

STAMFORD PLANNING BOARD
PUBLIC HEARING & REGULAR MEETING MINUTES #3721
TUESDAY, AUGUST 30, 2011
4th FLOOR CAFETERIA
888 WASHINGTON BLVD., STAMFORD, CT

Stamford Planning Board Members present were: Theresa Dell, Claire Fishman, Michael Totilo and Jay Tepper. Present for staff was Todd Dumais.

Public Hearing

The chair, Mrs. Dell, called to order the Public Hearing at 7:30 PM. She introduced each member of the Planning Board and Land Use Staff to the public and proceeded to explain the procedures by which the Public Hearing portion of the meeting would be conducted. Mrs. Dell stated that the hearing for Master Plan application 416 would begin with a reading of the Public Notice, followed by a presentation from the applicant and then questions or comments from the Public wishing to speak in favor of, in opposition to, or neither in favor of nor opposition to the application, in that order would be taken. Mrs. Dell noted that the Board would ask questions throughout and obtain answers to any questions raised by the Public and explained there would be no voting on the application this evening.

MP 416 - 710A LONG RIDGE, LLC, to amend the Master Plan Map from Land Use Category 2 – Low Density Single-Family to Land Use Category 8 – Commercial Campus for approximately 6 acres of property located on the west side of Long Ridge Road known as Lot 20B Long Ridge Road.

Mrs. Fishman read the following legal notice into the record:

RE: MP-416 Notice is hereby given that the STAMFORD PLANNING BOARD will hold a Public Hearing on Tuesday, August 30, 2011, at 7:30 P.M., in the Government Center Building, 4th Floor, Cafeteria, 888 Washington Blvd., Stamford, CT to consider an amendment to the Master Plan upon application of:

710A LONG RIDGE, LLC, to amend the Master Plan Map from Land Use Category 2– Low Density Single-Family to Land Use Category 8 – Commercial Campus for the following described property known as Lot 20B Long Ridge Road:

Beginning at Point A on the Master Plan Amendment Sketch (noted below) the following courses and distances;

Northerly: 627' +/- by land n/f of 887 Long Ridge Road Condos and through the westerly half of Long Ridge Road, each in part;

Easterly: 346' +/- by the centerline of said Long Ridge Road;

Southerly: 703' +/- through the said westerly half of Long Ridge Road; by land n/f of Parcel 20A on map 12390 S.L.R. and by land n/f of City of Stamford (Westhill High School), each in part;

Westerly: 422' +/- by said land n/f of City of Stamford and by land n/f of 800 Long Ridge LLC.

Total Area of Change: 263,814 Square Feet or approximately 6 acres.
Located in Block No: 375

The premises with respect to which application has been made is shown and delineated on the Master Plan Amendment sketch set forth below:

At the above-named time and place, all persons interested will be given an opportunity to be heard.

The meeting place is accessible to the physically impaired. Deaf and hearing impaired persons wishing to attend this meeting and requiring an interpreter may make arrangements by contacting the Department of Social Services Administration office at 203.977.4050 at least five working days prior to the meeting.

ATTEST: CLAIRE FISHMAN
SECRETARY
STAMFORD PLANNING BOARD

Dated at the City of Stamford this 18th day of August 2011

Mrs. Dell noted that there was a Staff report and an EPB memo that are part of the record and were available at side table for Public review.

John Freeman, Attorney for the Applicant presenting for 710 Long Ridge, LLC

Mr. Freeman submitted a Certificate of Mailing into the record. He explained that historically, the subject parcel was approved as part of Long Ridge Nursing Home in 1990's but they did not go forward with a full construction of that project at that time. Mr. Freeman stated that the Applicant also owns 800 Long Ridge Road which is currently zoned C-D and in a Category 8 of the Master Plan and they would like to develop the 710A parcel and incorporate it as part of that development. The Master Plan Map would be amended to reflect this. Mr. Freeman noted that even though this property is currently in residential land use categories, the uses surrounding it are not appropriate for residential use and are much more commercial in nature. He added that the Applicant is working with an Architect to create a building that has a residential character whereas the surrounding buildings are a Category 2 and are a Medical Office and Nursing Home. Mr. Freeman stated that the intent is to combine this property with the 800 Long Ridge property to create the flexibility for the potential for a small expansion of GE and that they would work with the existing tenant to occupy the new space. He also noted that the Zoning Board Staff has asked for an amendment to restrict the conservation area to exempt density and constrain office use and that the Applicant has worked with neighboring property and has offered to donate 1.5 acres of property to the City to be used as a ball field or outdoor classroom. Mr. Freeman explained that if the Master Plan amendment is successful the proposed C-D zone is appropriate for this site as outlined in the criteria for establishing a C-D zone in the Zoning regulations.

