

HARTFORD PLANNING COMMISSION
March 11, 2024
Meeting Notice and Agenda

The Hartford Planning Commission will meet on Monday, March 11, 2024, beginning at 6:00 p.m. to consider the following Applications.

This meeting will be conducted in person at Hartford Town Hall, 171 Bridge Street, White River Junction, Vermont. In addition, you may join the meeting remotely as follows:

Microsoft Teams meeting
Join on your computer, mobile app or room device
[Click here to join the meeting](#)
Meeting ID: 288 585 904 855
Passcode: vDBHZr
[Download Teams](#) | [Join on the web](#)
Or call in (audio only)
[+1 802-377-3677,,700799393#](#) United States, Middlebury
1 802 377 3677
Phone Conference ID: 700 799 393#

If you have problems accessing this meeting, please email Jo-Ann Ells at jells@hartford-vt.org

A. Administrative Matters beginning at **6:00 p.m.**

1. Public Comment. 2. Sketch Plan Review- Redevelopment of Coolidge Block, David Briggs. 3. Nomination of Matt Osborn as Acting Zoning Administrator. 4. Minutes 5. Administrative Permits. 6. Act 250 Applications 7. Town Plan Steering Committee update. 8. Regional Planning Commission update. 9. Climate Action Plan update. 10. Availability for the next Public Hearing.

B. Public Hearing, beginning at **6:30 p.m.**

~~1. Application #24-01 by Guernsey Ruth Hall Revocable Trust (owner) and Summit Distributing (applicant) for Site Development Plan Approval under section 260-45 of the Hartford Zoning Regulations for approval of a car wash, lot 44-0041-000, Sykes Mountain Avenue, White River Junction, in an IC zoning district. Continued~~

Please call the Department of Planning and Development (802) 295-3075 to request copies of the application materials. Persons wishing to be heard regarding these applications may do so by participating in the meeting, having another party participate in the meeting on their behalf, and/or by submitting written testimony.

An interested person who has **participated** in a municipal regulatory proceeding may appeal a decision rendered in that proceeding to the Vermont Environmental Court. Participation in a local regulatory proceeding shall consist of offering, through oral or written testimony, evidence or a statement of concern related to the subject of the proceeding.

John Reid, Chair

**Planning Commission
Administrative Agenda
March 11, 2024**

1. Public Comment
2. Sketch Plan Review
 - Redevelopment of Coolidge Block, David Briggs
3. Nomination of Matt Osborn as Acting Zoning Administrator
4. Minutes
 - February 5, 2024
5. Administrative Permits
 - Change of use from Smoothy Shop to Office, 6985 Woodstock Road
6. Act 250 Applications
 - None
7. Town Plan Steering Committee update (Bruce)
8. Regional Planning Commission update (Bruce)
9. Climate Action Plan update (John)
10. Availability for the next Public Hearing (April 15)

TO: Hartford Plng Comm DATE: February 27, 2024
FROM: DCB RE: Declaration of Coolidge Block
Redevelopment – HSB 02/20/24

Introduction – Over the past three meetings I have brought the Selectboard an array of comments and facts relating to the Coolidge Block in downtown White River Junction. Today I am sending a copy of my formal declaration to them and to begin to discover the best ways to proceed on this impactful proposal..

By way of background, the Coolidge Block is owned by Northern Hospitality Limited Partnership of which I am the General Partner. NHLP was formed by me on January 2, 1985 and so it is in its 40th year. Based on all that has been learned, all that has been experienced and all that has been accomplished in terms of the role this property has played in the community dating back to 1849, it is time to move forward on what should be understood as a redevelopment project and by that what is meant is removal and replacement of the existing building which dates back to 1927. The goal is to bring more durable and increased value to the property and to the community. Insofar as this is an historic building listed as contributing to the historic district which is listed on the National Register of Historic Places, it has been established that the Coolidge Block Redevelopment will result in highest and best use of the location and in so doing will “preserve” the prominence of the site as the centerpiece of the Designated Downtown of White River Junction. As an aside I would like to point out that this approach is buttressed by the commitment of the owners of the Gates Block to preserve that building as a more substantial building dating back to 1890. I bring a unique ability to back this commitment up because, at this historic juncture, I am the Trustee of Gates-Briggs Building Trust and in a position of site control during this chapter of downtown White River Junction. That brings a very rare advantage adding to the basis for proceeding at this time.

What – As of this date I am planning to move forward in a pro-active pursuit of the outcome of causing the Coolidge Block to be redeveloped. This is intended to result in a structure anticipated to be five stories tall in order to make maximum use of the property allowed by regulations and the economy. Included in the project would ideally be underground municipal parking as well as infrastructure envisioned as a part of geothermal heating and cooling systems in support of carbon reduction goals for Hartford.

More specifically the project plans include:

- A. A strong, viable main street level commercial uses planned to include provisions for retail artisan tenants, a more substantial events center and a medical services walk-in clinic.
- B. Four upper levels planned as work force and market rate housing.

Although the entire history of this location has been as a place of hospitality, the feasibility of a hotel operation is not foreseen at this time. Given the costs of construction a hotel would result in rates that go beyond the WRJ market and would contribute to gentrification out of step with the nature and the role of the village within the Upper Valley.

