

TOWN OF WESTPORT ARCHITECTURAL REVIEW BOARD

DRAFT MINUTES TUESDAY, JULY 26, 2022

Board Members Present: Ward French, Chairman, Vesna Herman, Jon Halper and Manuel Castedo. Staff: Donna Douglass

1. Minutes from the June 28, 2022 meeting were approved.
2. **374 Post Road East:** Proposed façade modifications, awning and signage (Parcel ID #D09//122/000) submitted by Lisa Donmeyer, JSD Professional Services, Inc, for property owned by Compo Acres LLC, c/o Equity One Realty located in a GBD/A zone. (Aerial site plan undated; Exterior renderings dated 7/12/22; Ruggles Sign signage package dated 7/14/22)

Appeared: Lauren Kenoy, Manager of Sweetgreen

Ms. Kenoy called Sweetgreen, located in the Trader Joe's shopping strip, a fast, casual restaurant. The concept is real food, fresh salads and green bowls. The business is expanding into this area, the closest current site is in Greenwich. They plan some minor façade updates on both the Post Road and parking lot (rear) elevations:

- Repaint the façades in Benjamin Moore Oyster White
- Remove front elevation trellis and replace it with a "kale" green and white Sunbrella awning
- Front elevation patio furniture is Kale green

Signage is individual internally face-lit day/night green channel letters.

- front elevation sign is 16 ft long by 27 ¾ inches high for 36.75 sq. ft.
- rear elevation sign is 12 ft long by 21 5/8 inches high

Vesna Herman had no questions.

Manuel Castedo asked if the pediment had been lowered on the rear elevation. Ms. Kenoy said no, the only change is the new paint and signage.

Jon Halper asked about the sign lighting. Ms. Kenoy said the letters are deep green by day and soft white at night.

Board members agreed that it was a nice reuse and tastefully done.

APPLICATION IS RECOMMENDED FOR APPROVAL AS PRESENTED (Unanimous)

3. **545 Riverside Avenue:** Proposed new canopy and façade (Parcel ID #C06//054/000) submitted by Peter Schuerch, Studio FFA, LLC, for property owned by Mill Pond Farm Inc., c/co Robert Meyer located in a CBD/S. (Aerial view 6/8/22; Property photos 6/8/22; Proposed new canopies and renderings 7/7/22; Walkway canopy brackets 7/16/22; Canopy sign details and color samples 7/19/22.

Appeared: Peter Schuerch, Architect; Robert Meyer, Owner

Mr. Schuerch said he had returned to the ARB because there were questions about the corner canopy design, building colors and lighting. The corner canopy entrance to the Mill Pond Farm store is now less classical and more informal, simplified to a more craftsman style that ties into the existing cupola. It has vertical siding that carries over to the end panels of proposed canopy. The canopy's height mitigates the stand pipe behind it.

He said the building colors are more muted and historical than they show in the illustrations/photographs and showed tan samples in the Grants Beige range of Benjamin Moore paints. The owner likes the color as do the tenants.

The dark green standing seam metal roofed canopy continues on the large white building. He said tenants requested it to prevent ice build-up on the sidewalk in winter. There are 3 signs on the canopy roof. He will review how they will be attached with the engineer; they will probably have to be attached to the rear (building) wall. He showed photos of signs on similar roofs.

Jon Halper asked if the signs on the canopy are all the same size. Mr. Schuerch said almost, one is 2 ft 8 inches, two are 2 ft 12 inches.

Manuel Castedo said brackets are nice and traditional, have you considered doing brackets on the corner canopy? It's such a formal design now. Mr. Schuerch said he had tried it and didn't like it, nobody liked it. Mr. Castedo said he liked the sample photos of roof signs, similar to those proposed, that don't show the brackets attaching them back to a wall.

Jon Halper agreed and suggested the support brackets could be pulled more inboard.

Mr. Castedo asked if the river side of the buildings are also being redesigned. Mr. Schuerch said yes, it will be redone with the same Hardie board and batten siding that is on the front of the buildings. Mr. Castedo was concerned that the siding would be painted the same yellow/beige color as the front, the old gray wood siding looks more appropriate.

Mr. Meyer said we are looking for permits for the front of the building, the rear is not subject to your review. We have done a lot of work to improve the structure of the building, it was old and needed a lot of work. The front is cleaned up and is more functional. The tenants are looking forward to the changes, and don't forget that the big white building will remain white.

Ward French said he didn't think the ARB could review the changes without commenting on the extent of the changes. We appreciate the work you have done, it is an idiosyncratic building that

is very visible. Personally, I liked the original look but understand the water side needs to have attention too. Our concern is only to help make the changes as attractive as possible.

Jon Halper said he felt pretty good about the project, the building's repairs are appropriate and an improvement. If the river side is repaired and replaced in kind I'm assuming it will be painted to look like one building.

