

**MINUTES OF PUBLIC HEARING
HELD BY THE PLANNING AND ZONING COMMISSION
SEPTEMBER 19, 2011**

ROLL CALL:

Members Present: Joseph Diminico, Chairman
Kevin Dougan, Vice Chairman
Horace Brown

Alternates: Anthony Petrone (sitting)
Susan Shanbaum
John Chaput (sitting)

Absent: Andrew Kidd, Secretary
Eric Prause

Also Present: Mark Pellegrini, Director of Planning
Renata Bertotti, Senior Planner
Matthew Bordeaux, Environmental Planner
and Wetlands Agent
Ginger MacHattie, Recording Secretary

The Chairman opened the Public Hearing at 7:01 p.m. The Acting Secretary read the legal notice for the application when the call was made.

WAL-MART REAL ESTATE BUSINESS TRUST – 420 Buckland Hills Drive – for proposed expansion of an existing store from 121,545 sq. ft. to 148,578 sq. ft. and related site improvements in a CUD zone – CUD Detailed Plan Modification (2011-018)

Attorney John Knuff, 147 North Broad Street, Milford, CT spoke on behalf of the applicant regarding its property at 420 Buckland Hills Drive. This property is located in a CUD zone and the application is to expand the existing store by about 27,000 square feet to add a grocery component. In addition to the expansion, the applicant will be improving the exterior of the store, adding landscaping in the parking lot and updating the lighting to LED.

Mr. Alan Carpenter, Engineer, explained that the 16.39 acre parcel is bounded on the north by Buckland Hills Drive, Ring Road on the west, I-84 to the south and another commercial property on the east. The topography slopes up to the west on most of the property, with a significant slope off of the back of the building at the east of the site. There will be no disturbance in the wetlands on the east side of the property. Approximately 1.7 acres, or 17,400 square feet, in the upland review area will be disturbed. There are two areas that will have new pavement totaling 2/100 of an acre.

Dr. Paul Davis, PhD, Soil and Wetlands Scientist, explained that the edge of the parcel contains some wetlands. There is a stream that runs from Buckland Hills Drive to the highway. The watercourse is confined by topography, dense shrubs and some trees. A fair amount of the area of the slope is landscaped. There appears to be no change to the wetland as a result of the existing development, nor will there be a direct impact to the wetland or watercourse associated with the proposed project. About 4/10 of an acre will be graded, primarily in the grass area and the wetlands hydrology will be preserved. The applicant is proposing 1.13 acres of new impervious area. There are currently three subsurface detention systems that have been analyzed to determine flows and stormwater quality treatment effectiveness. Conservative assumptions were used and it was determined that 86% of suspended solids will be removed from the site, which is a slight improvement over existing conditions. There will be no increase in storm flow quantities. The erosion and sedimentation control plan will control impacts of construction.

In response to a question from Mr. Diminico, Dr. Davis said the type of solids transferred would likely come from a sanding operation, atmospheric deposits, and automobiles. There is a hydrodynamic separator.

In response to a question from Ms. Shanbaum, Dr. Davis said some trees will be removed from behind the building. Attorney Knuff said this item will be addressed in the next portion of the presentation.

Mr. Carpenter said there are trees that will need to be removed, but the applicant will also be planting some trees near the area of disturbance for an overall increase on the site.

In response to a question from Ms. Shanbaum, Mr. Carpenter said the applicant is not proposing to plant new trees along the slope near the disturbance. If the Commission would like the proposed trees moved that could be accomplished.

Mr. Carpenter reviewed the zoning, stating the property is located in a CUD zone adjacent to Buckland Hills. The building is compliant with setback requirements. The site has existing landscape buffers. The significant buffer that currently exists along Buckland Hills Drive will be retained. The expansion is proposed primarily on the northern end of the site, where the current garden center sits. A new vestibule will be added on the west side and the garden center will be relocated from the north end of the building to the southwest and reduced in size. The grocery entrance will be in front of the northwestern portion of the building. There are two existing traffic docks. An appendage and a local delivery door will be added.

