



**CITY OF BRIDGEPORT
PLANNING AND ZONING COMMISSION
SPECIAL MEETING
MAY 26, 2020**

45 Lyon Terrace,
Room 210
Bridgeport, CT 06604
(203) 576-7217 Phone
(203) 576-7213 Fax

ATTENDANCE: Mel Riley, Acting Chair; Reggie Walker, Acting Secretary;
Cesar Augusto Cordero, Robert J. Filotei, Arturo R. Gravina-
Hernandez, Carlos Moreno

STAFF: Dennis Buckley, Planning and Zoning; Nicholas Sampieri, Zoning
Inspector

This meeting was conducted by Zoom/Teleconference.
The public was able to listen to this meeting by calling a conference line.

CALL TO ORDER.

Commissioner Riley called the meeting to order. He then read the following statement into the record:

This meeting of the Planning and Zoning Commission complies with Governor Lamont's Executive Order 7b as it relates to a web based meeting. Therefore, the in person requirement is eliminated as long as a person can participate by phone or video in real time. Also, the sign posting requirement and the return receipt of notification to property owners has also been eliminated as long as the P&Z agenda has been online complying with the statutes normal earliest publication date in the Connecticut Post.

This agenda was placed on the City website on May 4, 2020, which complied with that requirement. This meeting is being recorded to comply with the Open Meeting Requirements and will be available on the City web page following the meeting.

For those that are participating in the meeting tonight, petitioners, staff members and public, please state your name every time you speak. This will be awkward but is necessary for this meeting. I will ask you to repeat your name when necessary. Nicholas Sampieri of the Zoning staff and I will have administrative capabilities during the meeting when needed. Staff and Commission members will be unmuted. I will selective unmute petitioners who wish to speak I be

acknowledge. Feel free to use the chat feature to leave a message or use the hand button on the keyboard to signal when you wish to speak. If those options are not available, you can email Nicholas Sampieri at Bridgeport.gov so you can be heard.

Commissioner Riley then called the roll. A quorum was present.

C-1 (20-09) Text Amendment: City Wide Properties - Petition of Jewish Home for the Elderly of Fairfield County, to amend the zone development standards of the City to allow an accessible parking structure which services congregate housing facilities a maximum allowable height of 45 feet.

Atty. Raymond Rizio introduced himself and said that he had given there was a fairly detailed presentation at the last hearing. This item is a Text Amendment to the plan. One of the concerns that was expressed by some of Commissioners was to have the petitioner amend the language in order to obtain a Special Permit. An approval of this text amendment would allow the petitioner to go forward and build a parking structure for the uses that are already in existence. This structure would be up to 45 feet in height if approved.

Atty. Rizio said that they had also received input from Atty. Diane Lord and Atty. Charles Willinger who presented some concerns from the neighbors. They wished to be able to review and have input on the plans as it moved through the Special Permit process.

Revised language was incorporated and was signed off by Atty. Lord and Atty. Willinger. This revision was submitted earlier in the day to Mr. Buckley. The language reads:

“it will allow a maximum allowable height for an accessory parking structure approved under a Special Permit which services the uses shall be 40 feet provided that the lot size is in excess of 5 acres.”

Commissioner Riley asked if dormitories were still excluded. Atty. Rizio then read the full text of Note 6 into the record:

“ For nursing homes, convalescent homes, assisted living facilities, or congregate housing, the maximum allowable height for principle building shall be six stories or 60 feet. The maximum allowable height for an accessory parking structure approved under a Special Permit which services these uses shall be 45 feet provided that the lot size is at least 5 acres (dormitories excluded).”

Atty. Rizio said that the two major components were that the proposal was only allowable by Special Permit and that the accessory structure was limited to those uses. This would prevent someone from building a parking structure and renting it out commercially.

Commissioner Filotei asked if the wording could be changed to “5 acres or more”. Atty. Rizio said that they had not changed anything about the lot size and the language pertaining to the lot size had been there more than 5 years.

Commissioner Walker asked if there was a problem incorporating the construction of any other structure on a property like this requiring a Special Permit. Atty. Rizio said that they could require a Special Permit going forward but this petition was only for this one project.

Commissioner Riley said that they were going through a review of the regulations and they could amend the regulation at that time.

Commissioner Riley asked if there was anyone present who wished to speak in favor of the item.

Atty. Diane Lord spoke on behalf of the Greater Bridgeport Housing Authority, which owns Hollander House for the Elderly. She said Atty. Rizio had spoken with them and both she and Atty. Willinger were in favor of the proposed language.

