

PLANNING REPORT ON:
MAJOR ALTERATION TO THIS EXISTING MPD:
MIXED USE PLANNED DISTRICT
CITY OF CRANSTON, RI –
ZONING ORDINANCE

CRANSTON CROSSING

PREPARED FOR:
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NOVEMBER 2020

PURPOSE OF REPORT ~

The purpose of this report is to complete a Planning Report to the City of Cranston with regard to the proposed Major Alteration to Existing MPD by Coastal Partners, LLC. This report includes a review of the City's Comprehensive Community Plan, and Zoning Ordinance. In addition, this report provides a recognition and consideration of the applicable purposes of the Zoning Ordinance. It is the express purpose of this Planning Report to provide a Summary and Conclusions with respect to the consistency with the Comprehensive Community Plan and Zoning Ordinance Purpose Statements.

PROJECT SUMMARY ~ (Source: Revised Project Narrative)

Description:

The Cranston Crossing project (Project) is a commercial redevelopment of properties contained within an existing MPD Mixed Use Planned District (MPD) situated at 1000 New London Avenue, in the southeastern portion of the City. The 55-acre property is bounded by New London Avenue (Route 2) to the west, Howard Avenue to the north, RI State land and facilities (Pastore Center) to the east, and residential properties to the south.

The lots are identified by the City of Cranston Tax Assessor's as Map 15-1, Lots 8 and 9.

The current use of the site is as a commercial recreation facility comprised of mini golf, a driving range, clubhouse, parking and other accessory components, which is owned and operated by Mulligan's Island LLC.

Project Components:

- The primary commercial element of Cranston Crossing is a new large-scale retail facility (wholesale club) proposed on the central portion of the property. This portion of the redevelopment also includes a fueling station.
- Additional smaller scale commercial elements are proposed to be added north and south of that primary user. Development to the north will consist of two undetermined commercial/retail/restaurant uses along the eastern side of New London Avenue (Route 2), as well as a fast-food establishment with drive thru service on the southeast corner of the intersection of New London Ave and Howard Avenue.
- Another smaller scale commercial zone is also proposed on the south end of the Project to transition to adjacent city owned properties.

- A major component of the Project is the preservation of Parcel 4 which will gifted (deeded) to the City of Cranston for open space and public recreational use as specified on the Final Overall District Plan (FODP). Further, an additional 3.28 acres of open space is designated on Parcel 1.
- Two (2) communications towers also exist on the site, which will remain. As depicted on the FODP, one (1) such tower will be relocated to Parcel 5, and one (1) such tower will remain in its current location.
- To accommodate the Cranston Crossing redevelopment, a new 3-way signalized intersection is proposed along New London Ave opposite Brayton Avenue, such intersection being designed so as to prevent traffic leaving the Project to access Brayton Avenue (i.e. such traffic must proceed either north or south on New London Avenue).
- The Applicant, Coastal Partners, LLC., seeks a major alteration to this existing MPD in order to accommodate the new commercial development, and open space and public recreational use, of the Project within the district

DESCRIPTION OF ZONING DISTRICTS ~

The following Zoning District descriptions are appropriate to this application:

CURRENT ZONE DISTRICT~

MPD	Mixed Use Planned Development - Commercial Recreation Facility
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"Mixed use planned district (MPD)" means a development undertaken by a single owner or group of owners and planned as a single entity, within which uses shall be multiple in nature and may include uses not otherwise permitted within the same zoning district. The mix and orientation of these uses are required to be compatible within the proposed development and also in relationship to the surrounding area.

Mulligan's Island currently lists ten separate but certainly related uses on the property as a MPD in Cranston. They include:

Driving Range	Volleyball
Spargo Golf	Kiddie Land Amusement Park
Mini-golf	Par 3 golf
Batting Cages	Pitch & Putt
Party Area	Tiki Hut Restaurant

All of these uses, while complimentary to each other at the Mulligan's Island facility, most if not all could be stand alone uses, on their own separate sites located on appropriately zoned parcels. It is common for golf courses to offer driving ranges, a restaurant, pro golf services etc. Mulligan's Island offers many additional activities and uses of their property than normally seen at typical golf course facilities. By the City's definition above, Mulligan's Island is a Mixed-Use Development, and was approved as such.