Why This / Why Now – the concepts consistent with the goal of resulting in a highest and best use scenario have been studied and considered for well over ten years as the creative economy of White River Junction has evolved and proven to be both sustainable and agreeable to the Upper Valley community. Further to the timing, I am in a position for now to complete the role of pre-developer while sustaining the actual operations of existing building during planning, design and permitting. Although the economy is ever shifting, the challenges of the past 24 months with construction costs

and interest rates, they being typically cyclical now can be projected as potentially trending to more advantageous levels.

When – Aspects of due diligence completed over the past 18 months including the cursory confirmation that the historical element may be redeveloped. This is based on its limitations in support of the historic district and prior to it becoming a liability. This stage therefore calls us to commence without further delay. Further to this, certain current state and Federal programs required to ensure feasibility of the project, call for a decisive approach to avoid prohibitive delays that can add months and years to the process of design, permitting and financing. These resources are major enticements necessary to bring critical private sector investment and they also bring substantial supports to leverage the limited resources of the Town of Hartford.

More specifically, determination of the qualified developer/purchaser is expected to be completed over the next several months in tandem with confirmation of public sector involvements. It is projected that Hotel Coolidge operations would remain in place for the next 18-24 months to avoid pre-mature interruptions of the day-to-day patterns in downtown while leading up to demolition, disposal and construction. It is anticipated that the construction phase would span a period of 15-20 months after ground breaking.

How – This project is one of major impact on downtown White River Junction. The elements as a mixed-use project with a zero lot-line condition demand a public-private collaboration which is yet to be fashioned. At this time the search for a qualified developer is in an advanced phase. The final selection is crucially tied to pre-development work which is now approaching final stages.

The project is complex and public elements such as on-site subterranean parking and state-of-the-art energy systems contribute to acceptance by the right developer. In other words, the project viability calls for a joint-venture aspect based on mutual benefits. From the public-sector viewpoint this project results in a quantum increase in the tax base with optimal impact on municipal and school district services. The development community must carry the burden of demonstrating how the public supports make the economics work sustainably for all as a performing asset benefitting both sides of ownership – public and private.

A qualified developer is critical to this project. The pursuit of the right choice has reached formative stages and will allow adequate time and exposure to the Town early on in the process. In presenting the property to the development community at this time I am anticipating introductions that begin with me and end with a mutually agreeable relationship between this new investment and the Town to ensure a well-managed project based on common goals.

The required public sector supports from state and Federal programs of which the Town can avail itself have been researched and shown to pertain to this project concept and will be congruent with established public policies.

Next Steps – The process of determining the permitting steps required is initially slated for the Hartford Planning Commission meeting of March 11, 2024. This will serve to further inform the developer candidate. From there the preliminary design concepts and analyses can be commenced.

The Things of the Spirit – This project is arguably the most impactful single initiative one since the Junction House was established on the site of what is now the Hotel Coolidge Block in 1849.

Because of the zero-lot line nature of this downtown project and because it would foresee the overlapping of municipal uses such as parking and green energy, this venture calls for a pro-active perspective on both sides; public and private. As with any endeavor there is risk and that risk must be borne by all those benefitting. The municipality can best mitigate the risk in support of the developer who will bring long term benefits of tax base, economic activity, civic pride, jobs and housing by intentionally adopting a collaborative posture from the very beginning. My intention is that beginning is tonight and that this perspective be sustained until such time as any conditions prove otherwise. All the thought given to this project leaves me optimistic both as a native, a citizen, a tax payer, and one striving to make the best possible business result come of it.

As our own Calvin Coolidge reminded in 1926, upon the occasion of the 150th anniversary of the Declaration of the Independence, the abounding prosperity of the United States did not create the Declaration, rather the Declaration resulted in the prosperity all as reflective of the Spirit of '76 and this inspired him to assert that "The Things of the Spirit Come First".

In making the declaration here tonight that I am hereby beginning the formal processes of the redevelopment of the Coolidge Block. I am committed to shepherding all the efforts required, including making the property available, in bringing the private and public players together.

I must respectfully request that in moving forward we proceed in a pro-active collaborative way as opposed to the more usual reactive dynamic. This must be done with other than an adversarial approach. In this regard, I submit we can trust that all the safeguards required are in place in the form of documented regulations, established processes, and the all-important market forces will play an appropriate part. Indeed, this is a business proposition for the Town as well and this project is a major support of the public investment already in place.

These points justify us adopting a collaborative disposition as we move forward from tonight. I look forward to your confirmation of this plea. I will make my efforts as transparent as possible and ask that you do the same. Further to all this I hope that you will seek me out individually to hear even more and learn as much as possible from my experience in this. I thank you for your consideration and invite your questions. And, of course, I look forward to your responses, both collectively and separately. In inviting those comments, I would remind us all that no response is a response to this historic proposition whose time has come. Let's do this!