Commissioner Riley asked if there was anyone present who wished to speak in opposition to this item.

Council Member Michelle Lyons greeted the Commissioners and said that she had some concerns. She asked if the text amendment was a single application to one piece of property. She said her concern was this could open the door to changes for other properties. Commissioner Riley pointed out there were not many nursing homes that were located on five acres in Bridgeport.

Council Member Lyons said there had had been a number of issues, such as having 6 foot trees as a buffer zone. She asked what would be done to minimize the noise for all the residents of the neighbors.

Atty. Rizio said that Mr. Coleman had requested him to forward the plans for the parking garage to Council Member Lyons. He reminded everyone that this was not a Special Permit Hearing, but a Text Amendment that allows the applicant to move forward to the Special Permit hearing next month when the specific plans will be addressed. This would include the garage appearance, noise control and a variety of other details. This text

amendment simply allows the applicant to present the proposal to the Commission. The Commissioners have not received the plans yet. Commissioner Riley confirmed that they had not yet received the plans.

Council Member Lyons reiterated her concern about the potential opportunity for other projects. She asked if they could limit it to this project. She said they had just spent \$248,000 on the new Planning and Zoning regulations. This will supersede the new regulations that will be created in the next year. She said that she would be presenting her opposition to the proposed plans next month.

Council Member Lyons asked if the proposed text amendment would be incorporated with the new Planning and Zoning regulations. She pointed out they were basing the decision on the old Planning and Zoning regulations and not the new ones. She thanked the Commissioner for clarifying the earlier issue. Her concern was that the City had spent all this money for the updated regulations and this project may not be beneficial to the District when the new regulations are applied. However, this will supersede the new regulations.

Council Member Lyons said that it was important to think about the future and realize they had paid a lot of money for the new regulations and this project may not be compliant. She said she could not be in favor of a project like this after attending all these meetings about updating the regulations.

Ms. Angela DeBennato said she lives directly behind the property and they had been repeatedly lied to regarding the project. The residents of Crestview Drive need to be considered because they are raising families. This will increase traffic and increase the noise. They are taxpayers and the home owners have already lost 24% of their homes values. She repeated that the neighbors had been lied to. There is now a balcony staring over her back yard and there is always music playing. There weren't suppose to be balconies; the building wasn't supposed to be that close to the property line; there wasn't supposed to be a driveway by her house; there were supposed to be trees planted, but they planted saplings instead. Now they are asking for another building further down to inconvenience other neighbors on the street. Now it is time to consider the neighbors who are also tax payers.

Ms. Camilla Boutley of 188 Crestview Drive spoke next and said she totally agreed with Ms. DeBennato. She said that she opposes the garage being built there. Everyone on the street is upset about it.

Ms. Keiana spoke about the difficulty of raising an autistic child who has been disturbed by the increase of traffic noise. She said that there is a nearby school that has been

designated for special needs students. She said that she agreed with the previous two speakers.

Atty. Rizio reiterated that the text amendment was for one specific project and pointed out that if they attached the garage to the building the current regulations would allow them to build it up to 60 feet. The problem with the text amendment is that there are quasi-commercial or multi-family structures that treat accessory structures as residential structures in the RC zone. This is a parking garage that would not be attached to the building. He added that if someone wished to build an accessory structure on a parcel that was more than 5 acres and was either a nursing homes, convalescent homes, assisted living facilities, or congregate housing, they would have to come before the Commission to obtain a Special Permit. The height requirement is lower than if they attached the garage to the building. He reviewed the details for an RC zone.

Commissioner Walker pointed out that what was being proposed was consistent with what was already in the regulations. Atty. Rizio agreed. Commissioner Walker said that this was not out of compliance and it is not inconsistent with the current regulations. Atty. Rizio said that he thought of it as a stepping stone to the new regulations and hopefully something the would be incorporated in the new regulations.

Atty. Rizio said that his client has a parking problem and that they are currently running a shuttle all day to service the occupants of about 80 vehicles parking off site. If the parking garage is constructed as an accessory building, it will be smaller in size and reduce the traffic on Park Avenue. Unfortunately, his client can't wait for the new regulations because it will be about a year or so before the new regulations go into effective. Having a Special Permit would help moving the project towards completion.

Atty. Rizio said that he believed many of the comments would be expressed next month when the plans are presented to the Commission. He said that he was comfortable with the amendment because it tightens the language and the use as it currently exists.

