

**CITY OF NORWALK
PLAN REVIEW COMMITTEE
DECEMBER 10, 2009**

Revised to December 17, 2009

PRESENT: Jackie Lightfield, Chair; Michael Mushak; Robert Hard; Larry Bentley; Andrea Light; Adam Blank (7:32)

STAFF: Mike Greene; Mike Wrinn; Brenda Hrtanek

OTHERS: Atty. David Waters; Tom Shield; Atty. Liz Suchy; Jeremy Castele; Atty. Frank Zullo; Dean Kruger; Ray Sullivan; Barry McIntyre; Ron Kellogg

I. SITE PLAN REVIEWS & COASTAL SITE PLAN REVIEWS

a) #10-02SPR – AvalonBay Communities – 26 Belden Ave – 311 units – Request to modify public access walkway - Further review

Mr. Wrinn stated that there had been concerns about the width of the walkway and that Redevelopment now approved of the plan.

Atty. David Waters explained that the applicant had eliminated some of the retaining walls and modified the elevation levels in order to deal with the “canyon effect.”

He also addressed the concern about the planters on Belden Avenue.

Atty. Waters said that the sidewalk would be widened and its effect softened, so that it did not come straight out. He also discussed plans to eliminate the “monolith of dirt” near the stairway.

Mr. Tom Shield reiterated that the height of the wall would be reduced and that a more sloped landscape would be created. He confirmed that the walkway would not be narrowed.

b) #26-09CAM – Hillside Plaza, LLC – 14 & 16 North Main St (formerly Avricks) – Restaurant, office, retail & residential change from retail

Mr. Greene distributed photographs of the building and stated that it would become mixed use. He showed an architectural view of the building.

Atty. Liz Suchy discussed the change of use and the return to the brick façade. She said that the applicant had obtained the necessary signoffs.

Mr. Bentley asked for confirmation that there were five residential units on the second floor.

Mr. Hard asked if adjustments could be made to make the ends of the building less severe.

Mr. Blank asked if there were plans for a walkway.

The Committee commented that the passageway where the fire escape is located is dark and needs improvement. There was discussion concerning whether the fire escape could be moved.

The applicant discussed the fire escape and windows; pointing out that it was important to prohibit people from using those stairs.

Mr. Mushak noted that the fire escape was an important passageway and also that the park needed improvement. The Committee suggested that the design be modified to improve these areas.

Atty. Suchy stated that the applicant wanted to see the area enlivened with outdoor dining.

c) #X-09SPR – REI, Inc. – 189 Connecticut Ave (formerly Linens N Things) – New tenant for 24,062 sq ft retail store – Determination if minor change

Mr. Wrinn described the site, near Exit 14.

Atty. Frank Zullo gave background about REI, noting the quality of the equipment and the reputation of the company as a good employer.

The applicant discussed the REI's involvement with the community and its work at the corporate level.

Mr. Jeremy Castle discussed the bikeway map in West Hartford as evidence of the company's involvement with the community.

Atty. Zullo said that the new use proposed was substantially similar to the previous use and represented a minor change. He added that improvements would be made in landscaping and drainage and also that one loading dock would be removed.

Atty. Zullo emphasized that the applicant wanted to keep the sheet metal siding in place, but wanted to add skylights, windows and graphics.

Mr. Dean Kruger stated that the applicant was request 82 parking spaces, where 70 were required. He said that there would be a decrease in the impervious surface. He discussed the landscaping, the loading dock, the new entry and pop-up area, and the wood trellis, adding that there would be no change in the footprint of the building. He described the graphics as resembling a framed case on the building's exterior. Mr. Kruger explained the reasons for the applicant's preference of sheet metal siding, including the material's sustainability and its consistency as part of the REI brand.

Atty. Zullo presented the materials to the Committee. Ms. Lightfield noted that the sheet metal was a good choice, from a branding standpoint.

Mr. Mushak pointed out that the DOT would be widening the road and putting sidewalks near the property.

Mr. Blank asked about lighting at the property.

Mr. Wrinn noted that the proposed murals were outside of the advertising spectrum.

The Committee agreed that the application represented a minor change.

d) #X-09SPR – R. Sullivan – 677 CT Ave – Conversion of former MBI office to 17,416 sq ft retail space - Preliminary review

Mr. Wrinn explained that the application involved the reuse of an existing building. He said that it would be converted into two retail stores, adding that a sidewalk was proposed as well.

Mr. Ray Sullivan discussed the traffic report. He said that storm water and drainage improvements would be made. He said that the new entrance would be in the rear of the property and that the same materials would be used as in the front.

