

Project Narrative
0 West Park Place (004-4021)
Special Permit, & Site & Architectural Plans and Requested Uses
November 26, 2024

1. Introduction/Background

Tullamore LLC (a related entity of Wellbuilt Company) is the contract purchaser of a vacant 0.27-acre parcel in the heart of Downtown Stamford in the Columbus Park area. The property is in Master Plan Category 11 (Downtown) and the CC (Center City) Zoning District. The lot has been empty for over half a century and sits between two historic buildings.

In 2006 the property, owned by Stamford’s Urban Redevelopment Commission (URC), was part of a planned multi-phase redevelopment known as Park Square West Phases II-IV. Proposed as Phase III of the redevelopment, the parcel was going to contain roughly 80 dwelling units in a 12-story building to be internally connected at the garage levels to the other phases. Due to litigation, the development stalled. Years later, Phase II (66 Summer Street) and Phase IV (The Vela – 1011 Washington Blvd) were eventually completed (2013 and 2015 respectively). The “Phase III” parcel, which presented unique challenges, was left out of those developments and remained vacant.

In 2018, the URC initiated an RFP process to find potential buyers/developers for the Phase III parcel. A Letter of Intent with Wellbuilt was executed in 2019, and the contract then went through a multi-layer approval process by the Board of Finance, Board of Representatives and Mayor’s office. The contract was ultimately fully approved in March 2021 and due diligence has been ongoing since then. Wellbuilt appeared before the Zoning Board with a pre-application in May 2023, and the enclosed application is consistent with the proposal previously presented.

The proposed plan is to deliver a modern and exciting Extended Stay Hotel. Concept plans for the 99-room boutique hotel with ground floor restaurant have been reviewed and positively received by the URC as well as staff of the DSSD, Land Use Bureau, and Transportation, Traffic and Parking department.

To facilitate the potential redevelopment, the applicant is submitting the following applications:

- A. Special Permit; and
- B. Final Site and Architectural Plan and Requested uses.

2. Surrounding Area

The property is wholly within Master Plan Category 11 (Downtown) and CC (Center City) Zoning District. The vacant lot is flanked on each side by historic structures: Curley’s Diner to the west and 74 West Park Place and The Davenport building to the east. Together the buildings make up the eastern border of the Columbus Park section of Downtown – Stamford’s “restaurant row” with a variety of different eateries and retail shops at the ground level and a mix of residential and commercial uses on the upper floors, all surrounding a triangular park. The neighborhood is one of Stamford’s most vibrant sections of Downtown, directly across from Mill River Park and the site of the Alive at 5 and other concert series and gatherings.

3. Project Area/Development Site

For decades, the subject site has been the “missing tooth” in an otherwise activated streetscape. While it has served as public parking or a port-a-potty site during concerts, the site has not contributed to the pedestrian experience for decades. A 14’ wide strip at the western end of the site is reserved as an easement for access to the Curley’s parking lot. The rear of the site backs up to the City’s Summer Place garage with an 8’ wide pedestrian easement running along the eastern property boundary and connecting to West Park Place. The site is also within 300’ of the public garage at 300 Main Street; 400’ from the public garages at Target, The Marriott Courtyard and the Bell Street garage; and 750’ from the public garages at Landmark and the Government Center. The site is in the heart of Downtown within walking distance to a variety of restaurants, retail, entertainment, and service establishments.

4. Proposed Development

While no specific hotel operator has been determined, the Applicant has been in discussions with Mint House, an experienced operator of extended stay hotels around the county. Mint House aims to offer a unique hotel experience that feels more like “home”. From their website:

Mint House combines the classic comfort of home and the modern luxury of a hotel, giving guests all the perks and none of the tradeoffs. We’ve ditched losable key cards, long lines, room service and other relics for the things we miss when we travel – kitchens, groceries, workout routines, and the space to spread out. Every part of the Mint House experience is powered by smart technology, making your stay personal, predictable and effortless.

The hotel use will provide much needed activation of a key Downtown site that has been vacant and blighted for decades. The West Park Place street front will finally be complete – with a hotel lobby and retail/restaurant space providing pedestrian activation and facilitating a safe and attractive walkway connection from the street to the existing Summer Place garage.