Mr. Freeman next responded to several issues raised in the Staff report by explaining that the proposed development is low density, with a .32 FAR; maintains 100' setbacks; is compatible with adjacent uses; and is of a superior design further subject to design review control by the Zoning Board. He also commented that the proposed development would produce very little traffic and has been vetted as not having any major issues by the City's Traffic Engineer. Mr. Freeman next explained that the Master Plan talks about directing 70% of office development downtown but not all office development must be downtown and this is a small development appropriate to the site and neighborhood.

Mrs. Dell asked if GE was the proposed tenant for this building? Mr. Freeman said he can't definitively say yes but they support the project. Mrs. Dell then asked about parking in front of the building and why it wasn't reversed and put behind the building. Mr. Freeman explained the topography is such that parking would be hidden and that the wetland setbacks precluded and alternate site design.

Mr. Tepper asked what the tax impact is of donated land? Mr. Freeman said he was unsure.

Mrs. Dell asked if any other Board members had questions and there were none.

Mrs. Dell asked if there was anyone from the Public wishing to speak in favor of the application. No members of the public came forward to speak in favor of the application.

Mrs. Dell next asked if there was anyone from the Public wishing to speak in opposition of the application.

Ralph Nobile, 110 Barnes Road

Mr. Nobile stated that he's been a resident of Stamford for 40 years, 10 years residing in the immediate vicinity of this application. The area is composed of single family homes and he believes that the application to amend the Master Plan Map is inconsistent with the overall Master Plan. Mr. Nobile stated that he thought it was interesting that 50% of the applicants presentation focused on donating land to the City for school use and discussion about the GE property. He went on to say that the Master Plan outlines the area to be a residential zones and this application is a serious deviation from that. Mr. Nobile continued by stating that he felt this application didn't have merit and that this is a residential parcel and that the Board should not permit more commercialization along Long Ridge Road. He noted that River Oaks and Heatherwood are single family homes continuous to this property and would be the most impacted. Mr. Nobile stated that this area of Long Ridge is a balanced community and called for the Board to reject the application as to not set a precedent with this development which would unravel the Master Plan and become the basis for future commercialization along Long Ridge Road.

William DeLew, 631 Long Ridge Road, River Oak resident

Mr. DeLew spoke in opposition of application. He stated that Mr. Nobile spoke well about essential changes in character of the neighborhood if the application is approved and that the Board needs to think about the incremental changes in the character of the neighborhood. Mr. DeLew questions why there was a need for more office space when there is an abundance of vacant office space in Stamford? Why is 14,000 sf of office space needed in this particular area of Stamford and why is this area more suitable for office space than other areas? He said that the Board must consider the needs of the City and residential nature of this area.

Donna Mizola, Long Ridge Road Area resident

Mrs. Mizola spoke in opposition to application. She's said that she has seen the growth in Stamford over the past 20 years and a lot of changes have not been good. Mrs. Mizola stated that this development will create traffic problems. She said that it would be much worse having empty office buildings sitting on the site rather than the land sitting as is.

Pam Hershfield, 51 Barnes Road resident

Mrs. Hirschfeld spoke in opposition to application. She's stated that she was impressed with the proposed architecture but sees a failure to conform to the letter of the nature of the Master Plan. Mrs. Hirschfeld felt that Applicant was misrepresenting the benefits - "large enough to permit proper non-residential use; will be superior traffic management; compliance of goal of directing most commercial development downtown". She added that the applicant does not meet zoning requirements; will add additional traffic; and that the additional C-D property is not supported in Master Plan. Mrs. Hirschfeld noted that the change would not be consistent with surrounding 80 percent residentially zoned and Master Planed properties and that if the Applicant combines 710A and 800 Long Ridge it would be inconsistent with sections 4B2 and 4D1 of the Master Plan. She also noted that there she had additional concerns regarding the traffic and its potential to cause accidents.

