

Kenneth J. Hopkins
Mayor

Michael E. Smith
President

Jason M. Pezzullo, AICP
Planning Director



Ken Mason, P.E.
Robert Strom
Steven Frias
Kathleen Lanphear
Ann Marie Maccarone
Frank Ritz
James Donahue
Robert Coupe

CITY PLAN COMMISSION
Cranston City Hall
869 Park Avenue, Cranston, RI 02910

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

Saturday, February 19th, 2022 – 9:30AM

655 & 661 Park Avenue – Legion Bowl & Billiards / Pub on Park

▪ **CALL TO ORDER**

City Council President Chris Paplauskas called the joint City Council—City Plan Commission Meeting to order at 9:31 a.m. at Legion Bowl & Billiards, 661 Park Avenue.

City Plan Commission Chairman Mike Smith called the joint City Council—City Plan Commission Meeting to order at 9:31 a.m. at Legion Bowl & Billiards, 661 Park Avenue.

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

The following City Plan Commissioners were in attendance: Chairman Mike Smith, Ann Marie Maccarone, Kathleen Lanphear, Steven Frias, James Donahue, and Frank Ritz. Commissioners Ken Mason, Robert Strom, and Robert Coupe were absent.

The following Planning Department members were in attendance: Jason M. Pezzullo, AICP, Planning Director; Douglas McLean, AICP, Principal Planner; Joshua Berry, AICP, Senior Planner; and Alexander Berardo, Planning Technician.

▪ **PRESENTATION**

The applicant team, comprised of Atty. John DiBona; Marshall D'Ambrosio, owner/applicant; Eric Prive, registered P.E. with DiPrete Engineering; Ed Pimentel, AICP planning expert; and Paul Bannon, registered P.E. and traffic consultant, introduced the project to the City officials and members of the public in attendance.

Mr. Prive began by stating the property is a 2-acre parcel which would host a proposed 84,000 ft² mixed-use building. Although the applicant is still working through the concept for the property, Mr. Prive said they envision 70-80 residential units, primarily one-bedroom with perhaps a dozen two-bedroom units, and retail

space on the ground floor facing Park Avenue. Access would be provided from Doric Street, Park Avenue, and N. Clarendon Street. He added that the site is currently zoned C-3 but will need a special zone change per the Comprehensive Plan.

Atty. DiBona reminded those in attendance that no votes would be taken during this meeting on the proposal, as the purpose of the meeting was to introduce the basic concept. Mr. D'Ambrosio added that all options are on the table at this point and that he intended to work closely with the City to develop a quality project.

▪ **Q&A SESSION**

The applicant team then opened the meeting to public comments. The major topics of discussion concerned the housing, traffic, and parking components of the project, with a number of miscellaneous questions raised as well. A summary of the questions and responses is provided below.

HOUSING

- Would the project include Section Eight housing?
 - Mr. D'Ambrosio said there had been no discussion of that and that it was not proposed at this time.
- Does the applicant have a target residential clientele in mind (i.e. seniors)?
 - Mr. D'Ambrosio said he was working with Planning staff to get a sense of where the demand and need is for housing among the community's demographics but did not yet have a specific clientele to market the units to.
- What range of monthly rental prices would be charged?
 - Mr. D'Ambrosio said they average between \$1,300 and \$1,600 per month, but he wouldn't know what the rental prices would be for his project until two or three years from now, since rent prices are driven by market and construction costs.
- Would a portion of the units be dedicated as affordable housing?
 - Mr. Pimentel said that affordable housing was on the table and drew a distinction between the term "affordable," which meant restricted at a certain rental price, and "Section Eight." He further clarified that the project would not be submitted as a comprehensive permit and that there would be no public funding for the project – it would be a private development. Mr. D'Ambrosio said he was supportive of the City's efforts to increase affordable housing and suggested between 10-15% of the units could be designated affordable.
- How and why did the applicant decide on roughly 80 housing units for the property?
 - Mr. D'Ambrosio said the number is derived by working backwards from the size of the site. When the size of the site (factoring in setbacks) is known, the architect or developer can decide how many units can be built on each floor and square that number with other factors, including whether there is enough remaining space on-site for parking to support the units.

TRAFFIC

- Is the applicant coordinating with RIPTA to ensure bus service to the site?
 - Mr. Bannon said they are factoring public transit into their traffic analysis and are aware of RIPTA's long-term goal to make Park Avenue into a true east-west transit corridor through revisions to their system map and service patterns.
- Will the project exacerbate existing traffic issues in the neighborhood?
 - Mr. Bannon spoke to multiple attendees' concerns that the influx of residents and business patrons that this project could worsen existing traffic problems, which ranged from people running stop signs to increased congestion. Speaking to the stop sign issue, Mr. Bannon said deterrents, such as speed bumps, could be added. Mayor Hopkins said congestion in the area has been worsened by Providence's conversion of F.C. Greene Memorial Blvd in Roger Williams Park into a one-way street and Amtrak's closure of the bridge carrying Park Avenue

over the railroad tracks. He said Providence is uninterested in reversing its changes to the road network in Roger William Park, but he had been working with Rhode Island's congressional delegation to pressure Amtrak to expedite the bridge repairs, which are now projected to be completed in April.

