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## STAFF REPORT

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**TO:** CITY OF STAMFORD PLANNING BOARD  
**FROM:** DAVID W. WOODS, PhD, AICP, PRINCIPAL PLANNER, VINEETA MATHUR, AICP, ASSOCIATE PLANNER  
**SUBJECT:** ZB APPLICATION #217-01 - HIGH RIDGE REAL ESTATE OWNER, LLC  
**ADDRESS:** 0 HIGH RIDGE PARK ROAD  
**DATE:** August 4, 2017

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**MASTER PLAN:** CATEGORY NO. 8: Mixed Use – Campus  
**ZONE:** C-D

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### Highlights

The applicant, High Ridge Real Estate Owner, LLC (HRREO) is seeking to add a definition for Gymnasium or Physical Culture Establishment to Section 3 of the Zoning Regulations and modify Section BBB-C-D Designed Commercial District to add this use to the list of permitted uses in this District. This would allow the applicant to apply to develop a health and fitness center within High Ridge Office Park, after demolishing an existing, approximately 86,500 sq.ft. vacant office building. **Please note:** Currently, the applicant is seeking a text change only. The plans presented for this application are illustrative. Per the existing Zoning Regulations and proposed text amendment, the applicant has to request approval for site and architectural plans and special exception approval in a separate application that requires review and by the Planning and Zoning Boards.

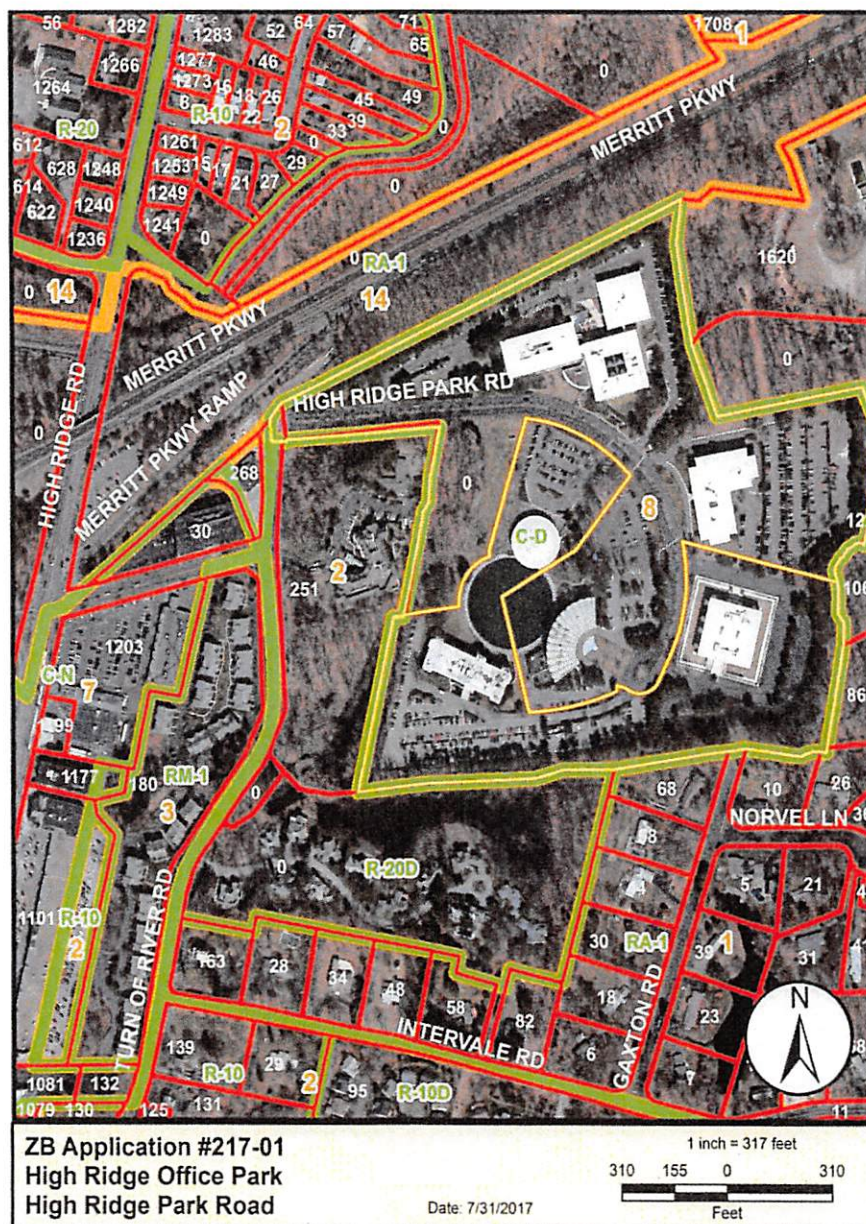
### Existing conditions

The proposed text change application applies to all C-D zoned properties. One of these properties is owned by the applicant and known as High Ridge Office Park (the "Property"). It is comprised of two (2) legal parcels totaling approximately 38.8 acres, located just south of the Merritt Parkway between High Ridge Road and Newfield Avenue. The site has one entrance which can be accessed through Turn of River Road and Buxton Farm Road, the latter connecting to High Ridge Road just south of Exit 35 of the Merritt Parkway. The area to the west of the office park is occupied by 'Sunrise of Stamford' assisted living facility. The area south of the site contains a cluster of single family residences named 'Sterling Lake' located in the R-20 designed district. The area to the north east of High Ridge Park is occupied by the Italian Center and single family homes on Newfield Avenue in the RA-1 zoning district. HRREO is the current

owner of the office park which was originally built in the 1970s and consists of six office buildings. A circular reflecting pool is located at the center of the office park. HRREO is now engaged in lease negotiations with Life Time to facilitate a new Life Time facility on the Property which would replace Building 3.