Liz Siegel, 97 Barnes Road resident

Mrs. Siegel spoke in opposition to the application. She began to explain that the Applicant, BLT, testified that they are the developers of large office buildings and residents feel they have a grander design for this building aside from what was stated. She noted that the Master Plan is being attacked and done surgically to replace residential parcels with commercial and that this application would set a precedent for the future. If not vigorously defended, the Master Plan will die. Mrs. Siegel added that the local residents of the area live in a transition zone; now there is an acceptable balance but if this application is approved a shift to commercial will upset the balance and the Master Plan design will be lost.

Ray Cockfield, Heatherwood resident

Mr. Cockfield spoke in opposition to the application. He said that safety is a nightmare getting out onto Long Ridge Road from Heatherwood development. Mr. Cockfield said that previous Board acknowledged that the line of commercial activities should stop at Lord & Taylor parcel further down Long Ridge Road. He added that there is empty office space in the large commercial building to the south on Long Ridge Road within 1.5 miles from this proposed development so why would we want to construct additional vacant office space?

Renee Kahn, Stamford resident

Mrs. Kahn spoke in opposition to the application as a resident of the Long Ridge Road area. She stated that the idea of the Master Plan was to give residents some security and to prevent drastic changes to zoning in Stamford. If this application is approved, it will have a damaging effect on the Master Plan. Mrs. Kahn noted that the history of Long Ridge Road was residential road with scattered sites and that some time ago the threat of turning several sites along the bus route into affordable housing, effectively scared previous Boards into approving the large office complexes that exist today. Mrs. Kahn requested that the Board think long and hard before approving this application which if approved would start a domino effect of commercial development along Long Ridge Road.

Thomas Lombardo, representing North Stamford Association

Mr. Lombardo, President of the North Stamford Association, who represents several thousand families north of the Merritt Parkway submitted a letter of statement into the record. He read the letter into the record which stated that since a comprehensive review of the Master Plan is under review, the application should not be acted on until the overall Master Plan is updated.

Ken Katour, Stamford resident

Mr. Katour spoke in opposition to the application. He cited section 4BB2 of the Master Plan which calls for an office campus district and that this 14,000 s.f. building could not be considered a campus.

Mr. Freeman then addressed many of the comments that were raised by the Public. He stated that the safety and traffic analysis shows that the application poses no traffic problems. He noted that they received comments from DOT, which raised no safety issues and that the City Traffic Engineer feels there's no need for a traffic light. He asked the Board to have Staff verify this comment. Mr. Freeman also stated that the applicant has no ulterior motives and that they are expressing exactly what they intend to do with the parcel.

Mrs. Fishman asked Mr. Freeman to explain FAR to the Public. Mr. Freeman explained that it was a term used to explain the amount of building floor area allowed on a site. He added that the FAR is so low for this site not reproducible in other areas of the City and that this location is not acceptable for single family housing.

Mrs. Dell returned to the Public for any additional comments.

Ralph Nobile again expressed his concern and requested that he be able to review any of the submitted materials.

Mr. Cockfield said that just because DOT says traffic is safe doesn't make it so. State Traffic commission doesn't want another traffic light but a picture trying to leave the area is worth 1,000 words.

Mr. Dumais clarified some of the issues from his staff report. He noted that the Applicant has submitted three applications to the Zoning Board, one of which was requested by Staff. So in this respect the Public could be somewhat assured that their intent was to construct a 14,000 s.f. office building. Mr. Dumais also stressed that in his report he cited several sections of the Master Plan which repeatedly call for the limited expansion of office along the Ridge Road for existing single-tenant users and that he believed Mr. Freeman had not made the case. Mr. Dumais concluded his comments by stating that the 2002 Master Plan, the Plan is not cast in stone. "It needs to be held in respect, but not awe. Its revision, like the original, should be orderly and based on sound research and consensus building."

There being no further questions or comments, Mrs. Dell closed the Public Hearing on application MP 416 and informed the Public that the Board would deliberate next Tuesday on the matter, same time and location.

