



**City of Stamford**  
**Zoning Board**

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**STAFF REPORT**

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**TO:** CITY OF STAMFORD ZONING BOARD  
**FROM:** VINEETA MATHUR, PRINCIPAL PLANNER  
**SUBJECT:** **ZB #221-29 Henry Street, Special Permit, Site and Architectural Plan and requested Uses, Coastal Site Plan Review, Cultural Resources Inventory additions and Zoning Lot approval, South End Pacific LLC**  
**DATE:** January 21, 2022

**MASTER PLAN:** Master Plan Category 6 (Commercial Arterial) & Master Plan Category 4 (Residential Medium Density Multifamily)

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**ZONING:** V-C (Village Commercial), R-MF (Residential Multi Family)

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**Introduction**

The Applicant, South End Pacific LLC requests approval of a Special Permit, Site and Architectural Plan and Requested Uses, Coastal Site Plan application, addition of three buildings to the Cultural Resources Inventory and approval of a Zoning Lot related to properties 670 Pacific Street (former Pacific Street Firehouse), 648 Pacific Street (Tabernacle of Grace Church), 686 Pacific Street (existing parking lot), 690 Pacific Street (former New Hope Church) and 171 Henry Street (existing 2 family residence) to facilitate the construction of a mixed use building with 61 apartments, retail use and preservation of three historic buildings on the site.

**Background**

The four Pacific Street properties listed above were rezoned to Village Commercial as part of an earlier application (221-15) and the residence at 171 Henry was retained as RM-F. The applicant's proposal will (a) preserve and repurpose the historic firehouse with a mix of retail, commercial and/or residential uses; (b) preserve and maintain the existing 2-family home at 171 Henry Street; (c) preserve and maintain the existing Tabernacle of Grace church; and (d) create a new multifamily residential building with an activated street-front, covered parking and 61 new apartments.

## **Surrounding Area**

Pacific Street is an important artery in the South End with a vibrant mix of retail, industrial, service, office and residential uses. There have been significant changes to the corridor including the Yale and Towne developments as well as more recent renovations including 484 Pacific Street (Rhône apparel office), 583 Pacific Street (Caro Home office and warehouse), 575 Pacific Street (Third Place Social Hall) and 597 Pacific Street (Renovation of Pacific House). The proposed project will continue the revitalization of the street by a comprehensive plan to restore and preserve the historic buildings and creation of new housing and retail. To the west of the site is the Lathon Wider Community Center along Pacific Street and a four story apartment building with retail on the ground floor. To the south of the subject properties is a three story residential building operated by Neighborhood Housing Services. To the east of the site are two story one and two family homes as well as an industrial building on Ludlow Street.

The Zoning in the vicinity includes R-MF, C-B and R-HD district to the west of the site across Pacific Street, the area to the north is zoned SRD-N, the area to the east is in the R-MF district. The area to the immediate south is zoned C-B district.

## **Proposed development**

The proposed new construction will encompass 686 Pacific Street (existing parking lot) and 690 Pacific Street (former New Hope Church) collectively called the 'Development Lot'. The new construction will include two stories of parking, four stories of residential and a partial recessed 7<sup>th</sup> story along Pacific Street. The parking levels at grade and the second story will be screened by residential amenities and commercial spaces along Pacific Street and will mimic residential windows along portions of Pacific and majority of north side elevation. The south side of the building will not have windows due to proximity to the neighboring building. The applicant proposes to commission a *Mural* for the south wall.

## **Building Design**

The building will have a varied façade on along Pacific Street to support the ground floor retail use and residential lobby. The materials include thin brick, cementitious stucco columns, storefront windows and metal canopies. A stone cornice above the second level punctuates the building and provides a break in the massing. The next four stories include recesses for balconies helping to break the building into alternating façade treatments of thin brick and lap siding. Large balconies improve the aesthetics as well as improve the quality of the residential units. The top of the 6<sup>th</sup> story has a panelized stone cornice which unifies the overall façade. The 7<sup>th</sup> level is recessed and includes loft spaces which lead out onto rooftop amenity areas.

The applicant has refined the design through multiple iterations in order to incorporate recommendations from the public, HPAC and staff. The current proposal strives to match the scale

of the surrounding neighborhood in terms of massing and size of features such as windows and cornices.

The proposed unit mix includes 12 Studio, 32 one-bedroom units and 17 two-bedroom apartments.

### **Circulation and Parking**

The Zoning Lot is in Parking Category 1 and exceeds the parking requirement of Category 1 per Table 12.7 of the Zoning Regulations in aggregate. The applicant has provided a parking chart (Revised 1/21/22) showing the compliance of each of the uses with the parking regulations and no shared parking request has been made at this time.

