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Jason M. Pezzullo, AICP
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CITY PLAN COMMISSION

Cranston City Hall
869 Park Avenue, Cranston, RI 02910

DRAFT MEETING MINUTES SPECIAL JOINT PUBLIC SITE VISIT OF THE CRANSTON CITY COUNCIL & CITY PLAN COMMISSION

Saturday, February 18th, 2023 – 9:00AM

AP 8, Lots 203 & 2739 – Knights Corner

▪ **CALL TO ORDER**

City Council President Jessica Marino called the City Council Meeting to order at 9:13 a.m. in the former church located on the Knights Corner site, 1390 Cranston Street.

The following Council members were in attendance for the meeting: President Jessica Marino, John Donegan, Richard Campopiano, Robert Ferri, Aniece Germain, Chris Paplauskas, Nicole Renzulli, and Lammis Vargas. Councilor Matthew Reilly was absent.

City Plan Commission Chairman Mike Smith called the City Plan Commission Meeting to order at 9:13 a.m. in the former church located on the Knights Corner site, 1390 Cranston Street.

The following City Plan Commissioners were in attendance: Chairman Mike Smith, Richard Bernardo, David Exter, Steven Frias, Kathleen Lanphear, and Thomas Zidelis. Commissioners Thomas Barbieri, Robert Coupe, and Lisa Mancini were absent.

The following Planning Department members were in attendance: Jason Pezzullo, Planning Director; Douglas McLean, Principal Planner; Gregory Guertin, Senior Planner; Alexander Berardo, Planning Technician; Amelia Lavalley, Planning Intern; and Angelina Coppola, Planning Intern.

Also attending: Assistant City Solicitor Stephen Marsella, Esq.

▪ **PRESENTATION**

The applicant team, comprised of Atty. Robert Murray (of Taft & McSally LLP); Jeremy Moses and Jotham Coe, applicants (of 333 Main Street LLC); Paul Bannon, registered P.E. and traffic consultant (of Beta Group); Jenna Shea, Project Manager (of DiPrete Engineering); and Ronald Stevenson, Project Architect (of South County Architecture & Design, Inc.), introduced the project to the City officials and members of the public in attendance.

Atty. Murray began by explaining the approval process for the project would be akin to the process that the Legion Bowl development went through one year before, noting that Knight's Corner would represent a Major

Land Development and would require a rezone and therefore would go before both the City Plan Commission and the City Council. He said the approval process and its associated public meetings would take some time, with groundbreaking not likely to occur before the end of 2023. He then invited Ms. Shea and Mr. Stevenson to speak to the details of the proposal as they currently stand.

Ms. Shea said the proposal consisted of redeveloping the existing church building on the northern (Cranston Street) end of the site into a restaurant, with four multifamily residential buildings and associated amenities (such as a dog park, pickleball court, fire pits, and walking paths) to be located south of the church, more toward the interior of the site. Mr. Stevenson said the residential buildings would each be five stories tall, between 65-70 feet in height, with an architectural design intended to break up their visual massing. Three of the four buildings would have ground-floor parking, while the ground floor of the fourth building would have various recreational amenities and gathering spaces for residents. Residential units would range from studio to three-bedroom in size; there would be 39 units per building for a total of 156 on the site.

▪ **Q&A SESSION**

The applicant team then opened the meeting to questions and comments, which generally centered around four major topics: the project's Residential Component, Environmental Remediation, Traffic and Circulation, and Impacts to City Services.

Residential Component

Councilor Donegan asked if there would be an affordable component to the project and whether the applicants intended to pursue any tax stabilization agreements or historic tax credits to finance the project. Atty. Murray said the applicants were proposing to designate 15% of the units as affordable and said they weren't currently pursuing any TSAs and were unsure if the church qualified as an eligible historic structure.

Councilor Vargas asked whether the units would be condominiums or apartments; Atty. Murray confirmed they would be apartments.

Councilor Renzulli asked if the applicants had any estimate of the total number of residents the site could accommodate, observing that the adjacent Cranston Print Works redevelopment would also constitute a notable increase in residents in the area. Atty. Murray said he did not know the total number of residents but reiterated that it would be 156 units at the Knights Corner site, while Cranston Print Works is proposing another 129 residential units of its own.

Environmental Remediation

Councilor Germain asked what steps the applicants were taking to ensure the site was remediated and would be safe for children, referencing an earlier comment from Atty. Murray, who said that the site had historically been used as a dumping ground for ash generated by the Cranston Print Works complex. Ms. Shea said the entire site has been reviewed as the subject of a Phase II environmental study and that contaminants are known and a remediation plan will probably include a mix of soil removal and capping (in the case of the parking areas). Mr. Moses confirmed the applicants have budgeted for remediation in the overall project cost.

