

WECA P & Z Meeting on Jan. 14: Discuss new commercial and residential zoning recommendations

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As a follow-up to its meeting on housing density and in response to the city's preparation of a 10-year Plan of Conservation and Development, the WECA Planning & Zoning Committee will meet on:

Thursday, January 14, 2010

Time: 7:00 pm

Location: West End Community Center , 461 Farmington Avenue

Parking is available at the rear of the building.

Note: Please read to the end of this message; see below for key recommendations for changes in zoning in commercial and residential districts.

On October 29, 2009, WECA's Planning and Zoning Committee held a meeting concerning density issues in the West End . At the same time, the City of Hartford is preparing is 10 year Plan of Conservation and Development.

WECA has created a task force to develop our response to this new Plan of Conservation and Development. This is an important activity because the plan will be used to guide city planning for the next decade.

The task force has prepared a report, which has relied heavily on the comments heard at the October 29 meeting. A copy is printed below.

This January 14 meeting is for the Committee to review the task force report. Please note that there are a couple of recommendations which would change the existing zoning. Note especially those which call for the allowance of Accessory Dwelling Units in Owner Occupied dwellings.

DRAFT: West End Civic Association recommendations for City of Hartford 2010 Plan of Conservation and Development

COMMERCIAL DISTRICTS

- 1. Complete the Farmington Avenue Streetscape plan to Prospect Avenue**
- 2. Implement Special Use Overlay for West End Commercial Districts, now classified as B3 and B4 Zone**

Purpose: To promote pedestrian-oriented, denser, more attractive, more economically viable businesses that will in turn promote the revitalization of the commercial streets, enhance the city's tax base, support the character and value of the adjacent residential streets, and provide a "neighborhood main street" as a gathering place.

Siting of buildings:

All new construction or major rehabilitation must be sited at a "build-to" line that will be established at or near the front property lines and at or near the property lines on any abutting side streets such that a minimum 12' sidewalk is available to the pedestrian public.

There is no side yard requirement (common walls allowed)

Cars and parking:

No parking is permitted between the building façade(s) and the curb, whether on public or private property.

All parking must be behind or at the sides of the building.

There is no minimum parking requirement.

Curb cuts and driveways are by special permit only, and must lead to the side or back of the lot

No "drive-thru" windows or other such facilities are permitted

The city will provide, as an incentive to retail development, angle parking on the street(s) in front of establishments which are subject to this zoning ordinance.

Building height and bulk

Buildings must be a minimum of two and a maximum of four stories in height from street level; the first story must be at least 14 feet high and upper stories at least 12 feet.

Windows and Doors

Street level facades must have doors no less than every thirty feet at street level.

Windows and doors with transparent glass must constitute 60% of all street-level facades, and 50% of all stories above the street level.

Uses:

No legal uses are prohibited as long as all other requirements of this ordinance are met; mixed use buildings are encouraged.

All health and safety codes apply.

Sidewalk cafes are allowed on the public sidewalk as long as the public's right to pass is preserved.

Amenities:

All occupants of buildings to which this ordinance applies are required to maintain the public sidewalk in front of their establishments. They are further encouraged to and may be required as part of the plan approval process to provide and maintain benches, bike racks, bus stops, planters, street trees, awnings, and other amenities that contribute to the comfort and safety of pedestrians.

Design:

Design standards shall be created for buildings and sites developed under this ordinance that shall apply to rooflines, building materials, signs and architectural style, among others, and shall be applied by the Hartford Design Review Board.

Process:

Approval to develop under this ordinance shall be as simple an “as of right” process as possible in order to encourage small property owners to develop and redevelop their properties, to provide them with certainty, reduce risk, and reduce costs.

3. Improve and enforce parking, building and zoning standards

RESIDENTIAL DISTRICT

Preserve and protect the historic character of West End properties

- Support the Historic Preservation ordinance
- Improve and enforce Anti-Blight ordinance
- Improve and enforce residential parking, building and zoning standards
- Implement Residential Overlay for West End , as:

1. Keep the existing zoning – that is keep single family (R-8, R-7) where it presently exists; two family where it exists; three family where it exists; multi where it exists;

2. Prior non-conforming uses continue, but as with current law, if the use terminates then the land use must revert back to be consistent with the zoning.

