

PORTLAND DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION

AMENDED SPECIAL MEETING

Monday, April 29, 2024 at 7:00 p.m.

High School Auditorium

95 High Street, Portland, CT

1. CALL MEETING TO ORDER

At 7:05 p.m. Michael Nadolski called the meeting to order.

2. ROLL CALL (EDC Members)

Angela Hammond, Robert Petzold, Karen Renner, Sarah Weeden

Others: Dan Bertram (Brainerd Place)

3. ACCEPT AGENDA

Sarah Weeden made a motion to accept the agenda, seconded by Angela Hammond, all were in favor, motion carried.

Michael Nadolski made some opening comments and gave guidelines of the meeting. No decisions or actions will take place; it is simply a fact-finding meeting.

4. BRAINERD PLACE PRESENTATION AND QUESTION AND ANSWER

Dan Bertram made a presentation on the current status of Brainerd Place, showing the layout of the project and explaining the plans for each building. Starbucks is expecting to open in October 2024. They are unable to fill Building A at this time.

Michael Nadolski asked about the current commercial market. Dan Bertram responded that he is an optimist in making something happen. He doesn't want to put anyone in there just to fill up space. The challenge is how to maintain momentum. The financing costs have gone up three times.

Q. Darlene Rice: What are the actual rentals for the first building. **A.** We will have residential units that will be finished by late summer. We won't start the leasing process because it puts too much pressure on us if they can't move in when they think they can. Range of rents: Rents are in line with other projects. Starting rent for studio is \$1,600/month; a 1BR is \$1,900/month; and a 2BR is \$2,400/month.

Q. Lois Vincelette, 1 Joelle Drive, said she loves the town. She made it clear that she doesn't want a cluster of people clogging our town and roads. We need businesses. She asked how many more apartments will be added. A. There are 108 more apartments than originally planned for.

Angela Hammond (EDC member) asked how people would exit the project. A. Restaurants and residents will have different times to enter and exit. It doesn't require any going back to the State. It won't have a before and after negative impact. If coming into the site, you can enter right after the gas station but you can't go out that way. The main entrance is on Rt. 66. Perry Avenue is an emergency exit only.

Grayson "Bud" Hartson, 1 Joelle Drive, said he lived here for 19 years. He has concern about the additional traffic. During the time of the proposed propane business, the traffic going across the bridge was 60,000 both ways in a 23-hour period. His concern is about accidents happening as people enter and exit the gas stations and Dunkin as well as the entrance on Rt. 66. It will back up traffic to the bridge and into Middletown. This is something that needs to be addressed. A. There is no traffic change on Main Street. The traffic engineer for the project will attend the P&Z meeting and will give the impact before and after the project.

Stephanie Tatro, 65 Great Hill Road, asked if it would make sense to change the usage and if so how the economics would be affected in the Arrigoni building. A. It is difficult to change and to build it out. It is possible but not likely. Dan explained in Building F (the yellow space) that was commercial. It is hard to get access and they can't park directly in front so it isn't desirable. Dan explained the parking situation.

Ben Srb, 139 West Cotton Hill Road, said if there is an additional 108 apartments, it reduces the commercial use on the site. The tax abatement that was written is in default in many areas. They are potentially renegotiating. Ben wants to see this project completed. He expressed concern about how the number of apartments increased in one shot. He asked if there is a tenant for the roof-top restaurant. He asked how much of the residential space is being subsidized? We need this to work. He stressed the importance of the historic side of the project and whether Hart Jarvis would be economical.

Dan Castelli, 566 Penfield Hill Road, expressed concern about the cost for the rentals as well as the size which he thinks is small. There are other more important priorities in town.

Anita d Annunzio, said she is glad that things were made more clear tonight. It's a big burden to the town to have that many more people in town. Is there incentives given for the commercial development to come here? A. This is a strategic part of the process. There are a number of ways that commercial leases can be negotiated to make a deal. They could be creative regarding the restaurant. The historic buildings might be creative. They are trying to get young people and older but not necessarily in between.

Dan then explained where the open plaza is located and where the underground parking garage is located. The outdoor space is significant. There are walking paths to make it friendly, and a gazebo in front of the Brainerd House. Things may be things that can be an amenity for the town like a dog wash.

Chris Graham, 26 Fox Run Road, asked what happens when the commercial spaces aren't filled and how important is the pedestrian part to attract commercial tenants. A. We are trying to create space so that the tenants get the extra dollars to get in. Right now it is to build the whole building. We have very substantial partners on this and at some point, we will fill the space. If we put the building up, it will be leased.

Stephanie Tatro, 65 Great Hill Road, was concerned about the traffic patterns, the sharpness of the corner, and the potential for accidents. Wolcott is not far from Perry Avenue, is there a way for another entry and exit there? She thinks the town should give consideration to making an exit on Wolcott and then come up and around to the bridge. May it is something the town would like to think about.

Ben Srb, 139 West Cotton Hill Road, said that the buildings on the corner look better but he thinks Dan will struggle with it. We have too much out there and he doesn't know what is going to happen with the additional units. Everything Dan has done required changes. He then told what some of the changes were. He doesn't see them being completed. Why don't you just do what you started. There is a meeting ground and we need to get there. A. Dan understands Ben's concern but the additional residential is to make the commercial happen. They are trying to find solutions. This is a very complicated puzzle.

Rick Sharr, 168 Middle Haddam Road said he is a former business owner. He was curious about the price of the apartments and their sizes. His experience with commercial real estate is that to get businesses to come to town, you need a population threshold. We are fighting a battle to get businesses and he is on the fence because he likes a small closeknit community, but at some point, we have to have the critical mass if we are going to get a lot more businesses in town. Getting people to come to town and businesses is difficult. You won't get the national players.

Angela Hammond (EDC member) asked if prices for commercial are in line with other commercial areas. A. Significantly.

Dan Bertram said, at the end of the day, there's a contemplated approach and it may change. We took on the Hart Jarvis House. We had permission to build "x" amount of units and the financing for that. From a developer's perspective, the judgment is made by the town. He starts the projects that are ambitious and it may take a year or more to finish them. If something changes after we start the job, then that's the way it goes and we'll finish the job when we can. I think I'm knowledgeable about what can be done here.

Ben Srb said Dan can't pull off what he said he would do. Dan thinks it is smarter to finish the job and then see what happens to the rest of the town. Ben said this is the only place in town

where you can do this. We need to work together but without another 108 apartments. We have very little viable commercial space. He hopes they can work together. Dan Bertram said what Ben wants is risky to wait it out. It doesn't get the best result for the town. The town will decide.

Dan Bourret said there was not enough time to allow Q and A from those on-line. Questions and comments can be forwarded to Dan who is the Town Planner. The meeting on the text amendment will be on May 8 at 6:00 p.m. Closing remarks were made by Mike Nadolski.

5. ADJOURN

Karen Renner made a motion to adjourn, seconded by Sarah Weeden , all were in favor; meeting was adjourned at 9:02 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,


Sharon R. Hoy

Recording Secretary