

**Approved
Minutes
Hartford Planning Commission
November 28, 2022**

**THIS MEETING WAS CONDUCTED IN COMPLIANCE WITH
THE VERMONT OPEN MEETING LAW
IN PERSON WITH ELECTRONIC PARTICIPATION AVAILABLE**

Present: John Reid, Chair, (01-11-24), Bruce Riddle, Vice Chair, (02-07-25), Robin Adair Logan (02-10-23), Toby Dayman (06-28-24), Dillon Bianchi (09-05-25), John Heath (03-22-24), Colin Butler (07-12-24), Kim Souza, Selectboard Liaison, and Jo-Ann Ells, Zoning Administrator

Absent: None

The Hearing was a continuance from November 14, 2022.

Public Hearing

John Reid opened the Public Hearing, read the Hybrid Meeting Script, took a roll call, explained the Hearing process, and administered the oath.

1. Application #22-29 by CHA Butson White River Junction, LLC (owner) and Twin Pines Housing Trust (applicant) for Site Development Plan Approval under section 260-45 of the Hartford Zoning Regulations to convert a Hotel to a Multi-unit Dwelling and Office, lot 14-0020-001, 102 Ballardvale Drive, White River Junction, in a GCR zoning district.

Andrew Winter, Nate Stearns, Bill Kelsey, Gregg Gossens, and Adam Morse were present.

Andrew Winter noted that the area had recently been rezoned to allow residential and mixed uses. He presented a PowerPoint presentation including the following information:

- Location of the project
- Hotel Conversion:
 - Area recently rezoned to include Residential as conditional use
 - 1.58-acre parcel with 3 story 37,000 sq foot building
 - On town water and sewer
 - State and Federal funding committed to project
 - On planned town sidewalk extension, adjacent to bus stop
 - Redevelopment of 67 room hotel into 40 units of affordable housing
 - Combine two hotel room bays to create an apartment

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- 31 one-bedrooms, and 9 studios
- Haven and the VA providing enhanced case management services to select residents
- Create softscape space at front of building for residents

Adam Morse reviewed the civil plans.

Gregg Gossens reviewed the landscape plan.

Nate Stearns reviewed the density allowance for the zoning district and proposed density for the project, proposed parking including a requested reduction in the number of spaces. He noted that the existing lighting and access were not proposed to change and informed the Commission that the Zoning Board of Adjustment had approved the project.

John Reid asked about ownership. Andrew Winter stated that Twin Pines intends to purchase the property.

John Reid noted the lack of a crosswalk on Route 5 to the VA and shared that it was his understanding that one would be considered if there were sidewalks on both sides of Route 5. He suggested the Commission and applicant advocate for the sidewalks and crosswalk.

Bruce Riddle asked if the applicant would install conduit for electric vehicle charging stations (EV charging stations). Andrew Winter stated that this was possible.

Robin Adair Logan noted that it would be difficult to install parking spaces in the future and suggested a ratio of 1.5 parking spaces per unit. Andrew Winter stated that they were trying to make the project feel more residential and less like a hotel. Robin Adair Logan noted that this was not a dealbreaker for her.

John Heath asked if the chain link fence extended along the interstate. Andrew Winter confirmed that it did.

Andrew Winter explained how hotel rooms would be converted to dwelling units, that residents would be at or below 60% median income for the area, that residents could be singles, couples, people with infants, and people with non-custodial children. He added that some residents could have vouchers from the VA and could be coming off a homeless list.

Bill Kelsey stated that some units would be accessible.

Colin Butler commented that the plans needed to be amended to indicate a gate in the fence, not its removal.

Bill Kelsey reviewed how the interior could be renovated into 40 units.

Colin Butler questioned the lack of floor plans in the application materials. Jo-Ann Ells said that the Commission could require them.

Colin Butler questioned why only conduit was being installed for the EV charging stations. Andrew Winter stated that he anticipated they would install the EV charging stations.

Colin Butler asked about laundry facilities. Andrew Winter said that a common laundry room would be provided on the first floor.

Toby Dayman asked about the parking count. It was noted that new pavement indicated on the plans appeared to be raised slabs and conflict with parking spaces. Adam Morse confirmed the areas in question were new pavement and not slabs.

