

**MINUTES OF BUSINESS MEETING
HELD BY THE PLANNING AND ZONING COMMISSION
MARCH 1, 2021**

VIRTUAL MEETING HELD VIA ZOOM

ROLL CALL:

Members Present: Eric Prause, Chairman
Patrick Kennedy, Vice Chairman
Michael Stebe, Secretary
Jessica Scorso
Jessica Poland

Alternate Members: Julian Stoppelman
Bonnie Potocki
Teresa Ike

Also Present: Gary Anderson, Director of Planning
Megan Pilla, Senior Planner
Nancy Martel, Recording Secretary

The Chairman opened the Business Meeting at 7:20 P.M. The secretary read the legal notice when the call was made.

MARCOS A. MUESES – Special Exception under Art. II, Sec. 5.02.02 for a place of worship at 182 South Main Street. - Special Exception (2020-076)

Special Exception (2020-076)

MOTION: Mr. Kennedy moved to approve the special exception under Art. II, Sec. 5.02.02 to operate a place of worship in the Residence B zone at 182 South Main Street. The Commission will specifically waive the requirement for landscape screening per Art. II, Section 1.00.02(e)(4) as the site configuration does not lend itself to landscaping. Ms. Scorso seconded the motion and all members voted in favor.

The reason for the approval is that the proposed activity meets the special exception criteria in Article IV, Section 20 and Article II, Section 5.02.02.

PAREDIM PARTNERS – Pre-Application Review to discuss a possible regulation amendment and special exception and site plan modification at 191 Spencer Street.

Attorney Dory Famiglietti, Kahan, Kerensky and Capossela, introduced herself as representing the applicant. The applicant is seeking to purchase and redevelop the Hawthorne Suites at

191 Spencer Street into a multi-family market rate development. Attorney Famiglietti reported that the layout lends itself nicely to repurposing for apartment use because the site's location is in close proximity to the highway, mass transit, retail and restaurants.

Mr. David Parisi introduced himself and stated that he founded Paredim to invest in Connecticut multi-family real estate back in 2003. Since that time, Paredim has acquired and redeveloped well over 3,000 apartment units throughout the state of Connecticut, as well as Westchester, New York, and New Jersey. He noted that they operate in all major markets of the state and have a portfolio of approximately 2,000 apartments in middle income, workforce housing and Class A apartment communities. Mr. Parisi explained that they typically find a property that is undervalued, undermanaged and underimproved, and deploy a capital improvement renovation upgrade via rebranding and remerchandising. They try to develop it as best in market and best in class, and try to attract the best residents to the communities. Mr. Parisi stated that they operate in the northwest Hartford market and New Haven, as well as 240 units in Bloomfield and several hundred units in the New Haven/West Haven marketplace. The property in the application, said Mr. Parisi, will be unique because of the zoning and adaptive reuse to deliver premier apartment communities with amenities and a fantastic service profile to attract a young, working class renter.

Attorney Famiglietti displayed the apartment conversion concept plan, explaining that her client has just recently contracted for the property and is still in the due diligence stage. Generally, the applicant is looking to convert the existing 104 units, which consist of 84 studio or one-bedroom units and 24 two-bedroom units. There would be significant refreshing and upgrading of the interiors. Some of the studios may have a barn door to become a dedicated one-bedroom. Attorney Famiglietti reported that all units have kitchen amenities which will be improved. In addition, each unit has a dedicated private direct access from the outside.

Attorney Famiglietti referred to the displayed site and gave a brief description of all the changes that would be made to the site itself and the proposed upgrade to the amenities. The traffic flow was reported and she acknowledged that there is currently an issue with the parking. Potential plans to change the traffic and maximize the parking were discussed. Attorney Famiglietti reported that there are six buildings that would be converted from the hotel units to rental units. The seventh building would be a significant conversion to add units and improve the functionality.

The site lends itself well to the re-adapted use, according to Attorney Famiglietti. One challenge is to find a way to maximize parking. There are 117 parking spaces currently and though the site is close to mass transit, they believe the ratio is tight for what renters would need. She enumerated ways in which the applicant can alleviate the parking issues.

Attorney Famiglietti remarked that another challenge they face is making the project work within the zoning framework. Currently, the property is in the General Business (GB) zone, which does not allow this type of use. It would allow for certain multi-family use, but does not allow the market rate, non-age restriction for multi-family use. In speaking with Staff, they thought of using the mill conversion special exception process as a framework. Attorney Famiglietti reported that she would like to work with Staff to craft a regulation for conversion of hotels and

motels in the GB zone to multi-family use with a special exception, and the regulations should set forth specific design requirements, taking into account the improvements planned.

Mr. Stebe acknowledged that the Commission has not seen the verbiage of the regulation, but he thought this is a great idea. Many towns will reach a point where there is no more open space to expand for any purpose. Repurposing existing development, he stated, is at the core of a number of the Plan of Conservation and Development points. There have been applicants over the years that have struggled to repurpose a hotel or an extended stay, but the Commission did not have the flexibility. For this location, Mr. Stebe continued, the traffic pattern will be noteworthy. Currently, the hotel has low occupancy, but getting in and out to Spencer Street is difficult, and this will require a large review by the State. The drive-throughs feeding into the entrance/exit will need to be dealt with. In his opinion, parking will be interesting because there will be a high number for required parking spaces. The concept of the zoning regulation should be pursued, according to Mr. Stebe, but there will be an uphill battle with parking and traffic.

