

NEW HAVEN CITY PLAN COMMISSION ADVISORY REPORT

- RE:** DOWNTOWN MUNICIPAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN (MDP), Amendment #2 submitting an order approving and authorizing such actions that may be necessary to implement the Gateway and Long Wharf Downtown Development Projects (Mayor).
- REPORT:** 1360-09
- ADVICE:** Approval, with amendments and conditions
- NOTE:** The City Plan Commission received this Communication and approved it with amendments and conditions, on October 20, 2004.

A copy of the Commission's advice, with additional comment on Long Wharf Theater, is included herein. Please note that the advice is amended to reflect recent plan modifications proposed by the Knights of Columbus and the Office of Economic Development.

BACKGROUND

Mayor DeStefano proposes the Gateway Plan, a \$230 million investment to revitalize a 15+-acre area in Downtown New Haven. Gateway includes several project elements: demolition of the New Haven Coliseum; relocation of Gateway Community College and Long Wharf Theatre; development of new residential, commercial and parking facilities; and development of new public open space. This project – in the works for several years now – is moving forward in a manner consistent with a term sheet between the City and State of Connecticut and a conceptual master plan prepared by Herbert S. Newman and Partners P.C. The project facts, financing and community benefits were submitted in summary form ("summary document").

The Mayor proposes to implement much of this project under the authority of the Downtown Municipal Development Plan, originally approved in 1996. Within the MDP, the Gateway project area generally is bounded by Route 34, State Street, Crown Street and the Temple Street Parking Garage. The new Gateway Community College is to be built on the site of the vacant Macy's Department Store and vacant land (formerly Malley's Department Store). The new Long Wharf Theatre is to be built west of the Knights of Columbus, 3 Church Street. As understood from the Herb Newman plan, the facility will include a 500-seat proscenium theater, a 300-seat theater and support spaces.

A second mixed use phase of the project is less defined, but will be located generally on the site of the to-be-demolished Coliseum. Key elements of the second phase include a 400-room hotel / conference facility, 280 apartment units and ancillary commercial spaces. The project elements are included and supported by the Comprehensive Plan's recommendations for Downtown New Haven.

The order submitted to the Board of Aldermen contains –

1. Amendment #2 of the Downtown Municipal Development Plan ("MDP");
2. Authorization for the Economic Development Administrator to enter into negotiations with various parties to implement the Downtown MDP.
3. Authorization for the Mayor to take any/all actions and execute any /all documents to implement the Downtown MDP.

For items (2) and (3), five actions are specifically mentioned. These are acceptance of grant funds to reimburse the city for demolition of Macy's; conveyance of the Macy's / Malley's site to the State of Connecticut; lease and/or sale of a site for Long Wharf Theatre; initiation of tunnel and streetscape improvements; and acquisition of real property and/or easements, air rights, etc. Each is described more fully in the summary document.

Under a separate submission, the Mayor seeks a capital budget amendment to cover the cost of demolition of the Coliseum and Macy's (the latter of which is state reimbursable).

The MDP, originally approved in February, 1996, was created to promote the coordinated and harmonious development of the central business district. The first amendment was approved in 1998 to facilitate development of the 800+ space Mid Block parking garage. With the MDP, the City now has a legal basis to acquire and assemble the development parcel. In turn, Mid Block has been instrumental in the adaptive reuse of 227 Church Street and will play an important supportive role to other developments are completed.

As proposed, this second amendment contains two material modifications to the MDP in support of the Gateway project, as follows:

(1) Acquisition and disposition of parcels, portions of parcels or any easement or other legal interest therein to the extent that the City considers them necessary and desirable in the interests of the project, particularly in regard to meeting the new parking demand that will arise from the Gateway Community College and Long Wharf Theatre facilities.

The intent of this acquisition / disposition schedule is to assemble the land necessary to construct two parking garages, complementing a larger-scale parking program associated with this project. The parking program is more fully described in a report prepared by Wilbur Smith Associates and included in the summary document.

