affordability Plan 2022, <https://www.stamfordct.gov/home/showpublisheddocument/16832/637896039003430000>

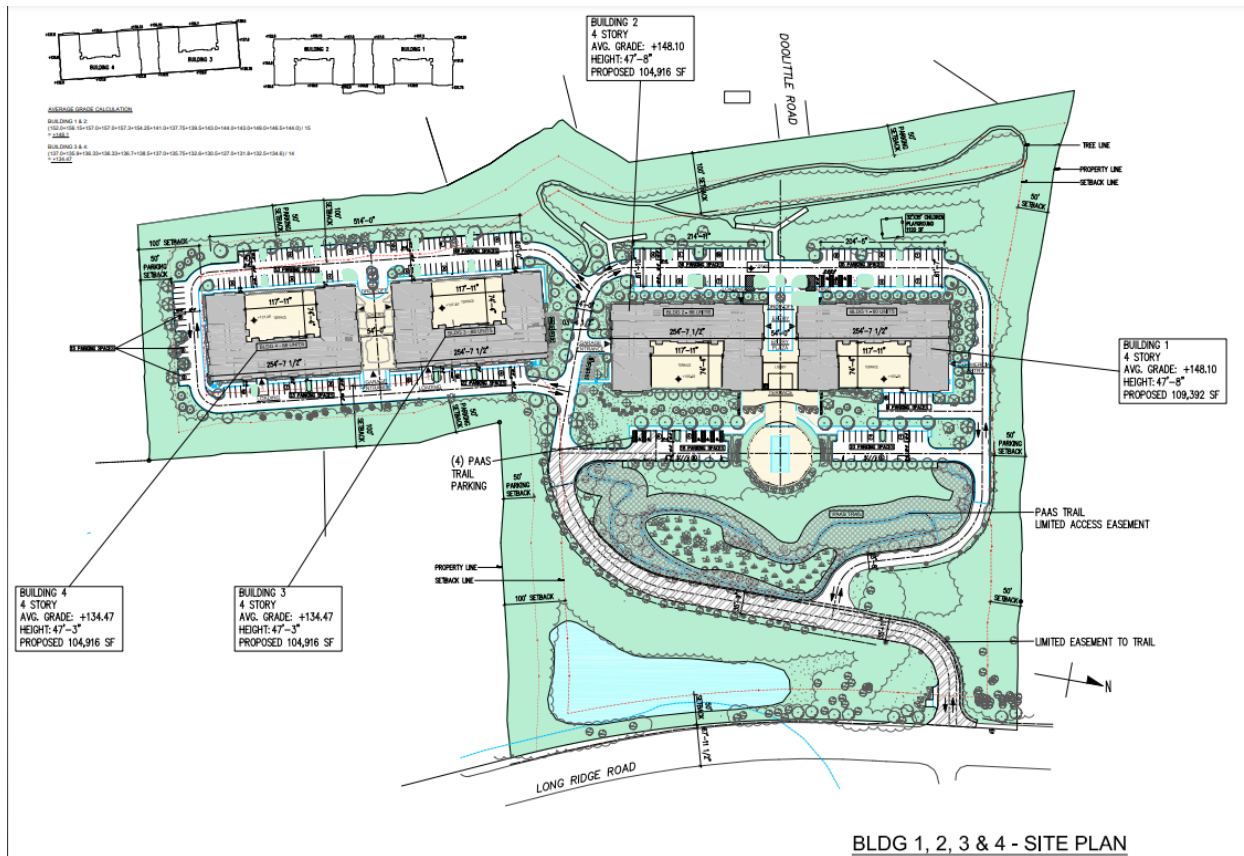
² Regional Plan Association & McKinsey and Company, 2024, Impact analysis of Housing Undersupply on the Tri-State Region https://s3.us-east-1.amazonaws.com/rpa-org/pdfs/20240502_Impact-analysis-of-housing-undersupply-on-RPA-region_Main-report_vS_III.pdf

Site and Surroundings

The site is bordered by the vacant office park at 900 Long Ridge Road to the north, single family homes to the west, commercial buildings including a day care and a medical office to the east and Westhill High School to the south. The site is accessed by a single driveway from Long Ridge Road. The site has a significant grade with a change in elevation of approximately 136 feet between Long Ridge Road and the high end of the property in the rear.