HOTEL COOLIDGE

WHITE RIVER JUNCTION

HOTEL DENSITY STUDY

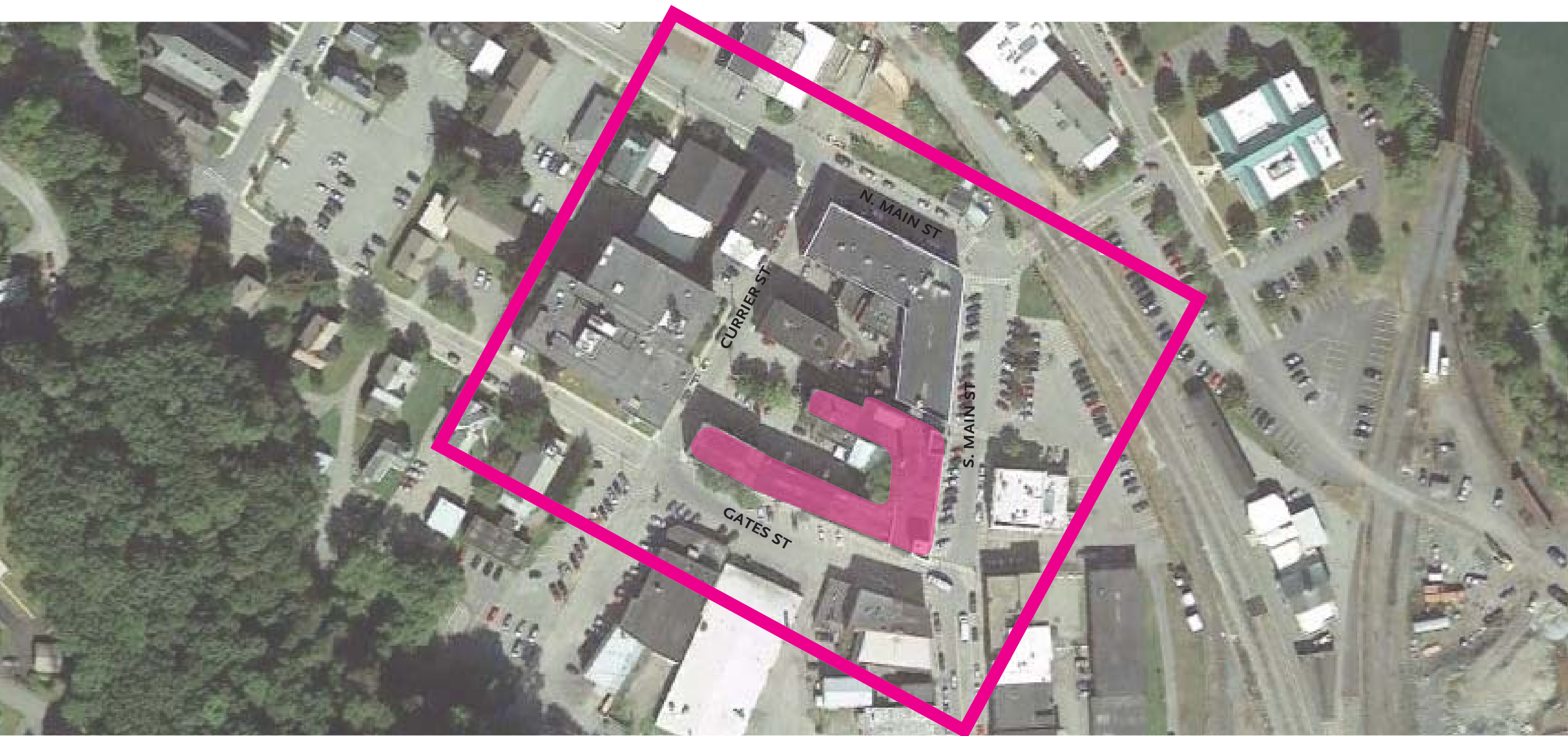
22 November 2017

4240

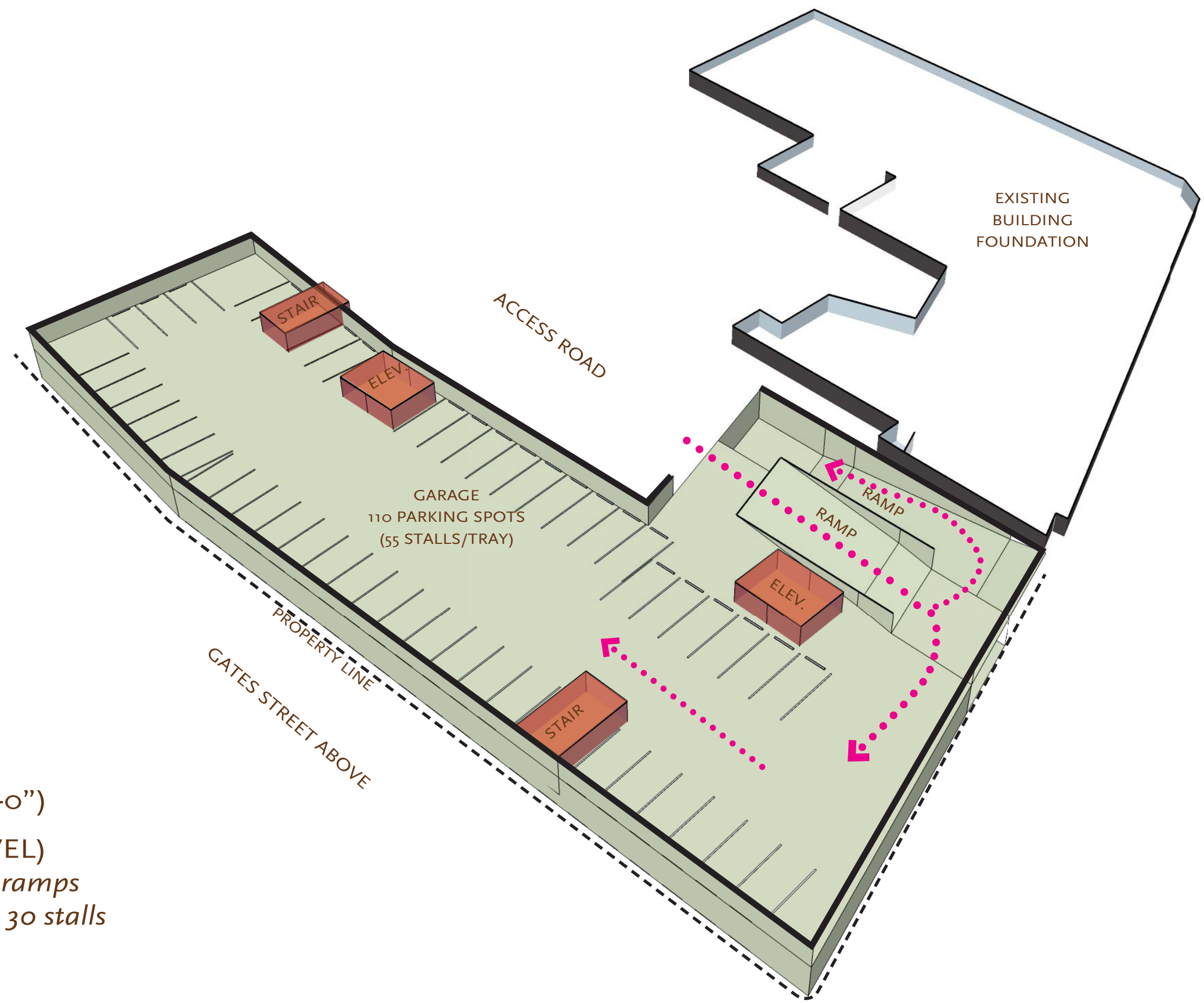