A. Building Composition & Features

The proposed extended stay hotel is to be constructed in a 10-story building with retail/restaurant space at the ground level. The restaurant space will have its pedestrian entrance along West Park Place, while the hotel lobby will be accessed from an interior drop-off plaza. A basement level will accommodate storage and mechanical space for both the hotel and restaurant.

The upper floors will contain 11 hotel rooms on each floor for a total of 99 keys, in a mix of 36 efficiency rooms and 63 one-bedroom suites. All rooms are designed with full kitchens and bathrooms to accommodate extended stays. Suites will include sleeping rooms that are separated from living/dining/kitchen space. A partially covered roof deck will provide roughly 3,000 square feet of outdoor lounge/amenity space for hotel guests.

The new building will fit comfortably alongside the taller building structure at the corner of Washington Boulevard and West Park Place, and the more modest medium rise structures to the East. The primary façade facing Columbus Park is meant to read as a simple and elegant composition of expansive glass with a steel channel profile bordering the glass. The side elevations are less transparent with windows set in a cementitious panel wall cladding. One of the primary

design considerations was the user and pedestrian experience at the first floor. The design will add value to the streetscape by creating a public use facing the street and park and filling in the void of the existing parking lot.

B. Access and Circulation

The site will have vehicular access from West Park Place via the existing westerly driveway with circulation through/under the building and exiting a one-way driveway at the eastern end of the site. The vehicle court will serve as a covered drop-off and pick-up area for guests arriving by car, as well as a loading area for the building.

As a standalone site leftover from what was intended to be a more comprehensive development, the property is simply not large enough to accommodate structured onsite parking, nor is any required¹. Like many urban hotels, the site will rely on public infrastructure for those guests traveling with their own vehicles. The site benefits from a direct pedestrian connection to the Summer Place garage, as well as proximity to several other publicly accessible parking facilities described in section 3 above.

C. Streetscape and Pedestrian Experience

The front face of the hotel is proposed to be in line with the historic structures on either side of the building. The existing 11' sidewalk (including 4' brick amenity strip) recently implemented on this side of West Park Place will be replaced in kind, maintaining a continuous uniform design. Final design of street trees and light posts will be coordinated with Engineering and TTP staff.

The public access easement from the Summer Place garage to West Park Place will be maintained and enhanced. The current easement runs through striped parking spaces and requires pedestrians to walk through a once-active parking lot. The reduction of onsite vehicle usage and restriction of the driveway to exit-only will vastly improve pedestrian safety. The proposed paving treatments and landscaping will make it clear that pedestrians are the priority and vehicles are secondary.

D. Construction Timing

Pending approval of the submitted applications, site work is anticipated to begin by the end of 2025 to be completed by the third quarter of 2027.

E. Conformity with Stamford Zoning Regulations and Master Plan

The Master Plan for the site is Category 11 which has a stated intent to “to provide for and protect an intensive, pedestrian-oriented mixed-use district. Intended is a full array of retail, office, cultural, recreation and residential uses serviced by mass transportation and integrated pedestrian access systems, always at-grade, enhanced by up-to-date lighting, seating, planting, signage, etc., to assure a desirable mixing and interaction of people and activities. A variety of scale and design in new construction is to be encouraged”. The proposal accomplishes those goals by infilling an existing vacant site with a pedestrian-oriented mixed-use development and improving the quality of housing with new onsite amenities. The size, scale and intensity of the proposed use and structure

¹ Pursuant to ZB Approval 224-19 revised section 12.D.1.j states that no parking is required for Zoning Lots 25,000 sf or less provided such lot is within 1,200 feet walking distance of a municipal Parking Facility.

all meet existing Zoning Regulations and goals. See further details on the submitted Zoning Data Chart and accompanying site and architectural plans.

5. Action Items

To facilitate the development, the Applicant has filed applications for approval by the Zoning Board for the following specific requests:

A. *Special Permit*

1. Pursuant to Section 19.E (Review of Large-Scale Development), Applicant requests approval of a nonresidential structure having a gross floor area of twenty thousand (20,000) square feet or more.
2. Pursuant to Appendix B, Footnote 23, Applicant requests approval of a hotel or extended stay hotel with a maximum above grade FAR of 6.0, subject to applicable standards and limitations.