PROPOSED ZONE DISTRICTS ~

MPD	Mixed Use Planned Development – Major Alteration to Existing MPD
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"Mixed use planned district (MPD)" means a development undertaken by a single owner or group of owners and planned as a single entity, within which uses shall be multiple in nature and may include uses not otherwise permitted within the same zoning district. The mix and orientation of these uses are required to be compatible within the proposed development and also in relationship to the surrounding area.

Cranston Crossing lists the following uses of their project as a Mixed-Use Development:

- New large-scale retail facility (wholesale club)
- Three (3) undetermined commercial/retail/restaurant uses
- Another smaller scale commercial zone, no specific use designated
- Parcel 4 which will gifted (deeded) to the City of Cranston for open space and public recreational use
- An additional 3.28 acres of open space is designated on Parcel 1.
- Two (2) communications towers

Opinion: While the list of proposed uses differs from the present Mixed-Use Development at Mulligan's Island, Cranston Crossing does match the definition provided in the Zoning Ordinance for an MPD. Cranston Crossing is a single owner or group of owners, Coastal Partners, LLC, uses are multiple in nature and are not currently permitted in the existing MPD, the design and mix of use within the development are compatible with each other, and the applicant has made a very strong effort to provide buffering and open space designations and a large dedication of open space to protect the surrounding areas.

From a historical point of view, research regarding this site indicated a previously approved large-scale project prior to the Mulligan's Island project approval. Those initial plans for this site included a large-scale, 150,000 square foot, indoor sports complex with 750 parking spaces. This project obviously was not constructed, but points out the process of the Cranston MPD which allows for alterations over time for these sites within the City. The proposed Cranston Crossing project has similarities to this early project proposal for this site. Also, worth noting, the Comprehensive Plan does not show any portion of this project site as Open Space or permanent buffer area. Under the applicant's proposal, a significant portion of the property will be dedicated as permanent open space for City resident's use, 18 plus acres, with another 3 plus acres set aside as an open space buffer area. The proposed open space to developed land ratio is 40% open space, 60% developed land.

One note, while a developed golf course, driving range, etc. have a "green" appearance, and have no structures on them, they are not open space available for public use or recreation. Those uses are "developed" commercial recreation sites. Unless a fee is paid for their use, access is not provided to the general public or City residents as a matter of right.

Mixed Use Development has become a very popular and more common method for allowing communities flexibility to large scale land developers and to benefit the community with a varied mixture of uses that are proven to ensure the best chance for success in today's markets across the state and country. It has been shown that a mixture of uses on a single coordinated and well-planned site draws more people to a single location providing a much better opportunity for success in the competitive marketplace. Mixed Use Development ordinances vary widely in their components, minimum requirements, permitted uses, design requirements, landscaping, parking, etc. Most require a minimum amount of land acreage, some require a residential component, some have percentage minimums and maximums on particular uses.

The point is, Mixed Use developments have many different requirements and appearances throughout the state and country. The MPD in Cranston does have minimum site requirements, does allow for a mixture of uses, including residential, but does not require residential nor have a minimum or maximum for residential use. The Cranston ordinance allows the applicant to be creative and propose a MPD that they believe will be a successful mix of uses.

To further bolster this opinion on the applicability of the MPD for the proposed Cranston Crossing Project, examination of the specific Purpose Statement for Planned Districts highlights this compliance with the ordinance:

7.96.010 - Purpose.

Planned districts are intended to be established from time to time by amendments to this chapter consisting of appropriate changes in the boundaries of districts established by this chapter in such a manner as best to fit the general pattern of land use established by this chapter for the development of the city and to further the purposes set forth in Chapter 17.04.