### Text Amendments

The proposed text amendment to the C-D district would add "Gymnasium or Physical Culture Establishments" to the list of permitted uses in this Districts to allow adaptive reuse of office parks with this use under certain conditions. It would also incorporate standards for environmentally sensitive design and assure that existing non conformances are not increased.





### Issues for consideration

**A. Compatibility with the Stamford Master Plan** (Master Plan Category 8, Mixed Use – Campus). The proposed text amendment would facilitate reuse and/or redevelopment within an office park in accordance with the Master Plan. Office parks have remained stagnant and underutilized. The Master Plan recommends the redevelopment of these sites with a low intensity mix of uses if they retain a landscaped ‘campus’ setting, in tune with existing buildings on the site and the surrounding area.

The Master Plan establishes the following four criteria for the adaptive reuse of existing office parks that need to be considered by the Board:

**(1) *Compatibility with adjacent uses and residential areas***

The proposed health and fitness facility is compatible, both with the office uses on the site and with the surrounding residential uses. Per Article II Section AA 1.3 h, clubs, including swim, tennis and other clubs allowing for physical activity are, by Special Exception, permitted even in the lowest density districts, as they provide an amenity to residents. However, appropriate measures must be taken, e.g., by requiring buffers, location of outdoor facilities away from neighbors and enclosure of uses to ensure residential neighbors are properly protected.

**(2) *Superior design including landscape design to buffer this use from adjacent residential uses***

The text changes proposed would allow the impervious coverage to increase from 40% currently allowed in the C-D district to 50%. The current impervious surface on the HRREO site is legally nonconforming today at approximately 50%. Efforts should be made to limit impervious surfaces more aggressively than proposed to best protect open space and the campus-like setting and to implement Low Impact Development principles (LID), as required by State and Federal regulations. Upon submittal of the site and architectural plans, staff recommends that the applicant provide a breakdown of the impervious coverage between the amount that currently exists and what is proposed. Other sustainability measures which improve the overall drainage, water quality and landscape design of the site should be utilized to maintain the pervious surface on site.

**(3) *Superior traffic management***

The applicant has produced a *Traffic Access and Impact Study* by Frederick P. Clark Associates, which indicates a slight increase on Saturday and an actual decrease in traffic during weekday peak periods for the proposed health and fitness use when compared to a viable office use.

The consultant used as an alternative the potential reuse of the existing building for medical office, one of the few viable as-of-right uses, and found that the permitted medical office use would have a greater traffic impact during peak hours than the Life Time use. **Thus, this**

application meets the requirement that the new use *results* in “no net increase in traffic impact compared with office buildings.”

**(4) *Compliance with the goal of directing most commercial development to Downtown,***

The proposed “Gymnasium or Physical Culture Establishment” use is a service-based use meant to complement other residential and commercial uses. Allowing this use to replace existing office space within the C-D zone would actually result in a net decrease in commercial development outside of the Downtown.

**(5) *Compliance with design guidelines.***

The current application only requests text change approval. A detailed design review will be warranted at the time site and architectural plan and special exception applications are made. The proposed text amendment should better facilitate good design standards by incorporating site and architectural design criteria including compatibility with the suburban context and development of a cohesive relationship among buildings. Entrances should be designed to facilitating pedestrian and vehicular connections within the park; the buildings should be designed to create an attractive environment at the pedestrian scale. All new parking structures should be enclosed and integrated into the development behind active uses. Loading and service areas should be required to be screened from pedestrian views by landscaping.

**B. Sustainable development**

In order to achieve the superior design the Master Plan requires for the adaptive reuse of office parks, staff recommends that the applicant incorporate sustainability measures within the proposed text to enhance the natural features of the site, to the maximum extent possible. Staff recommends that these measure should include consolidation of parking areas to minimize the impervious coverage on site and encouragement of bike and transit use through provision of visible and easily accessible bike racks and shuttle service. The proposed buildings should be built to high sustainability standards in terms of energy efficiency, green infrastructure (green roofs, water harvesting) and use of sustainable building and landscaping materials.

**REFERRAL COMMENTS**

**Director of Economic Development:** see letter from Thomas Madden, AICP

**HPAC:** see letter from Lynn Drobbin, Chair

### **STAFF COMMENTS**

Development of Stamford's Office Parks has been languishing and they are an underutilized asset for both their owners and the City. This is why the Campus Mixed-Use category was included in the Master Plan. However, because of their context in low density areas and the potential significant impacts, redevelopment of this site needs to be carefully planned.

**Given that this application is for text changes only and is consistent with the purpose of Category 8 of the Master Plan, staff recommends approval.**