Mr. Carpenter reviewed the existing driveway connection at Buckland Hills Drive. It will be altered to become a limited driveway restricted to right exit turn only due to accident counts. The connection to Ring Road will remain the same. The plans show the removal of parking from the cut through area and the addition of a bus stop area. He is working on getting a shelter for the bus stop. Sidewalk ramps and striping will go from the bus stop to the building. Mr. Carpenter pointed out the handicap parking locations. There will be three internal islands in the parking area and an increase to 26,300 square feet of internal landscaping. There will be 670 parking spaces, which equates to 4.5 spaces per 1,000 square feet. Parking complies with Town requirements.

Erosion and sedimentation control will consist of site surroundings such as silt fence and inlet protection. During development, the store will be kept open and construction will be done in phases. Initially, the existing vestibule and parking area will remain open. The north side of the building will be part of phase one. The existing north driveway will be maintained during construction.

Landscaping will be added to the parking area through islands. Some trees will be added at the truck dock area and additional landscaping will be added on the north side of the parking lot. This will result in 45 canopy trees, an increase from the current 33 trees.

Lighting will be converted from sodium to LED, which is more sustainable and will provide more uniform lighting.

In response to a question from Mr. Brown, Mr. Carpenter confirmed that the garden center is moving from the north end of the building to the south and Walmart will continue to sell fertilizer, pesticides, and herbicides. DEP requires a garden center be covered and these products will be inside the covered area.

In response to questions from Mr. Diminico, Mr. Carpenter confirmed there will be a 1.13 acre increase in pervious surface. A Super Walmart combines grocery, pharmacy, vision, a local restaurant, deli, bakery, retail sales, and garden center services. There will be no gasoline sales.

Mr. Chris Evertz, Architect, explained that the building is existing and signage will be painted and refurbished. The new layout reduces the size of the garden center to 4,000 square feet with the grocery portion at the north end. One loading dock and another service entrance will be added. The front of the building will be redone. He displayed an elevation and pointed out the new garden center, new vestibules, new paint color scheme, new logos and directional signs. The back of the building will be updated with new paint for a uniform look. Mr. Evertz submitted color blend samples to the Commission.

In response to a question from Mr. Brown, Mr. Evertz explained that the nine rectangles in the front of the building are windows used as an artistic feature. They are a block configuration and not made of glass. They give the appearance of windows but are not to be used as windows. This is where the shopping carts enter the building. The carts will be pushed in to the left of the panels. The panels will be made of material similar to Plexiglas but with a tint. They will let natural light into the cart area.

In response to a question from Mr. Pellegrini, Mr. Evertz said they will be tinted in hues of blue.

Mr. Bruce Hillson, Traffic Engineer, reviewed the traffic impact study dated June 2011 and the follow up letter dated August 2011. Data was collected through traffic counts at all significant intersections on Friday afternoon and Saturday during peak periods. A machine count was taken on Buckland Hills Drive. Site distances at intersections were measured. The proposed use of this site would be classified as a discount superstore according to the ITE trip generation manual. In response to Town staff comments, the numbers used were based on trip rates of vehicles

entering and leaving the site. Capacity analysis for each intersection found signalized intersections will operate at the same levels of service as before expansion. There will be very minimal changes to the levels of service at unsignalized drives and nothing will operate below a level "C". Site distances are greater than needed at Buckland Hills and Ring Road. One improvement has been identified. The left turn leaving the site at Buckland Hills Drive will be eliminated and this will be for right entering, right leaving, and left entering only.

Mr. Dougan wondered how big the grocery component is compared with other grocery stores. Local grocery stores are busy places. The report says the traffic will not change, but Mr. Dougan was not so sure that was accurate.

Attorney Knuff said the grocery component is 20,000 square feet. Existing Walmart customers will have the opportunity to buy more products. The Traffic Engineer used very conservative estimates. The ITE manual uses two standards, one for a discount store and one for a supercenter. A supercenter creates a lower rate of traffic per square foot than a discount store.