WHITE RIVER JUNCTION, VERMONT

43°38'52.8"N 72°19'08.25"W

HOTEL COOLIDGE - test-fit



HOTEL COOLIDGE
opt. 01 & 2



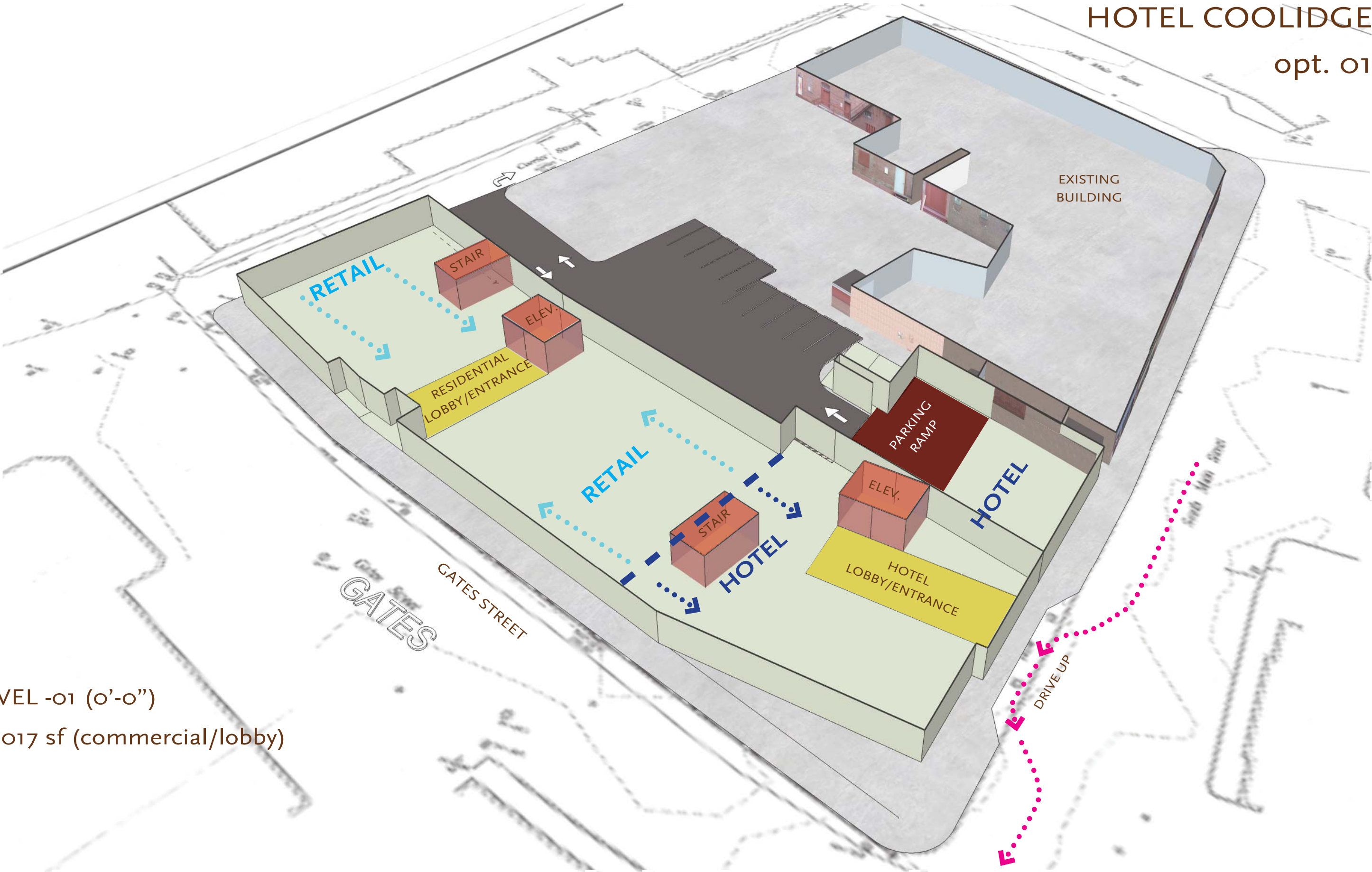
LEVEL -P1 & P2 (-10'-0")