Vesna Herman said the green standing seam canopy is such American vernacular. The arched corner entry does not fit.

Ward French said he was still concerned about the paint scheme. There is a substantial amount of green roof juxtaposed with the yellowish tan siding. Dunkin Donuts and the cupola building next to the bridge, the anchor buildings, are gray. They are more contextual.

After discussion, board members agreed the structural improvements were necessary and acceptable so felt the project could be approved with the understanding the applicants will take the board's concerns about the color scheme into consideration.

APPLICATION IS RECOMMENDED FOR APPROVAL WITH THE UNDERSTANDING THAT THE APPLICANT WILL RECONSIDER THE COLOR SCHEME. (Unanimous)

4. **Discuss Possible Text Amendment #819/#PZ-22-00387** by Eric Bernheim, FLB Law, to create a new zoning district 24C, GBC /Saugatuck Marina. (Exhibitions EX-1: Zoning Map Amendments, Existing Conditions dated 5/31/22; Z-1 Existing Zoning Map dated 5/31/22; Z-2 Proposed Zoning map dated 5/31/22; R-1 Master Plan Overview dated 5/31/22; R-2 Marina Elevation dated 5/31/22; R-3 Riverside Avenue Elevation dated 5/31/22; R-4 Charles Street Elevation #1 of 2 dated 5/31/22; R-5 Charles Street Elevation #2 of 2 dated 5/31/22; R-6 Farmer Market Elevation dated 5/31/22)
5. **Discuss Possible Map Amendment #820**, by Eric Bernheim, FLB Law, to rezone from GBD to GBD/Saugatuck Marina, the properties at 2, 16, 36, 40 Railroad Place, 601, 606, 609, 611 Riverside Avenue 91, 96 Franklin Street and 21 Charles Street which together equal 4.9 acres. (Ditto)
6. **Hamlet at Saugatuck Project – Pre Application discussion:** To discuss, review, and comment on the proposed project submitted by Peter Romano, Landtech, for property owned by Roan Ventures located in the GBD Zone. (Ditto)

Appeared: Eric Bernheim, FLB Law

Mr. Bernheim suggested that the entire review team should be introduced all at once. He introduced:

Martin Purcell and Roan Rodriguez of Roan Ventures, the developers; Brian Bensley of Bensley Architects, Interior Design and Landscape; and Peter Romano of Landtech, a local land use company.

Mr. Bernheim said they want to create a new zoning district, §24C, General Business District/Saugatuck Marina. They are seeking to take what Sam Gault did elsewhere in Saugatuck to the area near the railroad. It will provide mixed housing, commercial, office, hotel, retail and affordable housing with underground parking, pedestrian access to recreational and water use with no adverse impact on traffic. The goal is an attractive, vibrant community.

Mr. Bernheim said because of the remedial work that will be necessary, they are looking for bonuses and benefits that include denser, larger, higher buildings.

Ward French said the proposed GBD/SM zone is not similar to anything in town, it is a very different prospect of intensity. We should probably get everything you want out in the open ASAP.

Mr. Bernheim said the renderings are conceptual, what we think could work but we are quite a way from presenting drawings of final plans. An application has been submitted to P & Z, there will be a public hearing September 12. The site needs remedial work and we need more density to make it financially viable.

Ward French asked for clarification of the map outline as it looks like some of the buildings are not actually part of the development yet. Mr. Bernheim said not all the properties in the proposed GBD/SM zone are under contract yet, but we are asking that they be included in the new zone.

Martin Purcell of Roan said that this is a neglected area of Saugatuck. He showed a map of the properties from Luciano Park to the river proposed for development. We will leave Railroad Place alone, maybe just do some façade updates.

Roan Rodrigues said, that while the project is scientifically driven, some of the inspiration comes from the Robert Lambdin mural of old Westport commercial activity on the river. The town's problem is its inaccessibility to the waterfront. We have spent a lot of time analyzing the site. It is time for a change and we are hoping to improve and remediate the land and make it productive. He provided renderings showcasing possible "positive" changes on the river in the future. We have analyzed the architecture of the town and the gravitas and scale of some of its buildings are comparable to those proposed.

Jon Halper said if you are referring to the large commercial buildings on Riverside Avenue, they probably could not get approval today.

Mr. Rodrigues said this project merits buildings of substance. The Bensley team is world renown for thinking outside the box. But they haven't seen a site like this, a project sandwiched between the I-95 and the railroad. He talked about the zoning effects on the project and the bonuses they need to max out zoning allowances for remediation and underground parking. The programming is to incentivize people to use public transportation. We would use commuter parking at off times.

Ward French asked if there is a comparison grid of current and proposed zoning. Peter Romano said no because this is a preliminary meeting. Mr. French confirmed that they were not looking for approval of the text amendment at this meeting. He suggested that the board should look at the architecture.