Regular Meeting

Application 211-16 – Zoning Map Amendment – 14 Belltown Road LLC, Campomolo Realities, Mark Lanza and Fan Yang, request to rezone approximately .44 acres of land currently zoned RM-1 and R 7-½ to C-N, Commercial Neighborhood for portions of properties having addresses of 14 Belltown Road, 18 Belltown Road and 22-26 Belltown Road.

Mr. Dumais briefly introduced the Application. Attorney Gerry Fox representing three property owners on Belltown explained the application as parcels being split into multiple

zones and this application intends to place all three properties entirely in the C-N zone. He then described the uses surrounding these properties.

Mr. Dumais added that the underlying Master Plan category is already in the appropriate designation and that this application would make consistent the zoning to the Master plan.

After a brief discussion, Mr. Tepper moved to recommend approval of the requested Zoning Map Amendment. Mr. Totilo seconded the motion and it passed unanimously with the eligible members present voting, 4-0 (Dell, Tepper, Totilo and Fishman).

Zoning Board of Appeals Referrals:

ZBA APPL. #034-11, Joseph Ballerini & Laura Jordan, requesting a variances of front yard setbacks to construct a covered front porch on an existing single-family house located at 223 Ocean Drive East in a R-10 Zoning District.

Laura Jordan, 223 Ocean Drive East described historical documentation and land surveys for front yard setbacks. Mr. Dumais noted that the Board already recommend approval for the previous “full” version of this application but it was not entirely approved by the ZBA.

After a brief discussion, Mrs. Fishman moved to recommend approval of the requested variance. Mr. Totilo seconded the motion and it passed unanimously with the eligible members present voting, 4-0 (Dell, Tepper, Totilo and Fishman).

APPL. #035-11, David & Sophie Jacquet, requesting variances of front yard setbacks, to construct an addition to an existing single-family house located at 63 Clearview Avenue in a R- 7½ Zoning District. .

Mr. Dumais explained the application and noted that nearly the entirety of the applicant’s house is already in advanced of the allowed setback. This addition was to the rear of most of the house but still required a front yard setback variance.

After a brief discussion, Mr. Totilo moved to recommend approval of the requested variance. Mrs. Fishman seconded the motion and it passed unanimously with the eligible members present voting, 4-0 (Dell, Tepper, Totilo and Fishman).

APPL. #038-11, Ronald Ruocco, requesting variances of front yard setbacks to construct an addition to an existing single-family house located a 7 Craig Court in a RA-2 Zoning District.

Mr. Dumais briefly described the request and explained that the applicant was on a corner lot and that the existing house was nonconforming with respect to front yard setbacks.

After a brief discussion, Mr. Tepper moved to recommend approval of the requested variance. Mr. Totilo seconded the motion and it passed unanimously with the eligible members present voting, 4-0 (Dell, Tepper, Totilo and Fishman).

Old Business

Land Use Bureau, Master Plan Update Supplemental Appropriation Request, \$250,000 for consultant services related to the Comprehensive Review and Update of the City's Master Plan and related infrastructure studies and neighborhood specific plans.

Mrs. Fishman moved to add the above item to the agenda, seconded by Mr. Totilo and passed unanimously. Mr. Dumais explained that the Board previously recommended approval of this amount but because it was pulled from the Board of Finance it was being resubmitted.

After a brief discussion, Mrs. Fishman moved to recommend approval of the requested Supplemental Appropriation. Mr. Totilo seconded the motion and it passed unanimously with the eligible members present voting, 4-0 (Dell, Tepper, Totilo and Fishman).

Mr. Dumais asked for each member to email him their preferred time and date to schedule of tour of the Sterling Farms main building. He then noted that the next scheduled meeting was September 6, 2011 at 7:30pm in the 4th floor cafeteria.

There being no further business to discuss, Mrs. Dell adjourned the meeting at 10:02 pm.

Respectfully Submitted,

Claire Fishman, Secretary
Stamford Planning Board

Note: These proceedings were recorded on tape and are available for review in the Land Use Bureau located on the 7th floor of Government Center, 888 Washington Boulevard, during regular business hours.