STAMFORD PLANNING BOARD
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES #3754
TUESDAY, JULY 31, 2012
4TH FLOOR CAFETERIA, GOVERNMENT CENTER
888 WASHINGTON BLVD., STAMFORD, CT

Stamford Planning Board Members present were: Theresa Dell, Chairperson, Claire Fishman, Roger Quick, Dudley Williams, Michael Totilo and Zbigniew Naumowicz. Present for staff was Todd Dumais.

Mrs. Dell called the meeting to order at 7:30pm and introduced the Board Members and staff to the public.

Public Hearing

Master Plan Map Amendment:

MP 418 - 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. Dell explained the Public Hearing Rules and procedures and that they would not be voting on this Master Plan application even if the Public Hearing was closed. She then explained that Mrs. Fishman would read the Legal notice into the record followed by a reading of the staff report from Mr. Dumais.

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

RE: MP-418 *Notice is hereby given that the* ***STAMFORD PLANNING BOARD*** *will hold a* ***Public Hearing on Tuesday, July 31, 2012, 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

Mr. Dumais read the following staff report in to the record:

The above captioned application, submitted by 710A Long Ridge, LLC, requests an amendment of the Master Plan Map from Category 2 (Residential – Low Density Single Family) to Category 8 (Commercial – Campus Office), for parcel known as Lot 20B Long Ridge Road, comprising an area of approximately 6 acres. The subject property is currently undeveloped containing approximately 4.19 acres of conservation easement area of which approximately 1.37 acres is identified wetlands and is currently zoned R-20 single-family residential and is surrounded by R-20 residential zoned (Master Plan Category 2) properties to the north, south and east; RA-1 residentially zoned (Master Plan Category 1 & 17) property to the southwest; and C-D commercial zoned (Master Plan Category 8) properties to the west and north west.

The property was subject to a recent Master Plan Map Amendment application: MP 416. That application sought the same Master Plan Map change from Category 2 to Category 8 and was denied by the Board in September of 2011. The current application, from a Master Plan Map change perspective, is indistinguishable from the previous application. As such, Staff has included a copy of the previous report for a more detailed analysis of the request.

In reviewing this Master Plan Map Amendment application the Planning Board needs to carefully consider the existing goals, policies and strategies of the Master Plan to determine the merit of the current application. In doing so, the Board must weigh the current application on its merits for consistency with the 2002 Master Plan against the general and long standing policy issue of prohibiting expansion of commercial and office uses along the Ridge Roads. As stated in the previous Staff report and in 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." To that end, it is important to note that the City has begun this orderly research, consensus building process of updating the Master Plan as part of the 2012 Master Plan Comprehensive update.

John Freeman, Attorney for the applicant submitted the Certification of Mailing into the record. He described the location of the property to the Board and how he was inspired by multiple people and groups since the last application for this site including Domus, YMCA and the Boys & Girls Club who all approached him with an idea. Mr. Freeman noted that the State faces an educational crisis with one of the largest needs for education being field based experience. In this application, the Applicant is trying to create through a Master Plan amendment and other changes a state of the art outdoor classroom making use of some West Hill High property. They want to develop the property into a public/private partnership between private property owners the City and the Board of Education. They want to create a model for other properties to follow.

Mrs. Dell asked for confirmation that 3.5 acres will be given to an outdoor classroom. Attorney Freeman said there's a total of 5.7 acres, surrounded by other uses. The front of the property will be used as an office building and part of the property is wetlands. In the early 90's this parcel was meant to be a 45-bed assisted-living facility. After the last application, he worked on ideas in which the property can be redeveloped in some viable way. He explained that in working with staff, the Applicant thinks they've found a balance and this application is the best opportunity for all parties involved in addition to creating a great precedent.

The Board Members asked questions including access to the outdoor classroom. Mr. Quick had a question on the site layout and building design.

Matt Popp, Landscape Architect for the project prepared the plan for this project. Mrs. Fishman asked if it will be open to the public, who will maintain it? Attorney Freeman said yes, it'll be open to the public and the applicant will maintain it. MR Freeman next submitted a packet of information to the Board and read through specific sections of the Master Plan and how this application was consistent with them. He specifically noted that this application was consistent with the Master Plan as a Category 8: low density office use, compatible with adjacent uses, superior design, superior traffic management which doesn't adversely impact traffic at all. In the Neighborhood Plans Report, GE's expansion was linked to a public benefit and the report notes that on Long Ridge Road could encourage out of the box ideas and growth where there's a transit access.

Mr. Williams asked if there was anything in this classroom not already available in Bartlett or Stamford Museum or the Nature Center? Attorney Freeman said it's meant to supplement existing programs.

Mr. Naumowicz asked if they will donate the property to the City? Attorney Freeman said this design is what the City deems appropriate and would be open to that discussion if the City desired.