Commissioner Filotei asked if Ms. Haig was on the call. He was told that she was not. Commissioner Filotei asked for clarification on which text amendment version they were voting on. There was one in a letter and another version presented to the Commission. Discussion followed.

Mr. Buckley explained that the first version was from the original application and the second one was from the submitted May 1st addendum from Atty. Rizio's firm. That addendum was in narrative form and indicates the height was 45 feet.

Commissioner Filotei said that he would prefer to hear from Ms. Haig or at least have a written opinion. Mr. Buckley pointed out that the Commission had the option of continuing the item to hear from Ms. Haig or Mr. Coleman.

At this time, Commissioner Riley closed the public hearing on Agenda Item C-1 (20-09) Text Amendment: City Wide Properties - Petition of Jewish Home for the Elderly of Fairfield County.

(20-12) 268 Putnam Street – Petition of Emily E. Weckman, To Design LLC, seeking a special permit & site plan review to permit the establishment of a senior care facility in the existing public service building in the R-C zone.

Ms. Weckman of To Design greeted the Commissioners and said that her firm was the landscape architects for the proposed East Side Senior Center and Kyle White of QAM Architects [Quisenberry Arcari Malik, LLC] was also present. The focus of the project was the relocation of the East Side Senior Center from 105 East Main Street to the historical fire house on Putnam Street. Ms. Weckman displayed a rendering of the fire house with the addition of the elevator shaft.

Mr. White greeted everyone and said that this project was the conversion of an existing 1925 single bay firehouse into the new home for the East Side Senior Center. He said that he had been working with a team from Public Facilities, the East Side Senior Center along with Council President Nieves and Council Member Valle.

Mr. White then described the building images displayed on the screen and indicated where the elevator tower and an entrance vestibule would be added. The State Historic Preservation Office has been overseeing the compliance issues and providing feedback. There will be limestone and window restoration. The garage doors will be maintained and remain true to the character to the time when the building was constructed.

He then reviewed the floor plans with the Commissioners including the offices, multipurpose rooms, a warming kitchen, a general classroom and conference areas.

Ms. Weckman then reviewed the .34 acre property in an RC Zone. She described the property including the curb cuts and the fencing. The parcel currently has 72% coverage and there are no trees on the property.

The proposed adaptive reuse conforming to the zone. There will be 17 parking spaces, of which 2 will be handicapped accessible. There is a slight encroachment on the rear setback of 1 foot in the parking area due to the existing building and the required dimensions of the parking spaces. However, the existing impervious coverage will be reduced to 59% by converting the west access drive to lawn. The landscape will increase

to 31% and will have trees, along with landscaped bushes and plantings. There will be an improved streetscape and repairs to the sidewalk. Ornamental site lighting will be included along with fencing and a trash enclosure.

The revised proposed underground infiltration system is designed to handle and fully recharge a 100 year storm. These plans have been submitted to the Engineering Department.

The overarching goal of the adaptive reuse is to provide a neighborhood amenity that will benefit the community while maintaining the historical architecture. She said that they felt this design would do just that for the neighborhood.

Commissioner Riley said that it seemed like a very straightforward adaptive reuse.

Commissioner Filotei asked about accommodating buses and larger vehicles in the parking lot. Ms. Weckman said that they could do some turning studies with radius. They had eliminated the access drive to reduce the impervious surfaces.

Mr. White said that they had focused on maximizing the number of parking spaces because the building is relatively large compared to the site. He said that they could provide the additional studies if the Commission wished, but suspected that the best solution would be for the access buses to pull onto the property along the sidewalk drop off and then back out.

A Public Facility staff member also said that typically the buses are not large ones, but are the Access-a-ride type vehicles. Right now, the present facility has less space for the vehicles than the proposed site and it appears to be adequate.

Commissioner Filotei asked how many members were at the East Side Senior Center. He was told that there were 65 active members and usually between 10 and 20 people at the Center daily.

Commissioner Filotei said that the building was not set up for a Senior Center. The staff member said that the main floor would be used as the Senior Center and the second floor would be mostly offices for those running the Senior Center similar to the Senior Center in Black Rock.

Commissioner Filotei said that when the new center opens, there will be more people coming. He said that while it was nice there was an elevator, it would be just another obstacle for the elderly. The goal is to minimize the obstacles and just because the building is available doesn't mean it is the best use of the property. They need something better over there.

It was pointed out that the second floor was mainly for the staff working there. The garage doors can be opened if a bus needs access. There has also been some discussion about putting picnic tables out in the parking area for special events.