B. *Site and Architectural Plan and Requested Uses*

The Applicant requests approval for the proposed 99-room hotel, including approval of the proposed location, height, coverage, relationships with buildings and property lines, and associated uses.

The Applicant also requests a modification of the sidewalk requirements pursuant to Section 12.K.5. The existing sidewalk is 11' in width along the entirety of the block. While this meets and exceeds the base dimensional standard, since the property is located on a Downtown Retail Street, a 15' sidewalk is required. With historic buildings on either side of the property and occupying most of the block, adherence to the 15' requirement along the site frontage would create a disjointed and undesirable sidewalk condition. Having the building façade in line with the adjacent structures and maintaining a uniform street wall is a more appropriate design.

6. Conclusion

The proposed development embodies many of the goals of both the C-C Zoning District and the underlying Downtown Master Plan Category and will turn a long-blighted and underutilized property into an attractive new boutique extended stay hotel that will benefit Stamford in several ways.

- The site's proximity to UConn, Stamford Hospital and several corporate offices make it an ideal location to accommodate growing demand for extended stay options.
- The range of amenities and services will be tailored to long-term guests, providing a level of comfort and convenience that will enhance visitors' Stamford experience.
- Providing attractive and convenient options for visitors will benefit local business, restaurants and cultural attractions, and contribute to the overall vitality of the community.
- The developer's commitment to sustainable and eco-friendly practices aligns with the city's own sustainability initiatives and reflects a shared dedication to environmental responsibility.

7. Statement of Findings

I. The above referenced specific Special Permit requests are integral to the development project as a whole. Thus, for purposes of demonstrating compliance with the standards and conditions below, the entire development proposal is considered. The Applicants submit that all applicable criteria contained in Stamford Zoning Regulations Article V, Section 19.C.2 are met for the following specific reasons:

- a. *Special Permits shall be granted by the reviewing board only upon a finding that the proposed use or structure or the proposed extension or alteration of an existing use or structure is in accord with the public convenience and welfare after taking into account, where appropriate:*
 - 1) *the location and nature of the proposed site including its size and configuration, the proposed size, scale and arrangement of structures, drives and parking areas and the proximity of existing dwellings and other structures.*

The proposed development is appropriately located within a mixed residential and commercial neighborhood and the Downtown Master Plan Category. The proposed building is compatible in scale and style with the surrounding area. The proposed setbacks and arrangement of buildings are appropriate for the C-C and serve to activate the pedestrian street frontage while maintaining appropriate sidewalk width. Use of existing nearby municipal parking facilities helps to minimize unnecessary structure while still accommodating all potential building patrons in a safe and convenient way.

- 2) *the nature and intensity of the proposed use in relation to its site and the surrounding area. Operations in connection with special permit uses shall not be injurious to the neighborhood, shall be in harmony with the general purpose and intent of these Regulations and shall not be more objectionable to nearby properties by reason of noise, fumes, vibration, artificial lighting or other potential disturbances to the health, safety or peaceful enjoyment of property than the public necessity demands.*

An extended stay hotel is a permitted, as-of-right use in the CC zone, and the proposed intensity, height, and building coverage are all within the maximums permitted within the zone and prescribed by the Master Plan. The proposed building improves the hotel community with new and distinct product. There are no anticipated objectionable impacts or potential disturbances to nearby properties.

- 3) *the resulting traffic patterns, the adequacy of existing streets to accommodate the traffic associated with the proposed use, the adequacy of proposed off-street parking and loading, and the extent to which proposed driveways may cause a safety hazard, or traffic nuisance.*

The Property is currently improved with approximately 35 parking spaces, and the proposal contemplates utilization of nearby existing parking resources. Thus, Wellbuilt does not anticipate any measurable impact to existing traffic patterns. Moreover, with thousands of parking spaces within 500 feet of the Property that are empty on evenings and weekends, the Applicant is confident that parking can be adequately accommodated by publicly accessible infrastructure.