### **Development Lot**

The Development Lot is self-sufficient in terms of required parking and does not propose any off-site sharing. A total of 70 physical parking spaces for the residential use (including 5 EV spaces) are provided where 60.5 parking spaces are required. Counting EV spaces as equivalent to 50% of a regular space gives a net of 67.5 parking spaces and therefore a ratio of 1.1 parking space per unit residential units. The retail space in the new development will have one (1) dedicated parking space.

The new building will have two curb cuts along Pacific to access two separate levels of parking. The northern curb cut will lead to 37 at grade parking spaces including 3 EV spaces and 12 bike parking spaces. The curb cut along the south side of the property will lead to an upper level of parking which will have 33 parking spaces including 2 EV spaces. These two parking levels are not interconnected.

### **Church**

The Church building will remain legally non-conforming with respect to parking and will continue to use the 9 existing parking spaces accessed through the existing curb cut. While currently the users have to make a difficult turn to exit out of this curb cut, the new plan will allow exit from the Church lot to Henry Street through the driveway along 171 Henry Street.

### **Firehouse**

The Firehouse will be served by four parking spaces behind the Firehouse building and accessed through the driveway on the 171 Henry Street lot.

### **171 Henry Street**

The two family lot 171 Henry Street will have access to four parking spaces in its rear yard which will be accessed through the two way driveway off of Henry Street. One of these four spaces is partially located on the Development Lot.

## **Landscaping and Open Space**

### **a. Pervious Surface requirement**

The Zoning Lot is required to provide 15% of area ( Total 5,519 sq.ft.) as pervious surface at the ground level per the V-C regulations per Section 4.B.7.c.(11). The applicant meets this requirement by the provision of 5,519 sq.ft. of pervious area across the V-C parcels through lawn areas and perimeter plantings.

Of the total requirement for the Zoning Lot, the ‘Development Lot’ is required 3,121 sq.ft. of pervious surface of which 2,072 sq.ft. is provided on the Development Lot and 1,095sq.ft. is provided on the Firehouse and Church properties. The Applicant has proposed to landscape the front yard of the Firehouse which will be a major improvement for this section of Pacific Street and will be more befitting of the historic building.

### **b. Usable Open Space**

Per Section 7.Q, the new development is required to provide 75 sq.ft. of open space per dwelling unit which comes to 4,575 sq.ft. of required usable open space. The applicant has proposed a total of 6,700 sq.ft. of usable open space on the Development Lot which exceeds the requirement. The open space is provided in the form of private balconies and a shared rooftop amenity terrace as permitted by Section 7.Q. Child play area is permitted on a rooftop only by Special Permit where the Zoning Board makes a finding that the site and location of the Development render at-grade open space undesirable or unsafe for children and the play space can be provided at an alternative location within the development. The applicant has provided a statement of finding addressing the unsuitability of the ground level spaces available on the site for a child play area.

### **c. Streetscape**

The applicant has proposed a new sidewalk along the majority of Pacific Street which includes a grass amenity strip, sidewalk and planters along the building. One new street tree has proposed along the Development Lot while three existing street trees appear to remain. Due to location of existing utility poles and existing and proposed light poles there are limited opportunities for additional street tree planting. Staff recommends a condition requiring a payment in lieu of trees where they cannot be planted due to siting constraints.

## **Administrative approval of Zoning Lot**

The Applicant requests the approval of a Zoning Lot comprising of the five properties including 670, 648, 686, 690 Pacific Street and 171 Henry Street. The properties 686 and 690 Pacific Street are proposed to be consolidated prior to the building permit request for the new residential building and referred to as ‘Development Lot’ in the project narrative and tables. While development rights are shared across 670, 648, 686, 690 Pacific Street which are all within the V-C district, 171 Henry

Street (in R-MF) zoning district is minimally affected and is only included to allow for shared circulation and overlap of one parking space across property boundaries.

The Zoning Lot was added as new defined term in application 221-06 and is generally is described as follows in Section 3:

*A Zoning Lot is (a) a full Tax Lot or (b) a tract of land subject to a Zoning Lot Development Agreement, which consists of two or more full Tax Lots under common or separate ownership that, for zoning purposes only, is treated as one Lot. If a Building or Structure is located on more than one Tax Lot under common ownership, such tax lots shall be consolidated [...]*

This general definition is followed by detailed standards for a Zoning Lot which ensure orderly development of land when more than one lots are combined into a Zoning Lot. The Zoning Lot allows separate parcels (under common or separate ownership) to transfer development rights across property boundaries including unused *Floor Area, Density, Building and Lot Coverage*, and required off-street parking while *Height, Setback, Light and Air* and use requirements of the underlying Zoning District continue to apply. Setbacks along shared interior tax lot lines may be modified or waived as agreed upon by the property owners.