AERIAL IMAGE



OVERALL SITE PLAN

Final Site and Architectural Plan and Requested Uses

The proposed development comprises of four (4) new interconnected buildings (Buildings 1 through 4) with a mix of one-, two- and three-bedroom apartments in addition to a total of 9,394 sf of non-residential use located in Building 1 (See Overall Site Plan above). The proposal also provides 55,657 sf (5% of lot area) as Publicly Accessible Amenity Space. Each building will have an amenity terrace/courtyard and additional indoor amenities. A central plaza with a pool is proposed on the east side of Building 1 & 2. All four buildings are proposed to be connected by pedestrian paths. A trail area existing in the rear of the property will be restored and maintained for use by the residents. The existing retention ponds along Long Ridge Road will be maintained as present without any disturbance during construction and following the redevelopment of the site.

The site meets the 35% lot coverage and 10% building coverage requirement which is applicable to 4 story developments. C-D district is one of the few districts which has a lot coverage requirement and is the one of the most stringent districts for both lot coverage and building coverage.

Schedule E
Zoning Data Charts

BREAKDOWN OF FULL DEVELOPMENT

Mixed-Use Residential Community – C-D Zone			
	Required/Allowed	Proposed	Notes
Lot Area	15 acres	25.26 acres	Complies
Building Coverage	10%	9.51% (104,665 sf)*	Complies
Lot Coverage	35%	34.97%	Complies
FAR	0.40	0.389	Complies
Density	354 units (14 units / acre)	354 units (14 units / acre)	Complies
BMR	35.4 units (10% of 354)	35 units (10% of 354)**	Complies
Building Stories	4	4	Complies
Building Height	60'	47'-8"	Complies
Street Line Setback	50'	550'+	Complies
All Other Setbacks	50'	> 50'	Complies
Single-Family Setback	100'	100'	Complies
Usable Open Space	26,550 sf	64,653 sf	Complies
PAAS	55,016 sf (5%)	55,657 sf (5%)	Complies

*Excludes amenity terrace.

**The fractional (0.4) unit will be satisfied with a fee-in-lieu payment.

OVERALL UNIT BREAKDOWN			
Bedrooms	Average SF	Count	%
1BR (Market)	688	168	47.5
2BR (Market)	1,137	133	37.6
3BR (Market)	1,385	18	5.1
1BR (BMR)	688	18	5.1
2BR (BMR)	1,137	15	4.2
3BR (BMR)	1,385	2	0.6
TOTAL		354	

Setbacks

The C-D regulations (9.G.4) require expansive setbacks for buildings and parking areas from surrounding streets. While the regulation allows a 50 ft setback from streets, the Buildings 1 & 2 which are closest to Long Ridge Road are more than 550 ft setback from the street. The regulations require a 100 ft setback of buildings from residential zoning districts. The proposed site plan meets and exceeds these setbacks including the 100 ft setback from the residential zoning district to the west.

Building Design

The proposed buildings use a mix of materials (Azek, composite siding, stone veneer, textured panels) and colors and use of balconies and fenestrations to add variation to the façade. However given that all four buildings have generally the same massing, roof style and exterior design it results in a repetitive appearance. The roof has some variation in certain location with short cornice projections. However these short projections appear disjointed and not deliberate elements of design.



Building 1 – East Elevation

Staff recommends that the Applicant utilize architectural style closer to residential style including sloped/mansard roofs enveloping the top floor. Secondly the development should strive to develop distinctive styles for individual buildings while maintaining cohesion across the campus. The examples on the following page show similar scale buildings with varying styles which incorporate traditional residential architecture into apartment design. Further, the proposed amenity courtyards are shown to have identical design. Staff recommends the applicant develop individual design for the different amenity courtyards and increase the amount of landscaping on the courtyards.

Landscaping

The proposed plan seeks to minimize the disturbance of natural and landscaped areas currently on the property by maintaining the footprint of existing buildings and drives. This allows for preservation of existing flora and fauna.

The site is planned to be extensively landscaped. Approximately 365 new trees (including deciduous, evergreen) are proposed to be planted on the site as well as several thousand other bushes/flowers. Only 63 trees are proposed to be removed. The Applicant added additional landscaping based on comments from staff and discussion with neighbors which is incorporated in the latest set of plans. All parking lots will include landscaped islands and trees meeting the parking lot design standards.

Design best practices for mid-rise residential apartments



Photos 1, 2 & 3 show dormers and mansard roofs wrapping top floor to mimic the scale of traditional residential architecture.



Photo 5 shows use of traditional materials and design (e.g. stone), roof lines, shutters, dormers and landscaped courts to bring human scale to a large development.