Specifically, planned districts are intended to promote flexibility in site and building design and to facilitate a more economic arrangement of buildings, circulation systems, utilities and landscaping within a unified tract of land. This provision allows for the development of planned single use or multiple use projects and a redevelopment option in previously built areas of the city or as an option to standard subdivision development on unbuilt unified tracts of land.

Calling attention to the provisions below (bold and underlined added for emphasis), Cranston Crossing clearly meets the overall purposes set forth in the ordinance above:

Specifically, planned districts are intended to **promote flexibility in site and building design** and to facilitate a more economic arrangement of buildings, circulation systems, utilities and landscaping within a unified tract of land.

And,

This provision allows for the **development of planned single use or multiple use projects and a redevelopment option in previously built areas of the city** or as an option to standard subdivision development on unbuilt unified tracts of land.

CONSISTENCY AND COMPLIANCE WITH THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

The following recommendations are taken from the Comprehensive Community Plan and are deemed applicable and germane to the proposed Major Alteration to Existing MPD requested by Coastal Partners, LLC:

LAND USE ELEMENT ~

LUG-2 Promote mixed use (commercial, industrial, and residential) development that will:

- Focus on a few key redevelopment sites;
- Improve the quality of new development;
- Incorporate ‘smart growth’ principles.

Opinion: This Goal, while general in nature, shows the importance of mixed uses in the community to balance development in these sectors. Commercial and industrial uses generate far more net revenue than most residential uses. In fact, it is that balance that helps keep tax rates more stable over time. The goal also talks about redevelopment of existing sites. In the Cranston ordinance, redevelopment of an existing MPD is one method of accomplishing this goal.

LUP-2.6 Implement policies that protect residential neighborhoods from commercial encroachment through regulation, appropriate buffers, development design standards, traffic planning, and site plan review

Opinion: Equally important to goal #2 above, is designing new projects to provide protection from any nearby residential uses which includes appropriate buffers, design standards and detailed site plan review. Cranston Crossing will provide large buffer areas to nearby residential uses mostly unseen in projects around the City, or State for that matter. Certainly, the proposed Cranston Crossing projects presents a significant and effective buffer between the residential properties and the existing State institutional facilities.

Part III. Strategies and Actions

Land Use Principles

During the comprehensive planning process, it was determined that there were common themes among many of the ideas, suggestions, and issues regarding land use that also affected the other elements. These themes support the following land use principles and provide a basis for actions proposed in this plan. (Applicable to the applicant)

Principle 1: Direct future commercial, industrial and mixed-use development with two approaches:

- Adopt smart growth principles for new development that maintain the best qualities of Cranston;
- Focus efforts on a few key redevelopment sites by encouraging smart growth to increase the value and job potential from each site and increase the mix and density of uses.

Opinion: The Cranston Crossing project was designed with this Principle in mind. As a mixed-use development, this project encourages growth that will increase value in the City, provide many permanent new jobs, and a density that is reasonable given the overall size of the development parcel, 55 acres. The Cranston Crossing project is projected to generate 400-500 good paying permanent jobs, another 300-350 good paying construction jobs, 21.3 acres of open space, and a projected net increase in tax revenue of \$725,000 per year.

Principle 4: Protect and stabilize existing residential neighborhoods by basing land use decisions on neighborhood needs and quality of life.

Opinion: The Major Alteration to the existing MPD as proposed is a land use decision ultimately by the City Council. They will have to balance the needs of its residential neighborhoods with the goal of increasing tax base, revenue and jobs without impacting the quality of life. The Cranston Crossing Project has been carefully designed over many months of planning and discussion with City Staff to achieve this important Principle.

Future Land Use Map.