- Would the access into the parking lot from N. Clarendon Street effectively create an extension of the street to Park Avenue?
 - Mr. Bannon said the current plans would allow for people to pass through the parking lot from N. Clarendon Street to Park Avenue, but that it would not be a true street. Several residents of N. Clarendon said they did not want to see the parking lot be used as a cut-through; Mr. Prive said the applicant team will limit access via N. Clarendon if that is the neighbors' preference and suggested one solution could be to put up a gate to limit access to emergency vehicles.

PARKING

- Can the applicant be sure enough parking will be provided?
 - Mr. D'Ambrosio said yes. He said the number of parking spaces would be "backed into" from the square footage available on the site for parking and would be factored into and alongside the demands imposed by the number of residential units the site will support.
- Is a variance required for the amount of parking the applicant is proposing?
 - Mr. Pimentel said that a variance would be needed if the property were being developed as a C-3 zone, but because it will be done as a special zone, the parking required will simply be specified to what the applicant team deems appropriate
- Had the applicant considered incorporating underground parking into the site design?
 - Mr. D'Ambrosio said he had looked into underground parking early on in the process but said it is very expensive to construct, almost to the point of being cost prohibitive. He added that since construction costs are passed onto the tenants and reflected in their monthly rental charges, he knew that he couldn't recoup those costs while charging market-rate rents and dedicating a portion to be affordable housing, so he decided to do surface parking only.
- Why is the applicant confident that the shared parking concept will work in practice?
 - Mr. Pimentel said that the City's parking standards as expressed in the zoning code (2 spaces per unit) are archaic because they date from a time in which calculations were based off of housing units as opposed to bedrooms. He gave the example of a single-family home with four drivers being treated as a single unit to illustrate the practical limitations of the standards. He added that contemporary "best practices" in the field of planning recommend that adjacent, complementary uses share parking spaces wherever possible. He said that the residential demand on parking is higher at night whereas the commercial demand is higher during the day (at which point the residents have vacated their spaces to drive to work). He said that this aspect will continue to be reviewed so the sharing can be maximized. Mr. Bannon concurred, reiterating that planning for shared parking is standard practice now.

MISCELLANEOUS

- What impact will this project have on the City's utilities?
 - Mr. Prive said utility impacts (i.e. water, sewer) will be studied in a later stage, but he said even at this conceptual stage it is clear the project will bring improvements to drainage and stormwater management by virtue of its increased percentage of pervious (landscaped) surface area.
- Are any of the City's ARPA funds being spent on project?
 - Mr. D'Ambrosio said the project is a private development so it would not be funded with ARPA funds or any other public sources. He does intend to receive and incorporate public input by working closely with Planning staff and the City Council throughout the development process.
- Would the applicant need to post bond to complete the project within a given timeframe?

- Mr. Pezzullo said the bond posting requirement generally applies only to public projects, so he imagined it would not be required for this development.
- Will green building techniques be employed in the construction of the project?
 - Mr. D'Ambrosio said construction is still off in the distance, but he had begun to think about how and where green design techniques might come into play.
- Will the project be designed to be walkable and accommodating to pedestrians?
 - Mr. Bannon said the site design was taking pedestrians into account, particularly on the Park Street side of the property, to reinforce Park Avenue not only as a transit corridor but also as a pedestrian corridor. Annette Bourne of HousingWorksRI spoke positively of the applicant's attention to walkability and said that this aspect of the project's design can raise property values in the area.
- Will there be access to the commercial unit(s) on Park Avenue from the rear parking area?
 - The applicant team said the idea was worth further review and decided to study it.
- How will attendees be kept apprised of future public meetings for the project? Will there be any special accommodations made for non-English speakers in the neighborhood?
 - Mr. Pezzullo said abutters living within a 400-foot radius would automatically receive notice in the mail when future meetings are to be held (for City Council ordinance meetings), while interested individuals outside the 400-foot radius can find notices on the City's website. He also said the City would be looking into whether the Rhode Island Secretary of State's online meeting portal could automatically translate documents uploaded to it.
- Will future meetings be held on Zoom? Will there be accommodations for those without internet access?
 - Mr. Paplauskas said the City Council expects to return to in-person meetings in March, but there would be a call-in option via telephone as well.

Towards the end of the Q&A session, Mayor Hopkins briefly addressed the attendees and discussed the recent infrastructure investments the City has made in Eastern Cranston. He expressed his interest in the project and saw it as one of several exciting projects that could enhance Park Street's vitality out to and beyond Rolfe Square.

▪ **ADJOURNMENT**

Council President Chris Paplauskas asked for a motion to adjourn the meeting. Upon motion made by Councilor Ferri, and seconded by Councilor Vargas, the City Council voted unanimously to adjourn the meeting at 10:45 a.m.

Plan Commission Chairman Mike Smith asked for a motion to adjourn the meeting. Upon motion made by Commissioner Lanphear, and seconded by Commission Donahue, the City Plan Commission voted unanimously to adjourn the meeting at 10:45 a.m.