Commissioner Riley asked if there was anyone who would like to speak in favor of the item.

The staff member said that after speaking with both Council President Nieves and Ms. Wong, the Director of the Center, they are in desperate need because the City is currently leasing another building which leaks water and has mold. This would be a major upgrade for them. The Council representatives and the District residents are in favor of this.

Commissioner Riley asked if there was anyone who would like to speak in opposition of the item. Hearing none, Commissioner Riley closed the public hearing on 268 Putnam Street.

Commissioner Filotei noted that there was very little street parking available at this site. Nick said that during the walk through earlier in the day, there was on street parking available. Mr. White said that was on street parking at the site and the proposed plan was a major improvement over the existing situation.

Commissioner Filotei asked how many employees there were. Mr. White said that there were three: the Director, an employee and a volunteer.

(20-13) RE: 1875 NOBLE AVENUE (BEARDSLEY PARK ZOO) – – Petition of Connecticut’s Beardsley Park Zoo — Seeking a special permit & site plan review to permit the construction of an Andean Bear exhibit, consisting of a bear housing building with viewing & exhibit area structures at the existing zoo in the ZP zone.

Mr. John Mills, the Operations Manager for the Berkley Construction Group and Ms. Julia, a Zoo specialist, then spoke about the overall conceptual site plan design of the project for the South American bears. There will be two habitats separated by a moat.

Mr. Mills explained that the moat was indicated on the plans, but due to budgetary constraints, the moat may not be included in the final construction.

Ms. Julia explained the exhibit will follow the natural habitat and each exhibit has its own viewing space and shelter for the animal. The exhibit does not have bars and animals are contained by walls. She also reviewed the details of work area for the zookeepers caring for the animals. This will be a one story building with a pitched metal roof and concrete floor designed to the AZA design specifications.

Mr. Mills indicated that the exhibit will be located the center of the Zoo itself and the neighboring residences will not be able to see the exhibit without entering the zoo. These are previews of the plans for a total four bears, two per habitat.

The Deputy Director of the Zoo pointed out that the Andean Bears are a dying species and the hope it is breed the bears and stabilize the bear population. He said that there were less than 50 bears in the U.S. The Zoo has had bears in the past but the exhibit needs more space.

Commissioner Riley asked if this was a suitable climate for the bears. The Deputy Director said that the Andean Mountain range for the bears is quite high and they have had the bears in the Zoo before during the winter without problems. These bears are similar to the American Black Bear.

Commissioner Riley asked if there was anyone who wished to speak in favor of this item. No one indicated that they wished to speak in favor. Commissioner Riley asked if there was anyone who wished to speak in opposition to this item. Hearing none, he closed the public hearing on Agenda Item 20-13) Re: 1875 Noble Avenue (Beardsley Park Zoo) – – Petition of Connecticut’s Beardsley Park Zoo — Seeking a special permit & site plan review to permit the construction of an Andean Bear exhibit, consisting of a bear housing building with viewing & exhibit area structures at the existing zoo in the ZP zone.

Commissioner Riley then closed the Public Hearing portion of the meeting.

DECISIONS

C-1 (20-09) Text Amendment: City Wide Properties - Petition of Jewish Home for the Elderly of Fairfield County, to amend the zone development standards of the City to allow an accessible parking structure which services congregate housing facilities a maximum allowable height of 45 feet.

**** COMMISSIONER FILOTEI MOVED TO CONTINUE AGENDA ITEM C-1 (20-09) TEXT AMENDMENT: CITY WIDE PROPERTIES - PETITION OF JEWISH HOME FOR THE ELDERLY OF FAIRFIELD COUNTY, TO AMEND THE ZONE DEVELOPMENT STANDARDS OF THE CITY TO ALLOW AN ACCESSIBLE PARKING STRUCTURE WHICH SERVICES CONGREGATE HOUSING FACILITIES A MAXIMUM ALLOWABLE HEIGHT OF 45 FEET TO JUNE 29, 2020.**

**** COMMISSIONER GRAVINA-HERNANDEZ SECONDED.**

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

(20-12) 268 Putnam Street – Petition of Emily E. Weckman, To Design LLC, seeking a special permit & site plan review to permit the establishment of a senior care facility in the existing public service building in the R-C zone.