The proposed development has provided a draft ‘Zoning Lot Development Agreement’ as well as a table showing allocation of development rights in ‘Schedule B’. The two parcels (686 and 690 Pacific Street) which will contain the new building are defined as ‘Development Lot’ and the chart describes the various development rights which will be transferred from the rest of the parcels to the Development Lot.

#### *Building Coverage*

The Development Lot will receive a total of 16,950 sq.ft. of building coverage from the parcels 670 Pacific Street and 648 Pacific Street.

#### *Floor Area Ratio*

The Development Lot will receive a total of 29,500 sq.ft. of floor area from the parcels 670 Pacific Street and 648 Pacific Street.

#### *Pervious Surface*

A total of 1095 sq.ft. of green space required on the Development Lot will be provided on the 670 Pacific Street and 648 Pacific Street properties.

#### *Light and Air setback requirement*

The Zoning Lot also provides the Applicant relief from the Light and Air requirement. Section 7.3 permits the reduction of the Light and Air requirement from 20’ to 10’. The proposed building meets the 10’ Light and Air setback within the Development Lot along the southern and eastern property boundaries. The building sits on the internal property boundary shared with the Church on the northern side. Given that church building is setback from its southern property line, the proposed building adequately meets the Light and Air requirement.

### **Below Market Rate Housing**

The V-C District includes a BMR unit requirement of 12% - with 6% of the total units affordable at 50% of the Area Median Income (AMI) and 6% affordable at 65% AMI. The Applicant is proposing to satisfy this requirement entirely onsite with 7 BMR units consisting of 2 Studio, 3 one-bedroom, and 2 two-bedroom units. The proposed mix, which includes 5 units at 50% AMI and 2 units at 65% AMI, differs slightly from the fractional breakdown prescribed by the regulation, but exceeds the minimum requirement on an equivalency basis.

### **Historic Preservation**

The applicant proposes to preserve three buildings including the two family story house (Vernacular Cottage) located at 171 Henry Street built in 1885, former South End Firehouse located at 670 Pacific Street and built in 1900 and the Tabernacle of Grace Church located at 648 Pacific Street built in 1917. These structures will require repairs and restoration of elements for historic accuracy. A detailed report which enlists all needed preservation work has been prepared by Lynn Drobbin, the historic expert and included in the application package. A summary of the proposed improvements is below:

**171 Henry Street (Two family residence)** - The proposed improvements to the house include improving appearance of porch, adding landscaping along the porch, adding new matching historic style double front entry doors and replacing chain link fence with period style fencing.

**670 Pacific Street (Firehouse)** - Restoring windows to resemble historic configuration and repointing brick, as needed, with similar masonry profile and composition, make necessary modifications to meet building codes for new use(s) including grading of site and completion of outdoor platform and installing bathrooms. Interior tenant fit-outs, as needed. Make all necessary structural improvements, clean keystones, and sills, as needed, with non-abrasive products recommended by the SHPO and approved by the National Park Service. Add exterior historic interpretive plaque as required in the Preservation Easement. Create artistic design or applique for required utility equipment.

**648 Pacific Street (Church)** – Replace existing double doors with (3) single Wooden doors (with glass transom) and rebuild brick columns below arches. Remove paint and clean stone sills. Paint large pvc pipes on façade to match brick color Paint tower louvers and window trim/frames to match doors. Install compatible period style light fixtures at front entry. Clean window polycarbonate protection, paint handrails black.

### **Special Permit requests**

The application includes the following Special Permit requests. A Statement of Findings has been submitted by the applicant in support of these applications.

**1. Special Permit for new construction within V-C district pursuant to Section 4.B.7.e.6.**

All new developments with more than 20,000 sq.ft. of floor area require a Special Permit approval by the Zoning Board.

**2. Special Permit to allow rooftop Child Play Area pursuant to Section 7.Q**

The proposed location on the roof is suitable given the size of the rooftop amenity area. The ground level site area is constrained by parking and driveways and does not lend itself to an open play area.

**3. Special Permits pursuant to Section 7.3.C** relating to “Special Use Bulk and Density Standards for Historic Structures and Sites” to permit the following Special Standards under §7.3.C.4.

- Increased Floor Area equal to the area of the Historic Structures within the VC zoned portion of the site (which are less than 25% of the as-of-right Floor Area);

The bonus floor area is appropriate because it allows the preservation of three separate historic buildings while creating opportunities for housing in proximity of transit. The Development Lot only partially utilized the floor area being drawn from the Zoning Lot.

- Reduced Rear Yard Setback of 50% (from 20’ to 10’);

The reduction in rear yard is appropriate given the shallow depth of the Development Lot.