3. Do not allow conversions of two families to three families;

4. Do not allow conversions of one family dwellings

5. Allow Accessory Dwelling Units, as follows:

a. Carriage houses* on 7,500 square foot lots could be converted to dwelling units, provided:

Main house is owner occupied

Certificate of Occupancy necessary with each ownership change and on a periodic renewal basis.

Off street parking exists for any car whose owner resides in the unit

- b. Third floor units would be allowed in single and two family homes, provided:

Main house is owner occupied.

Certificate of Occupancy necessary with each ownership change and on a periodic renewal basis.

Off street parking exists for any car whose owner resides in the unit

There is a 7,500 square foot minimum lot size

*A carriage house is defined as an outbuilding (that is, a secondary structure on a lot whose main building is a house) built before 1940 to house animals or automobiles that also includes additional space previously used as living quarters or storage that can be converted to a modern dwelling unit.

6. Assessor's office web pages and street cards should have a large warning "Assessed use is not necessarily legal use and is not to be relied upon – you must check with the Planning Department."

7. Regulate use of homes to include no more than two unrelated additional persons in singles and doubles.

8. Implement Streetscape design, including

Traffic Calming

Green streets (mitigate stormwater run-off)

Lighting standards (historic, no glare/dark sky standards)

9. Develop, beautify and maintain gateway neighborhood entrances (esp. I-84)

10. Enhance community cohesion through functionality, including

Safe paths to schools

Improving walkability,

Common community, maintenance

OPEN SPACE

Parks: Preserve, enhance and protect the quality, access and recreational uses, and balance recreational uses with healthy, scenic landscape

Develop and implement a cohesive lighting plan for Elizabeth Park that enhances safety and reflects the historic character of the West End

Redesign pedestrian entrances to Elizabeth Park and playground area along Elizabeth Street

Create recreational space for Youth – one option is to provide a basketball court south of Farmington Avenue in an appropriate location

Ensure that plans minimizes water use and mitigate stormwater run-off

Implement the recommendations outlined in the Park (Hog) River North Branch Watershed Management Plan (e.g., 50 ft stream buffers, etc) Note: Pending approval Feb 9

OVERALL RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE PLAN FROM INDIVIDUALS

From Toni Gold

Downtown Recommendations: If WECA chooses to make recommendations regarding downtown, I propose the following:

- A. Make all streets two-way
- B. Take back Main Street (Redesign as pedestrian promenade, add trolley)
- C. Support the Hub of Hartford project to reduce or remove the adverse impact of I-84.

General City Recommendations: If WECA chooses to make recommendations regarding planning and zoning generally in the city, I propose the following:

- A. Completely re-write the city's street design guidelines to stress complete streets: green streets, angle parking, human scale, reduce automobile domination and support walkers, bikers and transit.
- B. Create a Transportation Division that includes all transportation planning and traffic engineering, and put it under the Department of Development Services.

From John Gale

I also have some suggestions for the City Plan which affect Downtown and the rest of the City. I don't think WECA should miss an opportunity to stress some ideas which we consider key to the future development of Hartford . So here are my thoughts in no particular order of importance:

- Continue to restripe streets to add bike lanes.
- Uncover the Park River
- Develop a light rail connection to the airport.
- Require downtown development to incubate small local retail by requiring buildings to communicate with the street
- So for instance Gold Building , Constitution Plaza , etc. should have holes punched in their facades at ground level
- Providing entrances to retail spaces of 400-800 square feet
- Leading to rents which the average small business entrepreneur could afford
- Develop design criteria on parking garages which
- Requires small retail space at street level – see above (bigger retail would certainly be allowed)
- Requires a façade that is somewhat interesting

- Emphasize more housing Downtown
- Repair, replace all sidewalks over the next 20-30 years
- Continue to bury the Interstates (20-30 years) – priorities
- Greater connection to river over I-91
- Reclaim land from Farmington and Broad to the State Capitol