The Future Land Use Map shows the proposed future land use citywide. There are several new plan components depicted on this map that were not shown on the 1992 Future Land Use Plan. These changes include:

Mixed-Use Planned Development. The parcels identified as MPD are those areas that have been or are currently being developed through the MPD zoning ordinance. These sites include Chapel View, Johnson & Wales, and Mulligan's Island Golf Center.

Opinion: The Future Land Use Plan (FLUM) specifically identifies the site, present day Mulligan's Island, as an MPD. Given the nature of Cranston's Zoning Ordinance, and the requirement to proceed through an alteration of an existing MPD, the applicant is proceeding in the manner envisioned by the ordinance. As a matter of fact, Chapel View has gone through several recent alterations or modifications to their MPD. So, this process is anticipated over time as business trends change. It allows the City and a mixed-use property to adapt or change over time, with proper City scrutiny. Cranston Crossing is very good example of this process and is in accordance with the FLUM.

Economic Development Element ~

As Cranston moves forward, it still needs to address the traditional economic development goals:

- Increase the tax base with new private investment in commercial and industrial properties;
- Promote emerging industries to maintain local shares of jobs and businesses;
- Export new goods and services to regional populations and attract outside money in support of economic development; and
- Create new and better jobs.

Opinion: These goals are typically found in most Comprehensive Plans. The key phrases are: Increase Tax Base, attract outside money for economic development, and create new jobs.

Part II. Current Conditions and Issues

Potential Development Opportunities

Redevelopment versus New Development

Urban locations in Central and Eastern Cranston (near Garden City Center, Rolfe Square, Interstates 95 and 295) offer potential opportunities for relatively high-end projects focusing on retail, office, and mixed-use development projects. In competing for capital, however, these will face cost disadvantages as compared to new developments on vacant land in western Cranston.

Opinion: The Cranston Crossing site is located in this urban area of the City, sandwiched between I-95, I-295 and Route 37. It certainly offers an opportunity for a high-end project that includes retail and mixed commercial uses, while maintaining 21.3 acres of open space. A real positive aspect is that this site is already developed and is not utilizing a vacant property in the City.

Part III. Strategies and Actions

Target Large-Scale Redevelopment

In seeking to capitalize on potential development opportunities such as those described above, the developers required for such opportunities will target large-scale, strategically situated sites (or otherwise notable properties such as historic buildings) where they can provide visibility, create high-quality environments, generate market synergies, and maximize the efficiency of their investments. Such locations would require the redevelopment of sites situated close to I-95 or I-295.

Opinion: Certainly, Cranston Crossing can be described as a large-scale, strategically located site, with great visibility, and the mixed-use nature maximizes the efficiency of the applicant's very large investment in the City. As stated in this Strategy, this is a location which will be redeveloped from the present-day use of Mulligan's Island, and is situated close to both I-95 and I-295.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

GOALS (EDG) AND POLICIES (EDP) Rhode Island Comprehensive Planning and Land Use Regulation Act Goal: To promote an economic climate which increases quality job opportunities and overall economic well-being of each municipality and the state.

EDG-1A Preserve and increase employment opportunities for Cranston residents.

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EDG-1A Preserve and increase employment opportunities for Cranston residents.

EDG-2 Attract capital into the Cranston area and expand the City's economic base.

EDP-2.1 Encourage the location and expansion of businesses with wide regional, national or international markets.

EDG-3 Add to the City's taxable property base by constructing industrial and commercial structures which are properly designed and sited in keeping with environmental, planning and design considerations.

EDP-5 Ensure that new and expanded commercial development along major arterials exhibits a high standard of design quality and is compatible with existing roadway functions and adjacent residential neighborhoods.

EDP-6.3 Promote large-scale, smart growth redevelopment opportunities at strategic locations to accommodate mixed-use, transit-oriented development. Properties along I-95 in the Wellington/Elmwood industrial area offer the best opportunities.

EDP-6.4 Encourage redevelopment opportunities at locations near Garden City Center, Rolfe Square, Knightsville, and along Interstate 295.