- Increased Building Height from 5 stories to 7 stories (and 55’ to not more than 80’) in the Arterial portion of the site (i.e. within 125’ of the Pacific Street right-of-way) and generally subject to the same limitations as 5th stories in the V-C District; and from 4 stories to 5 stories (and 45’ to not more than 60’) in the Non-Arterial portion of the site;

The Pacific Street portion of the new building will rise to 6 stories with a minor recessed portion rising to 7 stories. Given that the 7<sup>th</sup> story will be minimally visible from Pacific Street, the requested additional height is appropriate. The proposed height is consistent with other multi-family buildings in the vicinity including the Yale and Towne buildings as well as potential development in the R-HD zoning district across Pacific Street. The requested increase to 5 stories (from 4 stories) is appropriate given the scale of the buildings in the vicinity.

- Reduced Light & Air requirement (from 20’ to no less than 10’), where the proposed plan provides 10’ onsite and an additional 8’ of spacing based on the required setback of the adjacent property.

The proposed Light and Air setback of 10’ along the eastern property lines is appropriate in light of the proportions of the subject lot.

- 7.4.C.1.g and 7.4.C.1.k relating to the proposed bedroom and affordability mix of onsite Below Market Rate units, as described in paragraph 4-C above and further detailed in the enclosed Zoning Data Charts.

The proposed mix of units and affordability is marginally higher than the base requirement due to the size of the units proposed and their level of affordability.

### **Addition of the 3 historic properties to the Cultural Resource Inventory.**

The Historic Preservation Advisory Commission recommended approval of the three structures (former Pacific Street Firehouse, Tabernacle of Grace Church and 171 Henry Street) which are all contributing buildings within the Stamford South End Historic District (National Register of Historic Places).

### **Sustainability Scorecard**

According to the Sustainability Scorecard submitted the project is expected to receive a score of 78% (C) which is among the higher scores achieved by recent development approvals.

### **Referral Comments**

#### **Stamford Planning Board**

The Stamford Planning Board, during its regularly scheduled meeting held on December 14, 2021 recommended approval of Special Permit, Site and Architectural Plan and Requested Uses and Coastal Site Plan Review applications and found the request to be compatible with the neighborhood and consistent with Master Plan Category #4 (Residential – Medium Density Multifamily) and Master plan Category 6 (Commercial Arterial).

#### **Engineering Bureau**

In a letter dated December 14, 2021, Willetta Capelle, Coordinator of Site Plan Reviews and Inspections at the Engineering Bureau provided technical comments to be addressed by the applicant. The applicant has since provided a response to these comments to and revised their plans accordingly.

#### **Environmental Protection Board**

In a letter dated January 14, 2022, Lindsay Tomaszewski, Environmental Analyst stated that the project is consistent with the CAM program and provided comments to be addressed during the building permit process.

#### **Traffic Transportation and Parking Bureau**

In a letter dated January 21, 2022, Frank Petise, Acting Bureau Chief, Traffic Transportation and Parking Bureau recommended approval for this project based on its location and proximity to transit. The letter references various agreements between the traffic bureau and the Applicant including a \$20,000 contribution towards traffic improvements, a pavement marking plan for Pacific Street to incorporate a bike lane and on street parking along the northbound lane. The letter



further lists updates to the site and civil plans which will be required prior to the issuance of a Building Permit.

### **Historic Preservation Advisory Commission**

At the HPAC regular meeting held on Monday, December 13, 2021, the Commission reviewed the drawings and submission materials for the 686-690 Pacific St. and 171 Henry St. proposed development. The Commission made a determination to support the project as presented, by unanimous vote, with some recommendations for improvement. In a letter dated January 14, 2022 recommended approval for the addition of the three requested buildings to the Cultural Resources Inventory.

### **Harbor Management Commission**

In a letter dated December 14, 2021, Chairman Damian Ortelli stated that the HMC recommended approval of the project at their November 16, 2021 meeting based on the significant water quality improvements expected through the implementation of the proposed site improvements and increase of pervious surface.

### **Fire Marshall**

In an email dated October 29, 2021 Fire Marshal Walter Seely stated that he had no objections to the proposed building.

### **Water Pollution Control Authority**

In a letter dated December 28, 2021, Ann Brown, P.E – SWPCA Supervising Engineer provided comments to be addressed by the applicant prior to the issuance of a Building Permit.

### **Summary**

Staff recommends approval of the proposed Special Permit, Site and Architectural Plan and Requested Use, Coastal Site Plan Review, administrative approval of the Zoning Lot and Cultural Resources Inventory addition in order to facilitate a new 61 unit mixed use development which strives to achieve several City goals including creation of market rate and affordable housing units, creation of new retail space along Pacific Street, restoration of three historic buildings and contribution towards transportation improvements in the area. Therefore staff recommends approval of the collective applications.