



NORWALK PLANNING & ZONING COMMISSION  
125 East Avenue  
Norwalk, CT 06851

## **Memorandum**

**May 27, 2022**

**To: Planning & Zoning Commission:**

**From: Steve Kleppin, Planning & Zoning Director**

**Re: #2022-05R/M/SP – Merritt Station Norwalk, LLC – 67, 69, 79, 87, 111, 117, 129, 135, 155, 156 and 201 Glover Avenue and 2 Oakwood Avenue (North 7)**

The applicant will be comprehensively presenting the overall proposal for the redevelopment of the accumulated parcels on the west side of Glover Avenue, into a unified master plan, to be built in several phases, most likely occurring over an extended period of time. There are several applications that are part of this project, including text amendments, map amendments and a special permit application. You are not approving any specific projects or site plans at this stage. Should you look favorably on the comprehensive proposal, subsequent Site Plan applications would follow. Below is brief summary of what you will need to consider for each of the applications. Please note, a draft resolution is not included in this package.

### **Proposed Text Amendments**

The proposed amendments would modify Section 118-503 Executive Office zone, along with Section 100 Definitions to establish a new definition for Executive Office Development Park and to permit the new use in the Executive Office zone along with related amendments to Articles 120, 121 and 140. The amendment would also revise the schedule for the Executive Office zone to increase the permitted building height and number of stories from 8 stories and 100 ft for multifamily Commercial PRD uses to allow multifamily buildings of 15 stories and 150 feet in height. In addition, they are proposing to increase residential density to 1 unit per 500 SF of lot area from 1 unit per 1,650 sq. ft of lot area and increasing allowed FAR to 2.0 with no required minimum lot size (the current schedule limits higher FAR to larger parcels). Staff is in agreement with the proposed text amendments.

Staff would recommend that you review the proposed amendments since there is language pertaining to sustainability, green infrastructure and the required open space, since this was discussed at the initial phases of the application, approximately two (2) years ago.

## **Proposed Map Amendments**

Along with the text amendments the applicant seeks to consolidate the conglomerated parcels along the western side of Glover Avenue and rezone several of them to Executive Office. Several of the parcels are zoned Business 2, while others that were previously owned by the State of Connecticut are zoned AAA. Those properties were formerly part of the 7-connector right-of-way and were zoned AAA to safeguard until future uses were identified. Staff and the Commission previously stated that this rezoning makes sense.

## **Master Plan**

Numerous discussions between the Staff, Commission and the applicant resulted in agreement that the master plan should be considered in three phases, southern, middle and northern. This would allow the applicant to seek approval on the first (southern) phase, if they are able to demonstrate that the traffic generated by the first phase of the proposed development is consistent with the traffic generated by the prior uses that are being replaced as a result of this redevelopment, and that they do not exacerbate existing traffic conditions. The second phase (middle) of the project would only be allowed pending the proposed improvements to the Merritt Parkway/Route 7 interchange, which are scheduled to begin in 2025. The third phase of the proposal could only be approved pending completion of the needed improvements at Glover Avenue and Main Avenue. There is no scheduled dates for these improvements. Staff will craft conditions of approval that reflect the approval with phasing and tie those to the specific building sites.

## **Issues to Consider**

Traffic has been an obvious discussion point since the beginning of the project, based on the near gridlock conditions that occur during the AM and PM peaks on the Merritt Parkway and the backup on the Main Avenue/Grist Mill area. During this lengthy process, the City required outside peer review of the traffic, including remodeling of the applicant's analysis with the latest data and preferred alternate from CT DOT, which include their traffic projections as well as the anticipated road improvements. As stated, the applicant has agreed that a phased approval approach is acceptable, based on the significant infrastructure improvements that must occur before the later phases can proceed.

Building height has also been a considerable topic of discussion. Within the EO Zone, hotels can be constructed to 12 stories and 150 feet in height, whereas other buildings can be built to 8 stories and 100 feet. The proposed height would allow all buildings within the master plan to be built to 15 stories and 150 feet. The applicant has shown perspectives of the visual appearance/impact of these buildings (<https://www.norwalkct.org/2993/North-7>). The concern is, if built to the maximum height, will that loom over any residential properties? The closest properties are the Oakwood Avenue residential units, which are considerably higher in elevation than the Glover Avenue grade which abuts the residential development. As you proceed north on Glover Avenue, the grade rises, but the abutting development becomes scattered. While a 15-story building will be visible from the northern portion of the site, there are no properties to impact from a loom perspective. Lastly, the height of buildings within a Development Park is measured differently than how the existing EO zone measures building height. The existing EO zone begins measuring height at the building pedestal and excludes the parking structure from

the overall building height, whereas the height in a Development Park, like North 7, would be measured from the average grade. Therefore, the height of the proposed buildings should not be significantly taller than the existing Merritt office towers.

Proposed Open Space/NRVT/Trail Connections: The applicant is proposing an approximate 2-acre park on the northern portion of the development with access to the NRVT, as well as the internal sidewalk circulation and trail network on the development. The exact area should be clarified prior to any resolution. The applicant also indicated that they would seek to provide access from the Oakwood Avenue developments to the proposed “Town Square” space at the southern portion of the development. The Commission should also consider as a potential condition of approval, evaluating the location of the northern most portion of the development to maximize the park space, pending the location and impacts from any potential intersection improvements related to Glover Avenue and Grist Mill Road.

The Commission requested an approximate cost of constructing a sidewalk along the southern portion of Grist Mill Road from Glover Avenue to Main Avenue, plus associated improvements such as ADA ramps, striping, signal upgrades, etc. Should the Commission look favorably on this application, the Commission should consider this as a condition of approval.

Site Plan v. Special Permit: The applicant has proposed that the subsequent applications for the proposed buildings be approved via Site Plan v. Special Permit. Staff is supportive of this proposal, based on the ability to regulate future development based on the previously outlined infrastructure improvements, the requirement that each phase prove that there are no negative impacts as a result of traffic impacts and that each phase of the development must be found consistent with all design aspects that accompany the proposed Design Manual. In addition, the Commission has the ability to require a public hearing on all Site Plan applications. From the applicant’s perspective, there is certainty in a Site Plan application that if the application complies with the standards in the regulations, that they will gain approval; whereas, Special Permits do have some ambiguity built into the approvals. Staff’s comfort level on recommending Site Plan approval is that the applicant must satisfy the traffic standards, which are tied to each phase and that the development must comply with the submitted design standards.

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**END**