21,680 (55 Stalls/LEVEL)

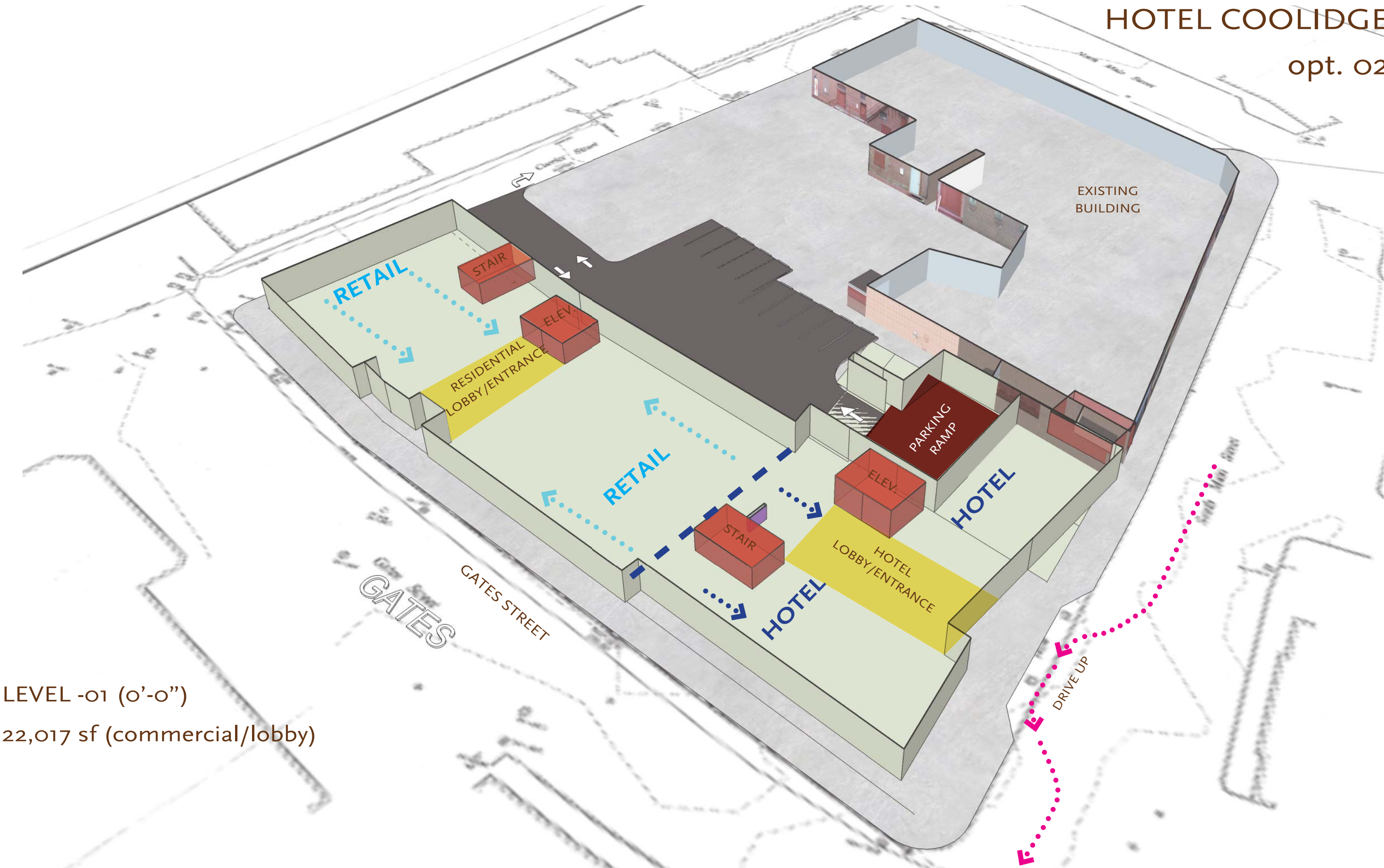
**Additional low slope ramps
provide additional +/- 30 stalls
per sloped tray*

HOTEL COOLIDGE
opt. 01

LEVEL -01 (o'-o")
22,017 sf (commercial/lobby)



HOTEL COOLIDGE
opt. 02



LEVEL -01 (o'-o'')
22,017 sf (commercial/lobby)

HOTEL COOLIDGE
opt. 01



LEVEL -02 (20'-0")
(13 residential units)
(17 hotel keys)