Photos 4 & 6 show combination of modern and traditional elements without clashing/busy aesthetics



Usable Open Space

The proposal exceeds the Usable Open Space requirement providing more than 64,653 sf of Open Space where 26,550 sf of Usable Open Space is required. A breakdown of the open spaces is given in the chart below.

OPEN SPACE CALCULATION

#	AREA	CALCULATION
A	COURTYARD 1	106'-10" x 72'-4" = 7,728 SF
B	COURTYARD 2	106'-10" x 72'-4" = 7,728 SF
C	PLAZA	3.14 (53'-6" x 53'-6")/2 + 128' x 88' = 15,743 SF
D	COURTYARD 3	106'-10" x 72'-4" = 7,728 SF
E	TERRACE 2	125'-0" x 60'-0" = 7,500 SF
F	COURT YARD 4	106'-10" x 72'-4" = 7,728 SF
G	PLAYGROUND	35'-0" x 35'-0" = 1,225 SF
H	REAR TRAIL	= 9,273 SF
	TOTAL SF	= 64,653.0 SF

Street trees

Given site frontage of 843 feet, and the requirement of 1 street tree per 25' a total of 34 street trees will be required. There are currently 25 trees along the frontage currently. Nine (9) additional street trees are proposed to be planted therefore meeting the total street tree requirement.

Below Market Rate Housing

The Applicant proposes to meet the required 10% BMR requirement on site with 35 BMR units proposed at 50% of Area Median Income and a payment in lieu of 0.4 BMRs. Given that the majority of BMR units have been constructed in Downtown and the South End, this project provides the opportunity to bring affordable housing to the Westover neighborhood.

Publicly Accessible Amenity Space

The project provides 5% of the land as Publicly Accessible Amenity Space totaling 55,647 sf as shown in the detailed Publicly Accessible Amenity Space plan (PAAS.1) which meets the requirement for PAAS in the C-D district. The PAAS will be in the form of a trails in the wooded area of the property west of the main entrance drive off Long Ridge Road. The PAAS plan shows the location of the required amenities per Section 6 including two shelters, four benches, 28 signs and 4 PAAS parking spaces (including 2 ADA spaces).

Parking and Access

The proposal includes 613 parking spaces where 586 spaces are required based on Parking Category 3 requirements per unit type and the 11 spaces required for the non-residential use per Section 12.D.1.f. The plan also includes 4 public parking spaces close to the entrance of the

Publicly Accessible Amenity Space (PAAS). The project exceeds the EV space and bike parking requirements. The parking summary is given below:

PARKING BREAKDOWN

Vehicle Parking

Residential	Number	Rate	Required	Provided
1BR (market)	168	1.50	252.00	-
2BR (market)	133	1.75	232.75	-
3BR (market)	18	2.00	36.00	-
1BR (BMR)	18	1.25	22.50	-
2BR (BMR)	15	1.50	22.50	-
3BR (BMR)	2	1.50	3.00	-
Total:	354	-	568.75	569
Commercial	Number	Rate	Required	Provided
	9,394 sf	1.75 / 1,500 sf*	11	38
PAAS	Number	Rate	Required	Provided
	55,657 sf	1 / 10,000 sf	6	6
Total Spaces for All Uses			Required	Provided
			586	613
EV Spaces*	Number	Rate	Required	Provided
	613 total spaces	10% of # provided	62	65**
Total Indoor Spaces: 348		Total Outdoor Spaces: 270		

*Per 8 12.D.1.f. of the Zoning Regulations, for uses of 10 percent or less of the Gross Floor Area, the parking ratio for the principal use shall be applied to the whole floor area. Following discussions with staff, it is the Applicant's understanding that the parking ratio for 2BR units should be applied for the proposed retail space because the principal use of the Property is residential.

**The 65 EV spaces provided are included in the total parking count of 618 spaces.

Bicycle Parking

	Class A Required	Class A Provided	Class B Required	Class B Provided	Notes
Residential (354 Units)	42 <i>(1 per 5 units for first 60 units, 1 per 10 units for remaining)</i>	68	36 <i>(1 per 10 units)</i>	48	Complies
Commercial (9,394 sf)	2 <i>(1 per 5,000 sf)</i>	3	5 <i>(1 per 2,000 sf)</i>	8	Complies
Total:	44	71	41	56	Complies

Special Permit

1. Section 9.G.3: Permitted Uses

The C-D district regulations were amended by the Zoning Board pursuant to application 221-10 to require a Special Permit for all permitted uses. The Applicant is requesting the approval of the residential use allowing for 354 housing units along with some of the permitted non-residential uses to allow the flexibility in occupying the 9,394 sf of non-residential use. Staff believes that the proposed housing will serve to add to the inventory of housing in this neighborhood. The non-residential use would complement the housing with potential users such as child day care center and medical offices.