Ms. Light asked if there was a tenant yet. Mr. Sullivan said that the applicant was expecting a sporting goods-related store.

The Committee agreed that this was a minor change.

II. SPECIAL PERMITS

a) #11-09SP – Silvermine Homes, LLC – 241 & 249 Silvermine Avenue – 11 unit conservation development - Preliminary review

Ms. Hrtanek showed the property on a map, stating that there were wetlands on the property and that the proposed conservation land would be preserved in perpetuity.

Atty. Suchy reiterated the content of the application and discussed the conservation easement and restrictive covenant. She said that the property contained an intermittent watercourse.

Mr. Barry McIntyre showed a computerized sketch of the property. He addressed the height of the

buildings, which he described as bungalow style with earth tone colors.

Atty. Suchy showed the materials board.

Mr. Mushak asked if the units could be seen from the road. Mr. McIntyre pointed out that the shorter buildings were located close to the road.

Atty. Suchy discussed restrictions on subdivisions. She said that the land was held in common and that the association was responsible for maintenance.

b) #12-09SP – Royal Auto – Main Street – Auto interiors & boat covers (manufacturing) - Preliminary review

Mr. Wrinn explained that the business would be relocated to the rear of the property and that a special permit was required.

Mr. Ron Kellogg showed the site plan and explained that the boats themselves would rarely be brought to the property. He said that no gluing or dyeing would take place at the site and also that fewer than ten vehicle trips per day were expected. He added that although the use required a special permit, the project was in fact more like a tenant fit-up. He added that the business had been in Norwalk for 40 years.

The Committee agreed to send the item to public hearing in January.

c) #X-09SP – Pasta Fair Restaurant – Connecticut Avenue - Replacement of previously permitted automatic changeable copy wall sign – Further review

Mr. Wrinn said that the signage issues had been addressed at last month's meeting.

Atty. Zullo explained that a sign had been put up in 1998 and another one added ten years later. He discussed the applicant's difficulty with the signs and the repairs involved. Atty. Zullo added that the applicant had not known that he needed an additional permit.

Mr. Wrinn pointed out that the flashing, animated sign was a concern.

Atty. Zullo said that at the time the applicant applied for the first sign, there was no twelve-second minimum concerning changeable copy. Atty. Zullo added that the sign served no purpose if it could only change copy infrequently. He added that the infrequent change in copy seemed to be causing the sign to malfunction.

Ms. Lightfield pointed out that changeable copy was defined as signage that could be changed remotely, adding that it was not credible that a less frequent change would affect the sign's technology. She suggested that the applicant confirm the model number of the Translux sign in order to examine its specs.

Mr. Blank said that the benefit of the sign was to change the copy remotely, adding that he too opposed the speed of the copy change.

Ms. Lightfield said that the current norm for frequency of changes was every 20 minutes.

Mr. Mushak described high-intensity copy signs in New Jersey, pointing out that the sign proposed here was not excessively bright or distracting.

Mr. Wrinn asked about the hours of operation. The applicant said it would be from 11 am to midnight.

Mr. Greene pointed out that under a special permit, the Commission had the right to include its subjective opinion regarding the sign's brightness.

After discussion it was determined that this item would be considered a minor change, however, the sign must comply with the following restrictions: sign operation is limited to the hours of 11:00 am - midnight only; sign changes are limited to once every 30 seconds; sign lighting intensity is limited to what exists today; and no scrolling, flashing or animation is allowed.

d) #23-05SP / #38-05CAM – Keller Williams Realty – 142 East Avenue – Proposed wall signage – Determination if minor change

Ms. Hrtanek showed the sign proposals and described the application.

The applicant pointed out that the muted red color allowed by the Village District regulations was inconsistent with the logo's corporate colors.

Ms. Lightfield stated that it would be preferable in this case to keep the sign black, since there was a difference in the two shades of red. Ms Lightfield indicated that the Commission should not be recommending changes to brand identity colors (such as the different colors of red recommended by the village district architect). She suggested that the signage recommended by the architect was inconsistent with the style of architecture; the recommended sign should fit the wood sign and be painted white with outside beveling as presented. The lettering should be black to fit in with the signage recommended for the village district.

The Committee discussed adjustments concerning the lettering and the trim.

The Committee agreed that the item involved a minor change.

III. REQUEST FOR RELEASE OF SURETY

a) #6-05SP/#6-05CAM – BG Dev'l Co, Inc – Harbor Bluff 12 unit conservation development – Request for release of final surety

Mr. Wrinn said that staff recommended release of the surety.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:10 pm.

Respectfully submitted by Charlene Smith.