Mrs. Dell said keeping with the Master Plan idea on why they chose to go the commercial route, what motivated the decision not to keep this parcel residential? Attorney Freeman said residential isn't compatible with the surrounding uses.

Mr. Quick had a question about the lot configuration? Attorney Freeman said they were merging the properties with the larger corporate office park they owned to the North and West.

Mrs. Dell asked if anyone from the Public wished to speak in favor of the application.

Michelle Komen, CT Audubon Society said the outdoor exposure and people spending time outside is good. It gives the Stamford Public Schools the ability to go to this site and utilize the facilities you wouldn't find anywhere else and the outdoor classroom is a huge positive.

Mike from the Stamford Boys & Girls Club expressed his support and said he hoped the Board considered this.

Michael Himond, Domus, supports this project as an additional flexible access point. The plan is well thought out, sound and the location takes advantage of the proximity of public open space.

Mrs. Dell asked if anyone from the Public wished to speak in opposition of the application.

Bill Billve, president of River Oaks Association, said it's admirable for the applicant to think about an education facility but didn't want the Board to lose sight of the issue of traffic congestion and these two residential complexes already have a difficult time entering and existing their properties. Homeowners have expressed concern about the traffic volume. This plan is for additional office space which is the real issue here and to allow it would be a mistake. They are opposed to anything such as an office that increases traffic and he encouraged the Board not to be deceived. It's a huge economic issue to BLT. He referenced the Corridor Study: Policy to Control Expansion of Offices on LRR and HRR and the desire to move office space downtown. There should be an emphasis on safety, reducing speed and anything that allows more cars is destroying neighborhoods.

Jeff Klein, local resident, said owners were denied once and now are stuck with the property. This is within two miles of the Stamford Museum and Nature Center. This is a residential area and is less dense. He encouraged the Board to deny the application.

Dennis Hugkben, President of Heatherwood, said the chief concern is about safety. There's no substantial change in this application from the last one that was denied. They don't want to expand commercial use and this is a primarily residential neighborhood. They neighbors shouldn't be punished and they want the current property to remained zoned as is.

Syndey Goldman said BLT is an important factor in Stamford but he has to express cynicism that they are in this for educational diversity. 40 cars a day is significant. If BLT wants to be a good citizen, they should donate the land to the City.

Stewart Graver said River Oaks has 59 homes on 26 acres. There's 250,000 sf of office space down the road that's vacant. He's concerned about safety and traffic. He asked the Board to deny this request.

Mrs. Hircsfield read a letter from the resident's at Barnes Road. The pressure is towards commercializing LRR which is out of sync with the Master Plan. They are troubled by this application because the City is undertaking current studies because they feel the applicant is trying an end run around an existing orderly process. She asked the Board to deny this.

Henry Hirschfield said the intent to combine the parcels should be challenged. There's nothing substantive in this version of the application that the Planning Board previously denied.

Ralph Nobile said there are clear reasons why the Board should deny the application. The adjacent parcels were developed to meet the current Master Plan. This area is a balanced community which doesn't need change and this would set a terrible precedent. The Master Plan is clear and the Board should deny the application.

Billy Yewn, resident of River Oaks, said Zoning allows a reasonable expectation of what will happen in your community and that's important for the Board to consider. Is there a compelling reason they need more office space, he doesn't think so, given that and concern about safety, he doesn't see a reason why the Board would vote yes on this application.

Helene Devin, North Stamford resident expressed that a change in the Master Plan, unlike any other road would set a precedent. LRR should be planned as a whole artery and if altered, will open the gates to more commercialization. The City is involved in a currently involved in a comprehensive planning process. She asked the Board to deny the application.

Ray Lockfield said he didn't recall one of the people who spoke in support of this application in favor of combining the office buildings. Why is this parcel important to combine office space? In previous Master Plan change requests the Board's made it clear that Lord & Taylor should be the line where no more commercial buildings are north of.

Mrs. Dell asked if anyone from the Public wished to speak neither in favor of or opposed to the application.

John Freeman wanted to respond to some of the comments from the Public. Traffic related to the classroom is expected to off-peak. Parking and people accessing the space will come by cars through the back of the property. The characteristic of the neighborhood is residential surrounded by dense commercial uses and that additional traffic will be minimal. He's been involved in the Corridor study and they are part of the solution to make the roads

safer. They have a unique situation here to make many acres available to supplement the public infrastructure. The Master Plan is here to represent the broad community and the proposed facility is meant to provide benefits to a broad audience. The applicant has narrowly defined the scope of this project so it only applies to this development.

Mrs. Dell said the education factor is lovely. It's great to know they can do this today even without the zone change. Attorney Freeman confirmed it would be a partnership with the schools, City and the commercial component is important.

Mr. Quick asked for an explanation of BLT's proposed office space? Attorney Freeman said it would be a small boutique office which makes sense in this location and a good investment. They've agreed to build the classroom first.