- 4) *the nature of the surrounding area and the extent to which the proposed use or feature might impair its present and future development.*

The Property is located in the heart of the downtown proximate to UConn and the Mill River Park, and the immediately surrounding area includes a variety of residential, commercial, and retail uses. The proposed hotel use is compatible with these uses and will place people on the streets thereby increasing the patronage of nearby retail and service establishments.

- 5) *the Master Plan of the City of Stamford and all statements of the purpose and intent of these regulations.*

Category 11 (Downtown) of the Master Plan contemplates “to provide for and protect an intensive, pedestrian-oriented mixed-use district. Intended is a full array of retail, office, cultural, recreation and residential uses serviced by mass transportation and integrated pedestrian access systems, always at-grade, enhanced by up-to-date lighting, seating, planting, signage, etc., to assure a desirable mixing and interaction of people and activities. A variety of scale and design in new construction is to be encouraged.” The proposed development fits within this category and fulfills the policy goals of the neighborhood. Other Master Plan policy goals realized through this redevelopment include:

- a) **3B.7** Implement traffic calming and improvements to bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure in the Downtown, along commercial arteries and in neighborhood centers.
- b) **5A.6** Promote infill development on vacant sites within Downtown.
- c) **5B.1** Improve pedestrian connectivity within Downtown and between Downtown and adjacent neighborhoods.
- d) **5B.2** Implement streetscape and traffic calming improvements Downtown.
- e) **5B.3** Encourage quality urban design that relates well to streets and people.
- f) **5E.1:** Promote neighborhood revitalization.

II. Pursuant to Section 19.D.4 Standards for Review the applicant submits that all applicable criteria are met for the following reasons:

In reviewing site plans the Zoning Board shall take into consideration the purpose of these Regulations, including the purpose of the applicable zoning district and the goals and policies of the Stamford Master Plan, the public health, safety and general welfare and convenience of the general public and the maintenance of property values. In its review the Board may modify a site plan or condition an approval to the extent necessary to conform the site plan to the following standards and objectives:

(1) Safe, adequate and convenient vehicular traffic circulation, operation, parking and loading, and pedestrian circulation, both within and without the site.

(a) The number, locations and dimensions of all vehicular and pedestrian access drives and walkways, parking spaces, drop-off and loading areas, and provisions for handicapped

access shall conform to the standards of Section 12 of these Regulations, to the adopted design criteria and engineering practices of the Dept. of Traffic and Parking, and all other applicable standards. Such areas shall be constructed of suitable hard surface materials and maintained in good condition.

The proposed development generally makes use of existing access drives. All proposed internal drives, and walks are thoughtfully designed to be safe and convenient, and compliant with all standards of Section 12 of the Regulations.

- (b) *The number of vehicle access drives shall be minimized and shall be located and designed to provide safe and convenient turning movements and safe sightline as determined in accordance with the Geometric Highway Design Standards of the Conn. Dept. of Transportation.*

The existing access drives are generally being maintained, with one such driving being reduced from two-way traffic to exit-only.²

- (c) *Area streets and traffic controls shall be determined to have adequate capacity to service the site without causing undue congestion or hazardous conditions.*

The proposed hotel creates minimal traffic demand, which is expected to be easily accommodated by existing streets and traffic controls. Moreover, as previously mentioned, the project intends to utilize existing parking resources which further reduces the number of new cars on the streets.

- (2) *The protection of environmental quality, landscaping of open space and harmony with existing development. The Board shall take into consideration the following features and standards:*

- (a) *The location, height, design and materials of walls, fences, hedges and plantings shall be appropriate to the vicinity and shall suitably screen parking, loading, garbage collection facilities, outside storage areas, accessway drives, utility installations and other such features; such landscaping shall be appropriate to the general character of the vicinity and consider the proximity and nature of abutting uses and the level of use of adjoining public streets and walkways.*

All loading, and refuse areas are located behind and beneath the proposed building and thereby suitably screened.