HOTEL COOLIDGE

opt. 02



HOTEL COOLIDGE

opt. 01



LEVEL -03 (30'-0")
(11 residential units)
(17 hotel keys)

HOTEL COOLIDGE
opt. 02



LEVEL -03 (30'-0")

(11 residential units)
(17 hotel keys)

HOTEL COOLIDGE

opt. 01



LEVEL -04 (42'-0")
(11 residential units)
(17 hotel keys)

HOTEL COOLIDGE

opt. 02



HOTEL COOLIDGE
opt. 01



LEVEL -05 (54'-0")
(6 residential units)
(17 hotel keys)

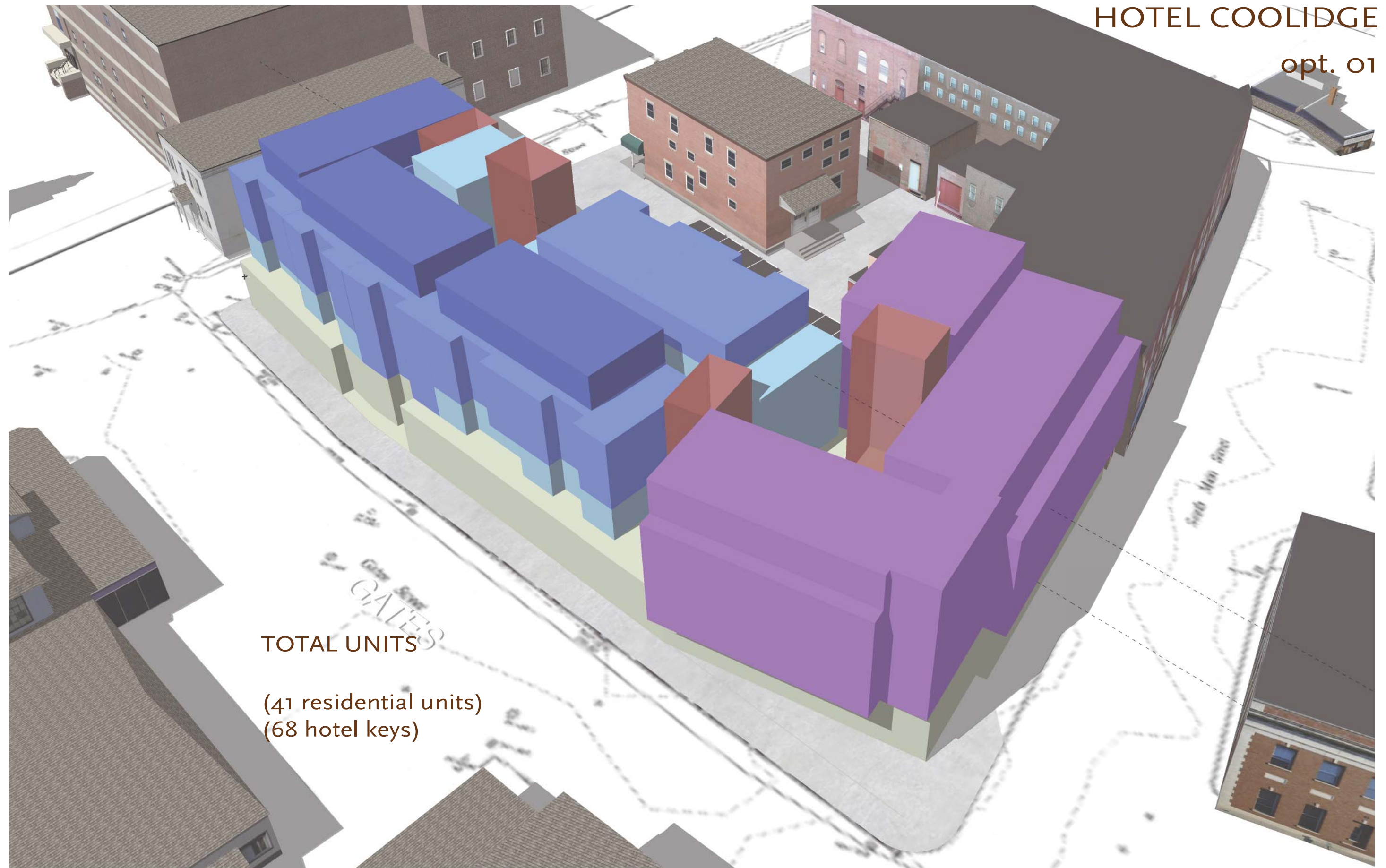
HOTEL COOLIDGE
opt. 02



LEVEL -05 (54'-0")
(6 residential units)
(16 hotel keys)