Opinion: The Cranston Crossing Project meets each of these important goals contained in the Economic Development Element of the Comprehensive Plan. The project will provide many permanent jobs available to Cranston residents. It will not only add to the economic base of the City, but will be a large increase of revenue produced from this site today from the Mulligan's Island business. This project is located along a major arterial, New London Avenue, and with proper design for traffic control, will not impact the neighboring area. Lastly, the large-scale wholesale member retail business will not only serve all of Cranston's residents, but it will attract regionally and that infuses other local businesses nearby.

THE SUITABILITY QUESTION ~

A central theme to any Comprehensive Plan and the Cranston Comprehensive Plan is:

This Comprehensive Plan has been updated to guide future growth and change in Cranston and lays out the means and methods to create the best possible future for Cranston for the plan's horizon and beyond.

CRANSTON CROSSING DEVELOPMENT SITE AND SURROUNDING AREA



The Cranston Crossing project (Project) is a commercial redevelopment of properties contained within an existing MPD Mixed Use Planned District (MPD) situated at 1000 New London Avenue, in the southeastern portion of the City. The 55-acre property is bounded by New London Avenue (Route 2) to the west, Howard Avenue to the north, RI State land and facilities (Pastore Center) to the east, and residential properties to the south. The lots are identified by the City of Cranston Tax Assessor's as Map 15-1, Lots 8 and 9. The current use of the site is as a commercial recreation facility comprised of mini golf, a driving range, clubhouse, parking and other accessory components, which is owned and operated by Mulligan's Island LLC.

Opinion: The Cranston Crossing site is immediately surrounded by institutional, State services, and residential uses. To the south and north along New London Avenue are numerous commercial/retail uses right on the roadway. Other large-scale commercial and mixed-use areas are nearby the site as well. This area in Cranston is truly a mixed use area, not a homogenous pattern of a single use. All of these factors, plus the high visibility and ease of access point towards a very suitable site for the proposed Cranston Crossing.

CONSISTENCY AND COMPLIANCE WITH THE ZONING ORDINANCE ~

As required under state law, the zoning ordinance and all amendments thereto, shall be consistent with the city's comprehensive plan, as described in Rhode Island General Laws Section 22-2 and shall provide for the implementation of the city's comprehensive plan.

Among its findings and recommendation to the city council with respect to a proposal for amendment of a zoning ordinance or zoning map, **the planning commission** shall:

- A. Include a statement on the general consistency of the proposal with the comprehensive plan of the city, including the goals and policies statement, the implementation program and all other applicable elements of the comprehensive plan; and
- B. Include a demonstration of recognition and consideration of each of the applicable purposes of zoning as presented in Section 17.04.010 of this title.

The following purposes are taken from the Zoning Ordinance – Article I General provisions and are deemed applicable and germane to the proposed major alterations to the existing MPD by Coastal Partners, LLC:

17.04.010 - General purposes.

The regulations, zones and districts herein set forth are made in accordance with a comprehensive plan prepared, adopted and as may be amended in accordance with RIGL Section 45-22.2 and shall be designed to address the following purposes.

- A. Promoting the public health, safety, morals and general welfare.
- B. Providing for a range of uses and intensities of use appropriate to the character of the city and reflecting current and expected future needs.
- C. Providing for orderly growth and development which recognizes:
 1. The goals and patterns of land use contained in the comprehensive plan of the city adopted pursuant to RIGL Section 45-22.2;
 2. The natural characteristics of the land, including its suitability for use based on soil characteristics, topography and susceptibility to surface or groundwater pollution;
 4. The values of unique or valuable natural resources and features;
 5. The availability and capacity of existing and planned public and/or private services and facilities;
 6. The need to shape and balance urban and rural development; and
 7. The use of innovative development regulations and techniques.

G. Providing for the protection of public investment in transportation, water, stormwater management systems, sewage treatment and disposal, solid waste treatment and disposal, schools, recreation, public facilities, open space and other public requirements.