- (b) *All open space areas, exclusive of undisturbed natural areas, shall be suitably landscaped to the satisfaction of the Board. Site landscaping shall be performed at a minimum dollar value equivalent to one shade tree of 2.5 inch caliper for every two hundred (200) square feet of landscaped area. In multi-family developments, open space shall be designed to provide functional outdoor living and play areas meeting the needs of intended residents.*

² Section 12.A.2 of the Zoning Regulations permits access driveways to be as narrow as 10' in width when accessing 10 or fewer parking spaces. The northerly 2-way driveway is roughly 16' in width and accesses not more than 8 parking spaces on the Curley's property and no dedicated parking spaces on the subject site.

The existing site is fully paved. Landscaped areas are being added at both the ground level and rooftop and will be suitably planted.

- (c) *Soil erosion, sediment and the release of excessive dust shall be controlled through implementation of suitable short term and long term controls in accordance with the standards and procedures of Section 15-B.*

A Sedimentation and Erosion Control Plan has been prepared, which ensures that the standards and procedures of Section 15-B of the Regulations are satisfied. A copy of this plan is enclosed herewith.

- (d) *Site development shall seek to preserve existing specimen trees, historic structures and other significant natural features of the site. Accordingly, the premature demolition and site clearance of prospective development sites is specifically discouraged and may be taken into consideration in subsequent site plan reviews.*

The site is vacant and fully paved.

- (e) *Artificial lighting, and site generated noise, odors, particles and other disturbances shall be controlled to avoid interference with the use and enjoyment of neighboring properties. The location, height, design and arrangement of outside lighting shall be consistent with safety such as to avoid glare on any other lot and to avoid hazards to traffic on any street.*

All artificial lighting is designed to be controlled and not interfere with the use and enjoyment of the neighboring properties.

- (f) *Available public utilities shall be adequate in capacity to safely service the requirements of the site. Surface water drainage facilities shall be adequate to safely drain the site while minimizing the risk of downstream flooding and erosion. Where infrastructure capacity is judged not to be adequate the Board may accept a binding agreement to perform suitable improvements.*

Coordination with public utility companies to ensure adequate capacity has already commenced. A comprehensive drainage plan has been prepared and is submitted with the enclosed materials. The plans illustrate the adequacy and availability of public utilities for the site.

- (g) *Adequate provision shall be made for emergency vehicle access, fire lanes, and safe fire flows, upon the recommendation of the Fire Marshall and the public water utility.*

Emergency first responders will be able to access the Property safely and conveniently.

- (h) *The arrangement, location, apparent bulk, architectural features, materials, texture and color of proposed buildings and structures shall establish an architectural character and overall site design compatible with the scale and general character of the vicinity.*

The proposed building is consistent with the height, bulk, and scale throughout the C-C zone, and has been designed to integrate within a block containing both taller and shorter structures. Architectural plans submitted herewith specify quality materials on all building facades.

- (i) *Building setbacks and the configuration of open space shall be appropriate to the existing structures on adjoining properties and established patterns of use of side and rear yard areas, and to the existing physical conditions of the site.*

Proposed setbacks meet and exceed those required within the C-C District as well as those provided by adjacent structures.

- (j) *No use shall be permitted that will cause or result in:*
-dissemination of dust, smoke, observable gas or fumes, odor, noise or vibration beyond the immediate site of the building in which such use is conducted, or
-unusual hazard of fire or explosion or other physical hazard to any adjacent buildings, or
-harmful discharge of liquid materials, or
-unusual traffic hazard or congestion due to the type of vehicles required in the use or due to the manner in which traffic enters or leaves the site of the use.

No nuisance or hazardous conditions are anticipated, consistent with the engineering materials provided herein.

- (k) *All buildings and grounds and other structures shall be maintained in good repair and in safe, clean and sanitary condition. All landscaping required pursuant to an approved site plan shall be installed to the satisfaction of the Director of Parks and Recreation and shall thereafter be maintained in accordance with an agreement to be made part of the application of record, which agreement shall be enforced by the Zoning Enforcement Officer, upon advice of the Director.*

The Applicants are amenable to a condition of approval requiring the execution of a Landscape Maintenance Agreement prior to the issuance of a Certificate of Occupancy.