The parking program looked not only at the parking needs associated with planned downtown developments but also the interim and long-term solutions necessary to satisfy the parking demand. The program essentially calls for construction of two 500-space garages (through the MDP), renovation of 200 dormant spaces in the Temple Street garage and construction of the now-planned Mid-Block and second Union Station garages. These latter two components are essential, since it is estimated that over 600 vehicles now parked at Temple Street will move to these new facilities.

With regard to the two new 500-space garages, conceptual, financial and relocation plans are being prepared. One garage will be located in the block bounded by Church, Orange, Crown and George Streets. In concept, much of the garage footprint will be on the existing surface lot to the north of the commercial building at 1 Church Street. The second garage will be located in the block bounded by Church, Orange, Crown and Center Streets, just east the commercial building at 55 Church Street and west of the Ninth Square apartments along Orange Street. As both sites are currently used for off-street parking the number of "net new" spaces is 840.

(2) Acquisition of parcels, portions of parcels, or any easement or other legal interest therein to the extent that the City considers them necessary or desirable in the interests of the project. Since much of the land already is owned by the City, the intent of this acquisition schedule appears to cover all of the remaining properties in the project area, should the need arise for easements, rights-of-way, or other logistic / infrastructure support for the parking / access aspects of the Gateway project.

PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS

The City Plan Commission strongly believes this is a signature initiative that will usher a new generation of Downtown investments. [see earlier advice and guidance in CPC Report #1353-20.]

To be successful, the Gateway project depends on the City's ability to acquire and assemble land, prepare the sites, develop the appropriate infrastructure support and steward site development. In this sense, the City's stewardship covers the arrangement of buildings, the land use, urban design, the public open space, traffic / pedestrian flow, etc. The MDP is the ideal mechanism to steward the project. The MDP not only provides

rights of acquisition / land assembly / disposition, but also enables the City to articulate a project vision, propose land use and outline technical details.

For the plan to be consistent with the comprehensive plan, the project likewise needs to advance the Commission's directives: Regional Standing, Quality Standard and Sense of Place. As a regional center, the plan reinforces New Haven's position as the economic, cultural and physical center of South Central Connecticut. In addition, the Commission's urban design guidance strives to elevate the quality of development in the city, thereby advancing a high standard of urban design, stewardship and environmental protection.

Finally, the Commission notes that New Haveners deeply respect the city's distinct qualities. Mindful of this community sentiment, the Commission directs physical development to enhance the city's identity, continuing a strong sense of unique place.

In its earlier guidance, the Commission stated, "*as many architects, planners, engineers and developers – not to mention two tiers of government officials – will influence the project, there must be a game plan of sufficient detail for all of us to follow.*" We say this because – over time – the City's interest will not necessarily align with the interests of the theatre, the community college, the Knights of Columbus, the office building landlords, the Parking Authority, etc. To be successful, we need to understand these interests, plan early and coordinate often. The Commission understands and appreciates existing steps in this direction.

For example, the design of the community college – as it relates to Church Street, the connector and Crown Street – is a major point of emphasis in the Herb Newman master plan. As this is a state facility, the design process will be administered by the Connecticut Department of Public Works (DPW). Since there is no advisory structure, nor a formal mechanism to influence the design program, the City is initiating a discussion with DPW regarding this matter.

Another example is the coordination of use and maintenance of the tunnel. The City bears the responsibility for maintenance and long-term capital improvement. It is imperative that the other parties in interest are good stewards of this shared resource. The Economic Development Department is taking the lead on these discussions.

A third example is the coordination of parking investments and the management of a short-term parking program. The Wilbur Smith update report includes an implementation plan but lacks specific assignments for the Parking Authority, Traffic and Parking and others. Moreover, there needs to be tangible relationship between garage planning and traffic planning. All told, though, this document is a good start toward coordinated planning and the program continues now that the Economic Development Department has retained Tigh and Bond to conduct further parking assessments and Wilbur Smith Associates to conduct a traffic assessment.