John Reid asked about the adequacy of lighting in a corner of the lot. Nate Stearns pointed out the footcandles on the lighting plan.

There was a brief discussion regarding building security. Andrew Winter shared that there would be limited access to the front door and a manager living on site.

John Reid asked for public comment.

Marie Alvin, Demers Ave., stated that she was disappointed that the project was not geared for families.

Bruce Riddle moved to close the Public Hearing. Colin Butler seconded, and the Public Hearing was closed.

Jo-Ann Ells reviewed changes to the draft Findings of Fact as discussed.

Bruce Riddle moved to approve the application with the noted changes. Colin Butler seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.

2. Application #22-24 by Upper Valley Haven, Inc. and Saint Paul's Episcopal Church (owners/applicants) for Site Development Plan Approval under section 260-45 of the Hartford Zoning Regulations involving a motion to reconsider the requirement to provide an internal access drive, 713 and 749 Hartford Avenue, lots 43-0074-000 and 43-0092-000, Wilder, in a VR-C zoning district and a Planned Development.

Michael Redmond, Nate Stearns, Erica Wygonik, and Paul Simon were present.

John Reid noted that the application was a motion to reconsider the Planning Commission's requirement to provide an internal access drive.

Nate Stearns reviewed two plans, existing layout and with a future multi-family housing building on the current Saint Paul's Church lot. He noted the area where a low barrier

shelter was denied by the Zoning Board of Adjustment and ultimately withdrawn by the Haven. He stated that the applicant was agreeable to a condition that shared parking be limited to the current parties involved.

Nate Stearns pointed out that the Zoning Regulations allow shared parking between lots without a connector road and acknowledged that the Planning Commission can look at “safety of traffic circulation between the site and the street network and integration with the overall traffic pattern, including provisions for auxiliary roadways connecting with adjacent properties where appropriate.”

Nate Stearns contended that The Haven had met the requirements for shared parking without a connector road and noted that shared parking is currently occurring without any indication of problems. He explained that staff and volunteers are required to park at St. Paul’s and people coming to the site for services park on site. He noted that the Commission needs substantial evidence of a safety problem to justify the requirement.

Erica Wygonik reviewed the findings of her report including determining that there is no need for an internal drive and there is adequate parking for all uses, there is no indication that an internal drive would be beneficial, and that parking spaces would be lost if it was constructed. She pointed out that if built, the internal access would increase conflict between pedestrians and vehicles.

Paul Simon stated that he was not aware of other Towns that required an internal drive for a residential use and that the installation of the drive would not be in character with a residential front yard.

John Reid stated that after reviewing Nate Stearns’ legal review, the Commission needs a strong reason to require the internal drive, such as safety, and such information has not been received.

John Heath asked Erica Wygonik if two access points would be safer. Erica Wygonik stated that she did not see a need for a project this size.

Toby Dayman noted the offer that the shared parking arrangement be limited to the current parties involved.

Toby Dayman noted that the Commission could require a third-party review.

Toby Dayman acknowledged that the internal drive could complicate pedestrian accessibility.

Bruce Riddle stated that he was not supportive of requiring the access road. He stated that an internal drive does not support the village character of the area and voiced support for requiring a parking management plan.

Michael Redmond stated that staff and volunteers are told where to park.

Colin Butler shared an experience of driving on The Haven's lot and noted his frustration with having to back out of the southern parking area. He added that he was not convinced that an internal drive was the answer, but was concerned with the existing circulation pattern, and commented that he did not believe the situation was as good as suggested by the traffic engineer.

John Heath stated that he understands the mission of The Haven, was concerned with the amount of activity, but was not sure an internal drive would address this. He suggested considering an outside review.

Nate Stearns commented that it felt like the Planning Commission was looking to start over and reminded them that the parking was approved, and the application was limited to the new internal drive.

Robin Adair Logan expressed frustration with the number of the applicant's applications the Planning Commission has reviewed over the course of the year and suggested the applicant figure out a new parking plan.

John Reid noted that the Commission needs to review and act on the application before them.