The discount store category was used for estimating in the case of additional floor area.

Mr. Dougan said Walmart is a good organization and he was sure it expects to increase its sales. He was curious as to what sales increase expectations are. Realistically, the store will generate more traffic if it generates more sales. This is a very busy area already.

Mr. Hillson said he discussed his methodology with the Connecticut DOT, which has experience with similar stores in the state. Most people who shop at Walmart will pick up groceries while they are there, but will not make a special trip to pick up groceries. The convenience is for existing customers to be able to pick up grocery items. A Super Stop & Shop or Shaw's is usually 60,000 to 65,000 square feet. The grocery component in this store is small in relation to other grocery stores.

Attorney Knuff added that he has had extensive conversations with Mr. Jim Mayer, Town Traffic Engineer, who is satisfied with the traffic generation rates.

In response to a question from Mr. Brown, Mr. Hillson said traffic counts were done in the fall and did not include the period between Thanksgiving and Christmas. One would not design for that period just as one would not design a highway for a holiday weekend. Design is based on normal conditions.

In response to a question from Mr. Diminico, Attorney Knuff explained that of the 27,000 square foot addition, 20,000 is for groceries, 4,000 is for the garden center, 1,200 to 1,300 is for receiving, and 1,800 to 2,200 is for the vestibule. The garden center right now is 16,000 to 18,000 square feet.

Mr. Carpenter reviewed Town staff comments and explained that the retaining wall will be made from Versalock. He submitted a product brochure to give the Commission an idea of its appearance. It is not stark concrete and will be comparable to the building. The number of parking spaces on the site overall are being reduced because the size of the parking spaces are

being increased from 9' x 18' to 9.5' x 18'. That will reduce the number spaces from 713 to 670. The buffer to the north that contains 14 existing 12" maple trees will remain as well as the 20 white pine trees. Most of the trees in the wetlands area behind the building will remain. Mr. Mayer commented on the entrance striping. Mr. Carpenter explained that this is a Walmart standard and provides a protected area nearest the entrance door. Mr. Mayer suggested some of the parking lot be one way, but Mr. Carpenter feels it will be hard to stripe and control and prefers it remain unrestricted.

Mr. Diminico asked if any member of the public wished to comment either in favor of or in opposition to this application. No member of the public wished to comment at this time.

Ms. Bertotti clarified the location of the one-way area Mr. Mayer is looking for. The concern is that this entrance is the busiest driveway on the site and Mr. Mayer suggested the Commission consider making it one way. The other comment Mr. Mayer had was regarding the cross hatch in front of the building. As presented, it is very wide which makes it unsafe. Mr. Mayer recommended creating two more defined, uniform, normal width crosshatch areas.

In response to a question from Ms. Shanbaum, Mr. Carpenter said the bus route is not complete but the plan is for a route from east to west through the lot and possibly from west to east. The shelter will be located for the east to west route.

In response to questions from Mr. Brown, Mr. Carpenter said he has e-mails from Connecticut Transit (CT Transit) indicating they are pleased to have a bus stop on site.

Mr. Pellegrini added that CT Transit does not currently enter and exit this site. This will be a major public transportation improvement. The site updates will be designed to accommodate this movement.

In response to a question from Mr. Diminico, Mr. Carpenter said the width at the elbow and entrance will be 25 feet.

In response to a question from Mr. Dougan, Mr. Pellegrini said the bus currently stops at Macy's then goes to the Circuit City/Marshall's plaza where it turns around. Mr. Dougan said the bus has the potential to reduce vehicle traffic. Mr. Pellegrini agreed and added that this bus stop eliminates walking back to Ring Road.

The Chairman closed the Public Hearing portion of the meeting at 8:51 p.m.

NOTICE: THE CASSETTE TAPE RECORDING OF THIS PUBLIC HEARING CAN BE HEARD IN THE PLANNING DEPARTMENT.

OFFICIAL TAPE NO. 1128, 1129, 1130