HOTEL COOLIDGE

opt. 01

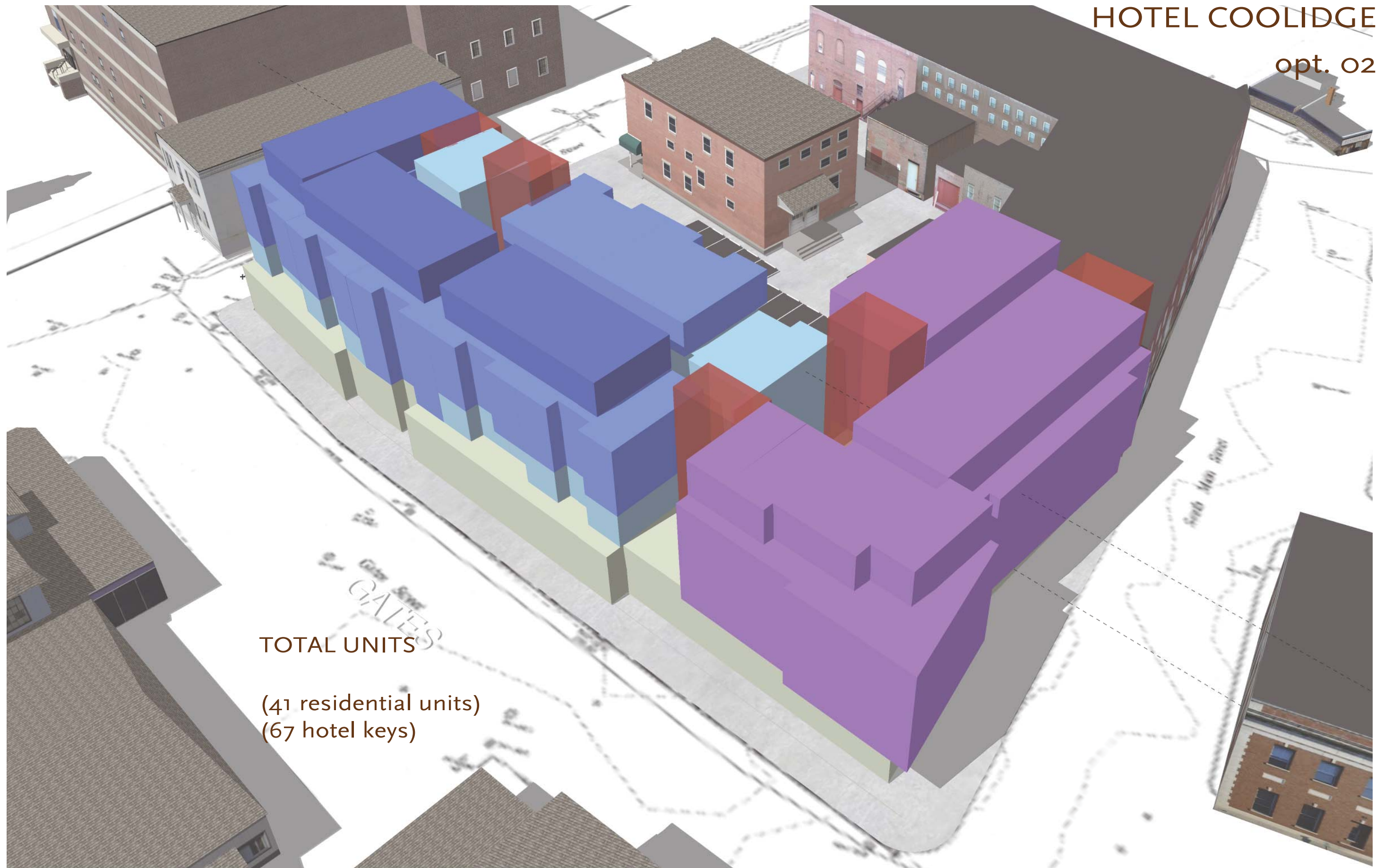


TOTAL UNITS

(41 residential units)
(68 hotel keys)

HOTEL COOLIDGE

opt. 02



TOTAL UNITS

(41 residential units)
(67 hotel keys)

4240



HOTEL COOLIDGE

opt. 02



opt. 1 - program summary:

level	ht.	condo units	hotel keys
o1	o'	o	o
o2	18'	13	17
o3	30'	11	17
o4	42'	11	17
o5	54'	6	17
total			
above grade	66'	41	68

opt. 2 - program summary:

level	ht	condo units	hotel keys
o1	o'	o	o
o2	18'	13	17
o3	30'	11	17
o4	42'	11	17
o5	54'	6	16
total			
above grade	66'	41	67

**DRAFT
Minutes
Hartford Planning Commission
February 5, 2024**

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

Present: Bruce Riddle, Vice Chair, Toby Dayman, Dillon Bianchi, John Heath, Colin Butler, Kim Souza, Selectboard Liaison, and Jo-Ann Ells, Zoning Administrator

Absent: Dylan Kreis

Administrative Matters

Bruce Riddle read the hybrid meeting script, took a roll call, explained the Hearing process, asked people to sign in, reviewed the Interested Party Rule, and administered the oath.

1. Public Comment

None.

2. Sketch Plan Review- Redevelopment of Brookside Nursing Home

Property owners Tim Sidore and Mike Davidson, and Jim Wasser of Studio Nexus were present.

Bruce Riddle stated that the Planning Commission would not be taking public comment at this time. He noted that the Commission had received a memo from Jo-Ann Ells dated January 24, 2024 regarding density.

Jim Wasser and Tim Sidore gave an overview of the proposed redevelopment. Of note was the intention to apply for an Affordable Housing Development and restrict access from Brookside Drive to emergency vehicles.

Tim Sidore commented that the redevelopment would result in less traffic than the nursing home.

John Heath suggested considering different sized units to create more diversity.

Toby Dayman suggested the applicant eliminate or reduce the parking spaces adjacent to Brookside Drive.

Colin Butler stated that he wants to see housing developed in town, but expressed concern with the size of the units.