Dillon Bianchi emphasized that the Commission has approved the parking and the issue before the Commission is the requirement for a new access drive.

Colin Butler agreed and noted that his experience driving on site should not open up a discussion on parking, but should send a message to the applicant that there is a problem. He noted that the changes at The Haven with uses/services over the years is the problem. He noted he did not want to require the internal drive, but did want the applicant to address the parking issues.

Dillon Bianchi noted that the Commission has approved the shared parking so staff can park at the Church. He acknowledged it is tight, but that he thinks parking can work and encouraged the Commission to vote on the application.

John Reid stated that he did not support requiring the internal drive and stated that he thinks the applicant manages the parking as well as they can. He polled the Commission.

Bruce Riddle stated that he agreed an internal drive should not be required and stated that he would like to see a parking management plan. Dillon Bianchi, Toby Dayman, and Colin Butler agreed.

John Heath stated that he was uncomfortable approving the request.

Robin Adair Logan stated that she wanted to see the internal drive built as parking was not currently working.

John Reid asked for public comment.

Linda Miller stated that she was sad that the parking problem was not being addressed. She suggested that parking spaces could be put where the low barrier shelter was proposed, expressed concern that the application for the low barrier shelter would come back, and compared a parking management plan to a fox guarding a henhouse.

Val Werner shared that as a volunteer at The Haven, the first thing they were told was to park at St. Paul's.

Gerry Williams expressed disappointment that an internal drive would not be required, expressed concern for additional applications that could be submitted, and stated that parking was only a part of the problem.

Marie Alvin commented that the grab-n-go food options create a lot of traffic and expressed concern with the growth at The Haven.

There was a brief discussion about using the area for the low barrier shelter for additional parking. Nate Stearns stated that this could be studied. Michael Redmond added that this could be reviewed with the development of a parking management plan.

Linda Miller expressed support for an independent review, and a revised plan indicating how an internal drive could work.

Marie Alvin suggested an alternative circulation pattern.

Colin Butler moved to close the Public Hearing. Bruce Riddle seconded, and the Public Hearing was closed.

The Commission reviewed changes to the draft Findings of Fact.

Bruce Riddle moved to approve the application with the noted changes. Colin Butler seconded, and the motion passed 4-3 with Toby Dayman, Robin Adair Logan and John Heath opposed. Toby Dayman stated that the internal drive could help address circulation and safety, Robin Adair Logan agreed, and John Heath cited section 260-45 C of the Zoning Regulations as his reason to oppose approval.

Noting the time (9PM), Dillon Bianchi moved to continue meeting until 10PM. Bruce Riddle seconded and all agreed.

The Commission took at 5-minute break.

3. Application #22-30 by Northern Stage Company (owners/applicants) for Site Development Plan Approval under section 260-45 of the Hartford Zoning Regulations for a Multi-Unit Dwelling and Performing Arts Facility, lots 45-0150-000, 45-0151-000, and

45-0152-000, 140, 146, 160 and 178 Gates Street, White River Junction, in CB and Design Review Districts.

Eric Bunge and James Lynch of Northern Stage, Jim Pulver and Mitch Hager of Breadloaf, and Adam Morse of Engineering Ventures were present.

Eric Bunge stated that Northern Stage was seeking to construct 26 units of housing, and a Performing Arts Facility with education and rehearsal space.

Eric Bunge reviewed a video simulation of the proposed project.

It was noted that the White River Junction Design Review Committee (DRC) had recommended approval of the project including the demolition of the garage.

Eric Bunge gave an overview of the youth programs currently offered that would use the educational space. John Reid asked if students arrive by bus. Eric Bunge explained that they are typically dropped off by personal vehicles or walk, noting most are not old enough to drive. He added that classes are generally after school and on weekends.

John Reid asked where students would be dropped off. Eric Bunge explained that they would be dropped off on Gates Street, in the parking lot on site, or at the drop off area at the Barrette Center down the street.

Bruce Riddle noted several changes that were needed to the civil plans.

Bruce Riddle asked about energy efficiency. Jim Pulver explained that this would be addressed during the Act 250 review.

Bruce Riddle asked if heat pumps would be used. Eric Bunge stated that PTAC units would be used (Package Thermal Air Conditioner).