The Applicant has provided a statement of findings as well as thorough documentation supporting these findings. The supporting documents reinforce the facts about infrastructure in Stamford including adequacy of services such as sewer, water, fire, parks, transportation and schools. A detailed traffic study was included which not only included traffic projections using ITE data but also used the residential traffic generated by a comparable development 'The Curb' in Norwalk which is located at a similar distance of Merritt Parkway. The Applicant has also provided a compatibility study conducted by Gorman + York which analyzed the compatibility of multi-family housing with single family residences and its impact on the surrounding community. Staff believes that the proposed uses will have a positive impact on the neighborhood through the provision of housing which is needed at all income levels and development type.

2. Section § 12.K.4.a.(6)(a) Exemption from sidewalk construction

Special Permit Approval pursuant to § 12.K.4.a.(6)(a) of the Zoning Regulations to be exempt from the sidewalk requirements of § 12.K.1. for the Long Ridge Road frontage to the south of the entrance to the Property. The presence of obstructions including a guardrail and utility pole along with proximity to wetlands hinder the provision of a sidewalk along the site frontage along Long Ridge Road. Further, Long Ridge Road being a State Road will require permits from the State for any such work. The Applicant has agreed to make a payment of \$250,000 towards sidewalk construction in other sections of Long Ridge. Staff recommends approval of this Special Permit request.

Referral Comments

Planning Board

In a letter dated March 18, 2024 the Planning Board voted to recommend approval of the related Site and Architectural Plan and Requested Uses application as well as the Special Permit application. The Planning Board found the request in general harmony with Master Plan Category 8. The Planning Board recommended adding sidewalks throughout the project for easier accessibility to Long Ridge Road and to restrict commercial uses to those which would service the residents of the complex.

Environmental Protection Board

Robert Clausi, Executive Director, Environmental Protection Board provided comments in a memo dated March 20, 2024 noted that the plan does not propose any activity within the 25' wide upland review area around the on-site wetlands and watercourses and therefore no separate EPB permit is required. Mr. Clausi made comments related to site controls during construction, site drainage and upland landscaping. He noted that the proposed landscape plan provides an acceptable restoration of the site's planting.

Fire Marshall

In an email dated February 15, 2024, Assistant fire Marshall Chad Armstrong requested information regarding firefighting water supply, FDC connection and access roads. The Applicant provided a response to the comments in a letter dated May 31, 2024.

Engineering Bureau

Susan Kisken in a memo dated February 22, 2024 provided technical comments on the application which are to be addressed prior to Building Permit. The Applicant addressed these comments in their May 15, 2024 letter to the Engineering Bureau along with revised civil plans and Stormwater Management Report.

Traffic Transportation and Parking Bureau

Frank Petise, Transportation Bureau Chief and Luke Bittenweiser Transportation Planner in a letter dated March 18, 2024 provided comments on the traffic impact study, civil site plan, PAAS plan and recommended contribution by the Applicant in lieu of sidewalk construction. The letter also required the Applicant to contribute towards a sidewalk along Long Ridge Road and contribute \$250,000 towards traffic signal upgrades. In the May 22 2024 memo the Applicant provided responses to the technical comments and confirmed that they are agreeable to the \$250,000 contribution towards signal improvement and \$250,000 contribution towards sidewalk construction.

WPCA

In a letter dated April 9, 2024 Ann Brown provided comments regarding the application to be addressed prior to the issuance of a Building Permit.

Summary

Staff believes that the proposed project meets a critical housing need in the City. Adding 354 housing units to the market is vitally important for increasing the housing supply in Stamford. The project does so, while also reusing a vacant office park relying on using existing impervious areas. The project will result in the addition of 35 affordable housing units which is a significant benefit for residents. Given the large setbacks of the project from the street level the project will have limited visibility for the public. However, the staff strongly recommends that the applicant update the façade of the buildings and design of intermediate amenity spaces so as to create a stronger sense of place.

Apart from the housing production, the project's contribution towards traffic improvement, payment towards sidewalk construction and provision of usable open space and street trees will provide significant public benefits. Therefore staff recommends approval of the related Special Permit and Site and Architectural Plan and requested uses applications.