**** COMMISSIONER WALKER MOVED TO APPROVE AGENDA ITEM (20-12) 268 PUTNAM STREET – PETITION OF EMILY E. WECKMAN, TO DESIGN LLC, SEEKING A SPECIAL PERMIT & SITE PLAN REVIEW TO PERMIT THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A SENIOR CARE FACILITY IN THE EXISTING PUBLIC SERVICE BUILDING IN THE R-C ZONE WITH THE FOLLOWING CONDITION:**

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE SUBJECT PREMISES SHALL BE IN STRICT ACCORD WITH THE PLANS SUBMITTED TO AND APPROVED BY THE COMMISSION.

FOR THE FOLLOWING REASONS:

1. THE PETITION AS PRESENTED COMPLIES WITH THE SITE PLAN REVIEW STANDARDS OF SEC. 14-2-5 AS WELL AS THE SPECIAL PERMIT STANDARDS OF SEC. 14-4-4.

2. THIS FORMER FIRE HOUSE BUILDING WILL NOW PROVIDE A NEW AND UP TO DATE SENIOR CENTER FOR BRIDGEPORT RESIDENTS.

**** COMMISSIONER MORENO SECONDED.**

**** THE MOTION PASSED WITH FIVE (5) IN FAVOR (RILEY, WALKER, MORENO, GRAVINA-HERNANDEZ AND CORDERO) AND ONE (1) OPPOSED (FILOTEI).**

***This special permit approval, as required under Sec. 14-4-5 of the Zoning Regulations of the City of Bridgeport, CT shall expire June 1, 2021.**

(20-13) RE: 1875 NOBLE AVENUE (BEARDSLEY PARK ZOO) – Petition of Connecticut’s Beardsley Park Soon — Seeking a special permit & site plan review to permit the construction of an Andean Bear exhibit, consisting of a bear housing building with viewing & exhibit area structures at the existing zoo in the ZP zone.

**** COMMISSION WALKER MOVED TO APPROVE AGENDA ITEM (20-13) RE: 1875 NOBLE AVENUE (BEARDSLEY PARK ZOO) – PETITION OF CONNECTICUT’S BEARDSLEY PARK ZOO — SEEKING A SPECIAL**

PERMIT & SITE PLAN REVIEW TO PERMIT THE CONSTRUCTION OF AN ANDEAN BEAR EXHIBIT, CONSISTING OF A BEAR HOUSING BUILDING WITH VIEWING & EXHIBIT AREA STRUCTURES AT THE EXISTING ZOO IN THE ZP ZONE. FOR THE FOLLOWING REASONS:

1. THE NEW ANDEAN BEAR EXHIBIT WILL EXPAND THE VARIETY OF ANIMALS TO BE VIEWED BY THE PUBLIC.

2. THE PETITION AS APPROVED COMPLIES WITH THE SITE PLAN REVIEW STANDARDS OF SEC. 14-2-5 AS WELL AS THE SPECIAL PERMIT STANDARDS OF SEC. 14-4-4.

**** COMMISSIONER CORDERO SECONDED.**

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

***This special permit approval, as required under Sec. 14-4-5 of the Zoning Regulations of the City of Bridgeport, CT shall expire June 1, 2021.**

OTHER MATTERS THAT MAY PROPERLY COME BEFORE THE BOARD

Mr. Buckley informed the Commission that State of Connecticut has required some minor changes to the 1705 Fairfield Avenue project which was previously approved by the Commission as per plans regarding egress to the side. The exterior look of the building had been changed a bit. He indicated where the alternations were made on the elevation plans displayed on the screens. Mr. Buckley said that he was mentioning this in case the Commission felt that they needed to re-consider this.

Commission Riley asked if OPED had reviewed these changes. Mr. Buckley said that they did not have a issue with it. A brief discussion followed about the details of the building. Commissioner Riley said that he thought it was an improvement.

Mr. Buckley said that the Commission had indicated in their decision that it was subject to State approval.

**** COMMISSIONER GRAVINA-HERNANDEZ MOVED TO AUTHORIZE MR. BUCKLEY TO PROCEED WITH THE APPLICATION PROCESS FOR 1705 FAIRFIELD AVENUE.**

**** COMMISSIONER WALKER SECONDED.**

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

**** COMMISSIONER FILOTEI MOVED TO APPROVE THE MINUTES AS PRESENTED.**

**** COMMISSIONER CORDERO SECONDED.**

**** THE MOTION TO APPROVE THE MINUTES AS PRESENTED PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

ADJOURNMENT

**** COMMISSIONER WALKER MOVED TO ADJOURN.**

**** COMMISSIONER FILOTEI SECONDED.**

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

The meeting adjourned at 7:30 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

S. L. Soltes
Telesco Secretarial Services