Brian Bensley said he and his partner, Brian Sherman, started out as landscape designers and then became architects. This presentation is their first pass at what is an urban/leisure environment, commercial center and transit hub, trying to incorporate all aspects. They propose a residential rather than urban design, with air, light, and sunshine encompassed in buildings with apartments with a minimum of 2 sides of windows, natural air and light, nooks and crannies. Streetscapes have retail and commercial spaces. Nooks and crannies create possible outdoor retail spaces. A focal feature is the walls closely abutting street.

It would be done in a residential shingle style to keep with the history of the area, with tweaks and twists for open air and natural space.

Jon Halper asked about the program for each of the buildings. Mr. Rodrigues said it is a balance of residential, commercial and office space. The anchor piece is the market by Luciano Park, a proposed indoor market like the Chelsea Market in New York City, for local farmers, craftspeople, etc., and possibly something like a kids' adventure amenity in winter. The top floor is a meeting and conference space for business.

Brian Bensley said there will be residential spaces on the river and a hotel. Charles and Franklin Streets will be residences of 3, 4 and 5 stories. The current 5 story office building will be renovated. We'll create a skyline with bays and tweaks and twists to provide natural light. We'll stay local with materials and components, shingle, clapboard and stone. This design is a first pass. The landscaping is important, we do all of it. We will create strong landscape features.

Roan Rodrigues said the landscaping and height will help to shield and cocoon from the railroad and I-95 sound and scale.

Mr. Bensley said a hospitality aspect is the basement parking and access to services, the subterranean basement is an important service.

Martin Purcell said all the services will be acted out below. Up top, it is serene. There is connectivity to the extended boardwalk on the water and to local neighborhoods. Water use is a public amenity.

Peter Romano said with its access to water and other neighborhoods, this proposal has received more traction than any plan yet. We wanted to show what it could be, based on what the text amendments will allow. It is all still preliminary. The waterside buildings will be 3 stories, 5 stories on Charles Street. It incorporates open space where there is none by asking for more height in exchange for remediation. Unless we get the text amendments, we can't change anything.

Mr. Purcell said it is a massive remediation project.

Ward French said he had 50 years of experience living in the area and change is long overdue. As for the architecture, these are a lot of renderings, we need the nuts and bolts. I support the direction and you have put together a good mix of people. It is going in the right direction but we need to see what the buildings are actually going to look like.

Vesna Herman said it is a complex project, it will take time to understand and I hope it happens. She was concerned about the scale of the project, some of the properties are not yet a part of the project. She wondered how the one and two storied buildings would fit in. And what kind of lifestyle it is proposing. She wondered if they could start at the river and accomplish it slowly, section by section. The neighborhood now is so different from what is being proposed, it should be taken it step by step.

Jon Halper said he had a technical question, he wondered how they are going to accomplish lower level parking with base flooding since our 100 year flood zone is now about 5 years. Martin Purcell said he works in the city with remediation of flooding in in the lower levels of buildings. It is a considerable undertaking and it will be an engineered solution. The entrance will be above the 100 year flood zone.

Mr. Halper said that you are essentially building a bathtub. The project is very ambitious with issues of height of buildings, architectural uniformity. I'm concerned that all of these buildings will be the same style and materials. It's an ambitious big project with buildings that are so similar to each other.

Mr. Purcell said that they were also concerned about cookie cutter buildings but was confident that, over time, they would add interest.

Brian Bensley said it was a helpful comment. Mr. Halper said he was less concerned about the height and was sure they would do a good job of breaking down the scale, but....

Mr. Rodrigues said they did a survey of heights in town and a lot of the scale they are showing is not out of line with some of the buildings in town. And don't forget the scale of the railroad tower.

Manuel Castedo said that looking at the renderings, he sees little relationship between them and local architecture. There is an overabundance of gables, windows, bridges, towers, balconies, there is so much going on. Regarding the stated proposed zoning goal "to encourage and maintain street walls", there is no clarity as to circulation. The bonuses requested allow you 50% more building than basic FAR. Nooks and crannies, I'm not sure this is in the spirit of what would have developed to this density over the years here. It looks like it was just plopped down.

Jon Halper said Manuel's point is good, he said what I would have said...how would this neighborhood have developed to this density organically? It does feel very foreign. It needs a more homespun hand in the development of details.

Ward French concurred with all board members. There are a number of hurdles to clear, we need to focus on the text amendment, the nuts and bolts.

Martin Purcell said that not all areas need remediation. Mr. French said we need to understand how that remediation will require 5 story buildings.

Eric Bernheim said remediation is extremely expensive so we will need the density and height to pay for it. The proposal is well thought out and well planned to avoid traffic density. We are looking for 5 stories and 3.0 FAR.

Mr. French thanked the applicants for the clear presentation and said the ARB looks forward to seeing future iterations.

Sally Palmer

Recording Secretary