With specific regard to Long Wharf Theatre, the Commission strongly encourages relocation of the theater to Downtown New Haven. In moving to the central business district, Long Wharf is making a significant contribution to the Gateway Plan and the overall health and vitality of the city. The proposed \$60 million investment further affirms New Haven's position as the cultural capital of the state and all of southern New England.

The siting of the theater is an important early step in the master planning process. As with many theaters and places for public assembly, the design challenges include building placement and outward presentation. There are additional complications here, including the impressive design of the Knights of Columbus tower, the undefined uses and buildings within the Coliseum block and the single-use nature of the proposed theater building. The original Herb Newman concept plan sites the building to the east of the tower, which creates additional challenges related to the face along Frontage Road.

Recently, however, the Knights of Columbus and the City Economic Development Department have proposed an alternative concept. In this concept, MBP 239-0206-00300 will remain with the Knights of Columbus and the theater will be shifted to the east on a portion of the Coliseum site. The rationale for this plan amendment is sound: the theater will be more closely aligned with the new hotel / conference spaces than with the office tower. This will not only improve land use synergy (pedestrian movement, spin-off economic development, etc.) but also solve a major design problem relating the tower appropriately to the new theater building.

As demonstrated above, the planning and coordination are integral to the success of this project. With that in mind, the City Plan Commission recommends conditions (shown below) to the MDP Amendment #2 to further advance the city's objectives.

ADVICE

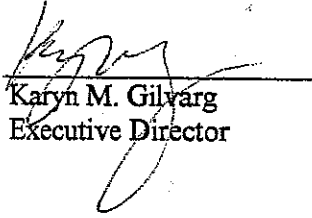
The Commission recommends approval of this submission, provided the Order is amended to include the following conditions under #1:

Prior to redevelopment, the Executive Director of the Development Commission, or his designee, shall take the following actions to implement the Downtown MDP:

- i. Provide a more detailed conceptual plan in Amendment #2. Make reference to the current plan drawn by Herbert S. Newman and Partners. Summarize existing planning to date; a project timeline; land use plan, interim uses (eg. surface parking), general project financing, city, state and developer responsibilities, etc.
- ii. Supplement Section E to integrate more detailed urban design guidelines and design review protocol. Provide an overall design scheme for the project that addresses integration with surrounding areas/downtown, the relationship of private / public space, guidelines pertaining to massing, circulation, first floor and façade, sign planning, landscaping, parking and energy efficiency. Include a guideline or policy on the airwalk and tunnel. Review the Zoning Ordinance and recommend a zoning approach for the project (eg. utilize the existing zoning, develop a new zoning district, develop a planned development program or recommend amendments to the central business district zoning). Develop a design review protocol. For design review, develop submission requirements, develop a review protocol, designate a design review committee, and outline the approval steps.
- iii. Prepare an infrastructure development program and guidelines. Provide location and guidelines for the improvement, management and maintenance of infrastructure, including the tunnel, air rights, parking garages, interim parking facilities, streets, sidewalks, lighting, open spaces. Provide a schedule of for implementation, as well as a mechanism for private developer participation in structured parking for the Phase II housing elements.
- iv. Substitute draft maps with final versions. Amend Maps 6 & 7 to add the new MDP boundary and the acquisition schedule, as further amended to delete MBP 239-0206-00300 from the acquisition schedule.
- v. Supplement Section C to describe the more fully all of the project elements and detailed land use descriptions.
- vi. Supplement Section D to integrate the parking program and other infrastructure improvements.

The Commission notes as well that it recommended to the Development Commission that the entire project be administered through the Development Commission. This provides a single point of implementation, which would be beneficial, as the project evolves over several years.

ADOPTED: December 15, 2004
Patricia A. King
Chair

ATTEST: 
Karyn M. Gilvarg
Executive Director