Mr. Kennedy concurred with Mr. Stebe that the concept is a good one, though he does not envision apartments taking over business zones. He acknowledged that there are other multi-family apartments in the area. Obviously there will be many details to be worked out in terms of drafting the regulation, and the State will need to be involved with the traffic issues.

Mr. Stoppelman questioned what the zoning is to the rear and sides of the property.

Attorney Famiglietti stated that the property is General Business zone. The property to the east, the Town of Manchester Housing Authority apartments, would not typically be permitted and must be a non-conforming use. She also pointed out the elderly housing development off Hillstown Road. Attorney Famiglietti reported that the property to the north of this parcel is owned by CL&P, and thus, not developable.

Ms. Potocki said she was hoping there would be a transit-oriented zone, and keep parking to a minimum. Her opinion was that there should be less parking, and more thought to creating a transit-oriented development to connect the bus routes. She was also disappointed that the proposal is not age-restricted or for people with disabilities. Ms. Potocki reported that there is also the landfill to the north and she thought the applicant would like to maintain the trees for screening purposes. She felt apartment dwellers would want screening to the east because of the businesses there.

Mr. Stebe referred to the map with the lot lines, which shows the lot as rectangular with shared access between the businesses. In addition to exploring the parking calculation with Staff, in any other residential plan, there would need to be open space. In the regulations, open space concerns need to be addressed.

Mr. Prause noted that, when Attorney Famiglietti spoke about the General Business zone, there were examples of special exceptions, though he does not see anything about this purpose. He stated that it will probably be a zoning change application, likely a Planned Residential Development (PRD) even though there is an existing building.

Mr. Anderson replied that Staff talked about options and a PRD or Elderly Housing Development (EHD) were options. No matter what option, there would be several variances required. The applicant has chosen to speak before the Commission about a text amendment that would allow for a specific conversion for hotels in the General Business zone.

Mr. Prause asked if it would be specific to the proposal.

Mr. Anderson responded that it would address open space, parking, frontage and density.

Attorney Famiglietti reiterated that density is an issue and they are trying to work with what exists currently.

Mr. Prause noted that the studio units have enough room to envision it as a one bedroom studio apartment. There are two bedroom units that are a good size. He questioned whether they would change the size of the apartments.

Attorney Famiglietti stated that they are working with the architect but she doubts that will be the case. They are working within the framework of the existing units. She added that all of the units are very livable, and it is easy to envision the apartments as residences.

Mr. Prause remarked that one of the pushbacks the applicant will receive during a public hearing will be the impact on schools. However, there are currently families living in hotels. He did not think the proposal will burden the school districts. On the north side of the property, Mr. Prause recognized the property is one lot away from the landfill.

Attorney Famiglietti displayed the site and pointed out the various parcels wrapping around the property.

Mr. Anderson displayed the property in relation to the surrounding properties.

Ms. Potocki added that the Hockanum River has an easement with CL&P for their trail.

Mr. Prause stated that there will be permanent residents close to the landfill, though there are other apartments in the area, but that may be brought up at the public hearing as well. The traffic with the Starbucks and Popeyes may be problematic and is something that needs to be considered with the application. Mr. Prause reiterated that there is a lot of residential development in the area and part of the Plan talks about having mixed use, especially in high commercial areas.

Mr. Anderson noted a comment about the property to the east, which is a Manchester Housing Authority multi-family.

Mr. Prause asked members to refrain from using the chat function, in an effort to maintain transparency to the public.

Ms. Poland questioned whether the plan would be considered middle housing. With the crisis we have in the United States, Boomers and Generation Z are looking for housing of this type.

Mr. Anderson stated that it would be middle housing between very dense areas and single family homes.

Attorney Famiglietti appreciated the Commission's feedback. She ensured them that this is not a cookie-cutter project, and requires creative thinking outside of the box, noting the regulations do not necessary allow it currently.

Mr. Parisi praised the feedback, and will take it all into consideration going forward. It is a complicated matter, he added, that will take a partnership with the Town and creativity by Paredim.

Mr. Prause reminded the applicant that what has been said is non-binding and very preliminary. The Commission is not offering an opinion on the plan.

Mr. Anderson addressed the chat function on Zoom. Going forward, he will disable chat except to the host. Chat should be avoided because everything done in the public meeting is essentially public and handled in the public realm.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

February 17, 2021 – Public Hearing/Business Meeting

MOTION: Mr. Kennedy moved to approve the minutes as written. Ms. Scorso seconded the motion and all members voted in favor.

RECEIPT OF NEW APPLICATIONS

There were no new applications.

MOTION: Mr. Kennedy moved to adjourn the business meeting. Ms. Scorso seconded the motion and all members voted in favor.

The Business Meeting was closed at 8:15 P.M.

I certify these minutes were adopted on the following date:

March 15, 2021
Date

Eric Prause, Chairman

NOTICE: A DIGITAL RECORDING OF THIS BUSINESS MEETING CAN BE HEARD IN THE PLANNING DEPARTMENT.