Jo-Ann Ells noted that the applicant needs to submit information justifying their request for a density bonus. It was noted that a floor plan would be helpful.

Dillon Bianchi stated that he was concerned with the size of the units and noted that families have a difficult time finding housing.

Colin Butler stated that he'd like to see workforce housing provided.

Bruce Riddle stated that he would prefer fewer than 39 units and for some larger units to be included. He invited the applicant to come back to the Commission with additional information regarding how the project meets the criteria for a Planned Development and justification for a density bonus.

Colin Butler noted that the lack of public transit nearby was a concern.

Tim Sidore offered that they are looking at providing a shared car program.

Public Hearing

1. Application #23-23 by Black Rock Investment LLC (owner/applicant) for Site Development Plan Approval under section 260-45 of the Hartford Zoning Regulations for a 48 dwelling units in a Multi-Unit Building, proposed lot 45-0243-000, Sykes Mountain Avenue and Hickory Ridge, White River Junction, in a R1-M zoning district. (Continued from December 4, 2023)

2. Application #23-25 by Black Rock Investment LLC (owner/applicant) for Site Development Plan Approval under section 260-45 of the Hartford Zoning Regulations for 192 dwelling units in four Multi-Unit Buildings, proposed lot 45-0162-000, Sykes Mountain Avenue and Hickory Ridge, White River Junction, in a proposed Planned Development. (Continued from December 4, 2023)

The Planning Commission decided to review applications #23-23 and #23-25 at the same time.

Earle Simpson, Dennis Marquise, Kevin Worden, Paul Simon, Adam Wagnor, Evan Haugh, Irwin Perret Jr., and Irwin Perret Sr. were present.

Dennis Marquise noted that they have engaged a new surveyor and are working on the realignment of Sykes Mountain Avenue and Hickory Ridge including making Hickory Ridge a dead end.

Kevin Worden reviewed overall master plan sheet L1.0. He noted that the realignment of the road would require approval from the Selectboard.

Paul Simon reviewed the proposed landscaping and amenities on sheet L1.0. He noted that they are working on a revised photometric plan. He added that they are working on landscaping and urban forest maintenance plans which they would like to submit for approval before the first Certificate of Occupancy is requested. In response to concerns voiced from a neighbor about lighting, he assured the Commission that the lights would meet the requirements of section 260-31 E of the Zoning Regulations.

Dennis Marquise stated that they met with Advance Transit and a shelter would be provided at the bus stop. He added that with regard to energy efficiency, lighting fixtures will be LED, EV charging stations will be provided, and heat pumps and solar panels will be installed on the rooftops.

Dennis Marquise noted that the trail system outside of the immediate development will be open to the public during daylight hours.

Evan Haugh stated that three additional traffic counts had been done and were reflective of the previous count. He added that the volume of traffic anticipated to be generated is half of what would warrant a left turn lane.

The Commission reviewed the revised elevation plans including colors and rooftop apparatus.

Dennis Marquise noted that a maintenance shed would be provided in one of the proposed garage bays and the detention pond on the corner of Sykes and Hickory will be installed with the first building.

The Commission reviewed revised renderings of the project.

Dillon Bianchi requested that the applicant provide a rendering from Sykes Mountain Avenue looking directly at the project.

Colin Butler expressed his concern with the lack of affordable units in the larger project. He asked how it would be guaranteed that there would be affordable units in the smaller project. Jo-Ann Ells noted that this would be in the Findings of Fact/a condition of the permit.

Irwin Perret Jr. noted that an Act 250 jurisdictional opinion requires the construction of the affordable units by 2029.

Bruce Riddle asked where delivery vehicles such as UPS/Fed Ex would park. Kevin Worden pointed to an available area on the plan for the 192 units.

It was noted that a school bus stop needed to be reviewed.

The Commission asked that the applicant ensure that the buried propane tanks do not interfere with the open space east of the gazebo.

Bruce Riddle asked for public comment.

Noting concerns with someone falling down the steep embankment. Peter DeCoff requested that the applicant install a fence along the back of his property. He added that he has a well and wanted to know if construction would affect it. He commented that he appreciates and supports the project.

Colin Butler moved to continue the applications to April 15, 2024. Dillon Bianchi seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.

Administrative matters continued

3. Minutes

Colin Butler moved to approve the minutes of December 18, 2023. John Heath seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.

4. Administrative Permits

It was noted that an administrative permit was issued for the Upper Valley Haven to operate a temporary Food Shelf at 608 North Main Street. Colin Butler expressed concern that this use was not discussed when The Haven was before the Commission in December for their application for an Emergency Shelter.

5. Act 250 Applications

None.

6. Town Plan Steering Committee update

No report.

7. Regional Planning Commission update

No report.

8. Climate Action Plan update

No report.

9. Availability for the next Public Hearing

All Commissioners anticipated being available for the March 11, 2024 Hearing.

Adjournment

5. 02-05-24

At 7:55 p.m., Colin Butler moved to adjourn. Toby Dayman seconded, and the Hearing was adjourned.

Respectively Submitted,

Toby Dayman, Clerk

Planning Commission Terms

John Heath 03-22-24

Toby Dayman 06-28-24

Colin Butler 07-12-24

Bruce Riddle 02-07-25

Dillon Bianchi 09-05-25

Dylan Kreis 6-26-26

John Reid 02-05-27