Bruce Riddle expressed support for the project.

There was a discussion about apartments that are currently being occupied by Northern Stage in the downtown being freed up if the project was built.

Toby Dayman noted that the landscape plans needed to be cleaned up so they show the same things, and that sheet L1.7 needs to be amended such that the plantings are labeled. He recommended that the trees along Gate Street be shade trees.

Toby Dayman expressed disappointment with the design of the building noting that the historical character of the area is not being maintained.

John Heath asked if the structure at 178 Gate Street would be removed. Eric Bunge confirmed it would be and noted it is not a contributing structure in the historic district.

There was a discussion about parking. John Heath expressed concern with congestion during drop off times related to the education space. Eric Bunge commented that the program is currently running at the Barrette Center with no issues.

John Heath stated that he felt that the character of the historic district is already gone.

There was a brief conversation regarding the lots not being merged. Colin Butler questioned if lenders would be concerned.

It was noted that the two-bedroom units could be occupied by two singles, a couple, or a family.

Eric Bunge stated that the existing stone retaining wall would remain.

It was noted that the project will require an Act 250 permit and energy efficiency would be reviewed at that time.

Eric Bunge stated that Northern Stage would be agreeable to installing EV charging stations.

Robin Adair Logan asked if the DRC thought the proposed building was an appropriate style to replace what was demolished. She stated that she was not agreeable to the design of the building.

John Reid asked if there was any way to create space for recreation. Eric Bunge noted that there was a community room for functions.

John Reid asked if parking spaces would be assigned. Eric Bunge stated that the topic had not been discussed.

John Reid asked for public comment.

Brian Marsicovetere introduced himself as an abutting landowner. He stated that he was concerned about the accuracy of the property lines, noting that two surveys have been done with conflicting information, questioned if melting snow was considered in the stormwater management plan, noted that the video and plans do not all show the same landscaping and expressed concern with parking on Gates Street. He stated that overall he supported the project and noted he felt the issue of design changed when the Assisted Living Facility was approved.

Colin Butler moved to continue the Hearing to 10:30PM. John Heath seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.

Heidi Duto stated that the building did not fit in with the character of the area and questioned if construction would compromise the hillside.

Eric Bunge noted that the building would not be built into the hillside.

Dillon Bianchi moved to close the Public Hearing. Colin Butler seconded, and the Public Hearing was closed.

Dillon Bianchi stated that he would like the applicant to address the conflicting information on the lot lines and the melting of snow.

John Heath agreed and noted that his biggest concern was the design of the building.

Colin Butler questioned if the boundary dispute was a private matter and agreed that snow melt should be addressed. He stated that he liked the design of the building, but possibly not in this location. He added that it might be difficult to say no given other modern buildings that have been approved in the downtown.

Bruce Riddle moved to approve the application on the condition that before a Zoning Permit is issued:

- The question regarding the boundary line is resolved with the neighbor
- The applicant submits information regarding how melting snow from the snow storage areas is handled
- The proposed street trees along Gates Street are changed to shade trees
- The plans are amended as follows:
 - Landscaping is shown consistently on the plans
 - Landscaping species is called out on all landscaping plans
 - The note on sheet C1.0 regarding a lot merger is removed
 - Lot numbers and addresses are added to sheets C1.0 and C1.1
 - Ownership is corrected on sheet L1.0
 - The number of apartments at 146 Gates Street is called out on sheets L1.1, L1.2, L1.3 and L1.4

Dillon Bianchi seconded, and motion passed 4-3 with Robin Adair Logan, Toby Dayman and John Heath opposed.

Robin Adair Logan stated her vote was based on parking and architecture.

Toby Dayman stated that his vote was because the architecture did not preserve the historic character of the street.

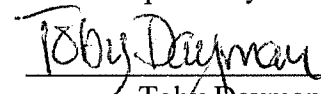
John Heath stated that his vote was based on the architecture and parking.

Adjournment

At 10:45 p.m., Bruce Riddle moved to adjourn. Colin Butler seconded, and the Hearing was adjourned.

10. 11-28-22

Respectively Submitted,



Toby Dayman, Clerk