Mrs. Dell went back to the public for comments.

Gary Stone, resident of North Stamford, asked when the property was purchased, what was the intention? Why'd they buy it?

Beverly Frank asked for clarification to the footprint restriction. Attorney Freeman said BLT has owned this 5 or 6 years and it was originally bought as an opportunity to expand GE.

Mr. Dumais commented on process and policy. He noted that a significant portion of the applicant's presentation regarded the open space and outdoor classroom, an area that is already protected by a conservation easement area and which the applicant cannot propose the outdoor classroom space without approval by another Land Use Board, the EPB. He also noted that the Zoning Text amendment hasn't gone before the Zoning Board and is not in place so merging these properties would create a large amount of potential new FAR. Mr. Dumais next commented that he was concerned because the City was in the process of undergoing a Comprehensive Master Plan update and this this application to make a significant change from the existing Master Plan was operating outside of that process. He noted that all of the difference between the Applicant and the Public was proof of working on a solution through the Comprehensive Planning process.

Mr. Freeman addressed the comments.

Mrs. Dell said she had one other comment that even though they own both parcels they are not truly connected.

Mrs. Dell closed the Public Hearing on Application MP 418.

Subdivision:

Subdivision Application #4001 Alice Ryan, For subdivision of property into three (3) parcels. The property is located on the north side of Eden Road, (across from Eden Lane); having an address of 86 Eden Road.

Mrs. Dell introduced the application. Mr. Quick recused himself on the application and left the table. Mrs. Dell explained the Public Hearing process and noted that the hearing on this application would likely be left open or continued to reviewed additional information from the Applicant. Mrs. Fishman read the Legal Notice into the record.

John Ryan, agent for Alice Ryan who is his mother, said they've been working on this subdivision with the City since 2007 and has meet with many different departments trying to satisfy all requests. He noted that prior to filing this application, the property was two lots and per Staff's request they filed a consolidation map.

Professional engineer for the Applicant, Barry Hammon, presented the technical details of the proposal. He explained that the application is a three lot subdivision where two new homes are proposed but that they do not have the final design of the houses. Mr. Hammon noted that on July 19 they received unanimous approval from EPB with 13 conditions and subsequently received additional comments from the Engineering department. He next explained how each lot has access over a common drive over a proposed new bridge and added that the certain areas require access easement agreements and drainage agreements to meet City requirements.

Mrs. Dell asked about utilities. Mr. Hammon answered that each lot has its own septic system and well water and would be served by electricity alongside the bridge.

Mr. Williams asked for an explanation of the driveway and bridge.

Mrs. Dell asked with so much water on the property will the septic be a problem and will they have dry wells as well? Mr. Hammon answered yes, they have designed an engineered system to properly offset increases in drainage runoff. He added that each site was designed to meet septic system requirements.

Mrs. Dell asked if anyone from the Public wanted to speak. No members of the public came forward to speak in support or in opposition to the application.

Caroline Torre, 100 Eden Road, said this home has been in the family for 26 years and concerned about wetlands. Once building starts she noted a concern about how the water will flow and impact her property.

Tracy Miller, 20 Perry Road said this area continually floods and is concerned with pattern of water and whether altering the flow will dramatically impact the water direction. She stated that she is not opposed to building but is concerned about water. Mr. Hammon said he shared the concern but they've been doing this for 40 years and have analyzed the site and this plan will work and that Mrs. Miller's property is in a completely different watershed from the Applicant's property.

Mrs. Dell asked if the house on Lot 3 would remain? Mr. Hammon answered yes.

Mr. Dumais asked for clarification from the applicant on both the design consideration for the inclusion of a circle terminus of a cul-de-sac and for a detail on how the application is consistent with the RA-1 Zoning requirements. Mr. Hammon noted that the driveway was designed to create more of a sense of place for the future residents and was reviewed by the City's Fire Marshals. He also explained how the application meets the circle diameter requirement, area requirement, and frontage requirements as noted on the zoning chart of the proposed subdivision plan.

Mrs. Dell asked about the topography of the site. Mr. Hammon answered.

Mrs. Dell noted that since the applicant still needed to address several comments raised by the City's Engineer, the Public Hearing would be continued to August 14, 2012 to the 7th floor of the Government Center at 7:00pm

Regular Meeting

Planning Board Meeting Minutes:
Meeting of 7/3/12

Mr. Williams moved to approve the minutes as submitted. Mr. Quick seconded the motion and the minutes were approved unanimously with the eligible members present voting, 4-0 (Dell, Quick, Totilo and Williams).

Meeting of 7/24/12

Mr. Williams moved to approve the minutes as submitted. Mr. Totilo seconded the motion and the minutes were approved unanimously with the eligible members present voting, 4-0 (Dell, Quick, Totilo and Williams).

There being no further business, Mrs. Dell adjourned the meeting at 10:45 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.