One member of the public raised concerns over arsenic levels on site, but several members of the applicant team confirmed that the project would not receive RIDEM approval unless it met their standards, and the findings of the Phase II study indicated the site is not so contaminated as to preclude residential use once remediation efforts are undertaken. Ms. Shea added that RIDEM's purview would extend to other environmental considerations as well, such as protecting the wetland area in the southeastern portion of the site and improving runoff water quality conditions. The applicants otherwise intend to minimize grading to the extent possible to limit disturbances to the soil and drainage patterns.

Councilor Vargas asked if the applicants intended to incorporate any green building design or construction techniques into the project, particularly the new residential buildings. Mr. Coe said they had considered geothermal heat as a source of energy, but the scale of the project might be too large. He added that they fully intend to incorporate solar panels into the roof design and expect it will noticeably reduce residents' utility costs.

Traffic and Circulation

Councilor Ferri asked if the applicants would be able to demonstrate the proposal would not worsen the traffic situation, pointing to current issues at the nearby intersection of Cranston Street and Dyer Avenue and the prospect of Cranston Print Works bringing a similar number of new residential units to the area. Atty. Murray said Mr. Bannon has begun to work on a traffic study and said Director Pezzullo has already requested the applicant have its traffic study peer-reviewed. He added that Cranston Print Works would be accounted for in their traffic estimates. Mayor Ken Hopkins, who was also in attendance for the meeting, said he felt some portion of the current traffic levels at that intersection was attributable to detours prompted by the construction of Knightsville Park. Ms. Shea and Mr. Stevenson noted that one of the four existing curb cuts would be eliminated to avoid potential conflicts with the nearby fire station, leaving the site with two access points onto Cranston Street and one onto Dyer Avenue.

Commissioner Frias asked the applicants to review whether their current proposal to build 1.25 parking spaces per unit would be workable. He said he believes that calculation is workable for studio and one-bedroom apartments but is not sure they should assume two- and three-bedroom apartments will be adequately served. He said the site's location along a RIPTA bus route may also help alleviate the pressure for parking. A member of the public said he felt 2 parking spaces per unit would be more than needed, now that more people are working from home and anticipating that this project and the Cranston Print Works redevelopment would improve the walkability of the area. Another member of the public encouraged the applicants to ensure the project will interface well with RIPTA's bus service. Mr. Stevenson added that covered bike parking will be provided in the ground-floor parking areas.

Mr. McLean said he felt the project's parking-related impacts would generally be contained within the site and were unlikely to generate noticeable on-street parking issues. He then asked if the applicants were looking at the 1.25 parking spaces per unit figure as a parking minimum and if they might build less parking up-front and only expand if needed. Mr. Stevenson acknowledged that there is sufficient space on site to expand parking, but confirmed the applicants' preference would be to expand only if the need is demonstrated, as it would come at the expense of landscaping and outdoor recreational amenity space. Ms. Shea said the restaurant would have valet parking, which could make double-stacking a viable option to economize on space for restaurant-related parking. She also said the restaurant will only be open at night.

Impacts to City Services

Commissioner Frias asked the applicants to prepare a Fiscal Impact Statement and submit it with their application; Atty. Murray confirmed they would.

Councilor Renzulli asked where future residents' children would attend school. Atty. Murray said he believed the project falls within the territory of Arlington Elementary School, Western Hills Middle School, and Cranston West High School. Council President Marino observed that it cannot be known with certainty that all children who live in the Knights Corner development will attend public schools, so the project's projected impact on the City's school system might well be higher than its actual impact.

Commission Chairman Smith asked if the applicants had any estimates on the project's economic impact; Atty. Murray said they would be accounted for in the fuller Fiscal Impact Statement, but the project itself represents a roughly \$30 million investment. Atty. Murray also said they hoped to have projections on the number of construction jobs the project would create and confirmed the project would rely on public water and sewer.

▪ ADJOURNMENT

Council President Jesica Marino asked for a motion to adjourn the meeting. Upon motion made by Councilor Vargas, and seconded by Councilor Renzulli, the City Council voted unanimously (8-0) to adjourn the meeting at 10:03 a.m.

Commission Chairman Mike Smith asked for a motion to adjourn the meeting. Upon motion made by Commissioner Frias, and seconded by Commissioner Bernardo, the City Plan Commission voted unanimously (6-0) to adjourn the meeting at 10:03 a.m.