H. Promoting a high level of quality in design in the development of private and public facilities.

I. Promoting implementation of the comprehensive plan of the city adopted pursuant to RIGL Section 45-22.2.

Specifically, the following change to the MPD is requested to support the development for Coastal Partners, LLC:

The Cranston Crossing project (Project) is a commercial redevelopment of properties contained within an existing MPD Mixed Use Planned District (MPD) situated at 1000 New London Avenue, in the southeastern portion of the City. If ultimately approved by the Cranston City Council, the redevelopment of the site will have these multiple uses as part of the new MPD:

- *New large-scale retail facility (wholesale club)*
- *Three (3) undetermined commercial/retail/restaurant uses*
- *Another smaller scale commercial zone, no specific use designated*
- *Parcel 4 which will gifted (deeded) to the City of Cranston for open space and public recreational use*
- *An additional 3.28 acres of open space is designated on Parcel 1.*
- *Two (2) communications towers*

Opinion: All of the above-mentioned Purposes of Zoning should be considered by both the Planning Commission and the City Council in deciding on this important land use application by Coastal Partners, LLC. All of these purposes are met by the project and request before the City.

I have reviewed the overall Site Plans prepared by Garofalo & Associates and find that, except for future site design, for those zoning items that may apply, either the applicant can make design provisions to comply, or there is adequate land area to accomplish these requirements at subsequent future stages of any future design and approval by the City.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION ~

It was stated that the express purpose of this Planning Report is to provide a Summary and Conclusion with respect to the Application by Coastal Partners, LLC for a change to the Cranston Zoning Ordinance MPD Zone for this specific location, Tax Assessor's as Map 15-1, Lots 8 and 9. This report describes the nature of the request by Coastal Partners, LLC and the description of the existing Zoning District MPD, and proposed major alterations to the MPD. The report then outlined those Recommendation Strategies of the Land Use and Economic Development Elements of the Comprehensive Plan as well as the general goals and policies that were deemed to be germane to the proposed amendments by Coastal Partners, LLC.

Further, the Purposes of the Zoning Ordinance, and specifically the Planned Districts section, which were deemed applicable to this application by Coastal Partners, LLC, were presented in this report. These purposes of Zoning mirror those in the Zoning Enabling Act – RIGL – Chapter 45-22.2. A discussion regarding suitability was presented to highlight that the proposed changes to existing MPD designation for this parcel for future development on the property is in keeping with the current land use pattern of the area.

Finally, the description of the area and uses surrounding the proposed development support the proposed uses which would be allowed by this amendment, namely a new MPD and specific range of proposed uses for this project site.

Approval of this zoning ordinance amendment is supported by the following Objectives of the Comprehensive Community Plan to:

Promote mixed use (commercial, industrial, and residential) development that will:

- **Focus on a few key redevelopment sites;**
- **Improve the quality of new development;**
- **Incorporate ‘smart growth’ principles.**

and

Promote large-scale, smart growth redevelopment opportunities at strategic locations to accommodate mixed-use, transit-oriented development. Properties along I-95 in the Wellington/Elmwood industrial area offer the best opportunities.

Based on all that has been presented in this written report, it is the professional opinion of Joseph D. Lombardo, AICP, President of JDL ENTERPRISES that the proposed Zoning Alterations to the MPD at Tax Assessor's as Map 15-1, Lots 8 and 9 requested by Coastal Partners, LLC is:

**CONSISTENT WITH, AND IN COMPLIANCE WITH THE
ZONING ORDINANCE**

AND,

**CONSISTENT WITH, AND IN COMPLIANCE WITH THE
COMPREHENSIVE COMMUNITY PLAN OF
THE CITY OF CRANSTON.**

Submitted by,

Joseph D. Lombardo, AICP

Joseph D. Lombardo, AICP

Date: November 2020