



City of Stamford Planning Board

STAFF REPORT

TO: CITY OF STAMFORD PLANNING BOARD
FROM: DAVID W. WOODS, PhD, AICP, DEPUTY DIRECTOR OF PLANNING
SUBJECT: MP-432 & MP-433: APPLICATION FOR AMENDMENTS OF THE STAMFORD MASTER PLAN MAP - PACIFIC STREET, WOODLAND AVENUE, ATLANTIC STREET & WALTER WHEELER DRIVE
DATE: November 21, 2018; December 14, 2018 **[REVISED]**

EXISTING MASTER PLAN: MP Category 4 (Residential – Medium Density Multifamily), MP Category 6 (Commercial Neighborhood), and MP Category 9 (Urban Mixed-Use)

PROPOSED MASTER PLAN: MP Category 5 (Residential – High-density Multifamily), MP Category 9 (Urban Mixed-Use) and MP Category 11 (Downtown)

INTRODUCTION

Building and Land Technologies (BLT) bought a large portion of the block bound by Woodland Avenue, Atlantic Street, Pacific Street and Walter Wheeler Drive, the site that was formerly the B&S Carting Site. This is the second Master Plan Amendment request brought forth by BLT for their portion of this block. The remaining parcels on the block the Land Use Bureau proposed amending from MP Category 6 to MP Category 5, and MP Category 4 to MP Category 9. **Please note: at the Public Hearing on November 27, 2018 Robert Katchko, owner of lot at 43 Woodland Avenue, requested to be removed from the Master Plan Amendment; thus, the Board will remove this parcel from further consideration.**

At its June 27, 2017 Public Hearing, the applicant presented their earlier request asking the Planning Board to amend the underlying Master Plan Category for two contiguous parcels in the South End from MP Category 4: Residential - Medium Density Multifamily to MP Category 9: Urban Mixed-Use. The first change requested was for a 4.52 acre parcel from MP Category 4: Residential - Medium Density to MP Category 9: Urban Mixed-Use. The second area, encompassing a 0.15 acre parcel, was requested to be changed from MP Category 6: Commercial - Neighborhood Business to MP Category 9: Urban Mixed-Use. However, the key issue for the Planning Board was that it was not clear what was being proposed by BLT nor what the Zoning regulations should be. (See below for further discussion regarding the four issues)

BLT, in working with the LUB staff, proposed the R-HD Multifamily High-Density District (RH-D) to set aside areas which have been and may be developed predominantly for transit-oriented, high-density high-rise dwellings within the appropriate Master Plan Categories 5 (High-Density Multifamily), 9 (Urban Mixed-Use) and 11 (Downtown). What was proposed by BLT was designed to allow BLT to maximize the development potential of this site, and as such, the LUB staff has some reservations with some of the provisions proposed. Refer to the companion Staff Report for discussion and recommendation on the existing R-HD Multifamily High-Density District text as proposed by BLT.

Subject Area:

The subject area encompasses the block bound by Woodland Avenue, Atlantic Street, Pacific Street and Walter Wheeler Drive. The block is located immediately north of Commons Park in Harbor Point. Roughly a quarter of the block in the southeast corner adjacent to Harbor Point is currently already under Master Plan Category 9: Urban Mixed-Use. The remainder of the block is under Master Plan Category 4: Residential - Medium Density Multifamily with a small portion on the northeast corner



under Category 6: Commercial - Neighborhood Business.

#MP-432

The Strand/BRC Group LLC, 5-9 Woodland LLC, Woodland Pacific LLC and Walter Wheeler Drive SPE LLC is seeking to amend the City of Stamford Master Plan Map to change a portion of properties currently located in MP Category 4 (Residential - Medium Density Multifamily), MP Category 6 (Commercial - Neighborhood) and MP Category 9 (Urban Mixed-Use) to MP Category 5 (Residential - High-Density Multifamily) and MP Category 9 (Urban Mixed-Use). The subject properties are commonly known as 707 Pacific Street; 5, 9, 17, 21, 23, 25, 29, 39 and 41 Woodland Avenue; 796 Atlantic Street and portions of Parcels C1 and C2 in the Harbor Point Planned Community. Refer to the attached application and to the Map below labeled Area I, II, III, IV and V:

Area I - Land to be changed from Category 4 to Category 9:

Property fronting on the south side of Woodland Avenue, known as 5, 9, 17, 21, 23, 25, 29, 39 and 41 Woodland Avenue

Property fronting on the east side of Atlantic Street, known as 0, 796 Atlantic Street and portions of Parcels C1 and C2 in the Harbor Point Planned Community

Area II - Land to be changed from Category 6 to Category 9:

Portion (+/-2,098 SF or .05 acres) of the Property adjacent to the east side of Pacific Street, known as 707 Pacific Street

Area III - Land to be changed from Category 6 to Category 5:

Portion (45 feet) of the Property adjacent to the east side of Pacific Street, known as 707 Pacific Street

Area IV - Land to be changed from Category 4 to Category 5:

Portion (14,156 SF or approximately .33 acres) of the Property adjacent to the east side of Pacific Street, known as Unit C2 of Walter Wheeler Drive, LLC and Woodland Pacific, LLC

Area V - Land to be changed from Category 9 to Category 5:

Portion (13,274 SF or approximately .30 acres) of the Property adjacent to the east side of Pacific Street, known as Unit C2 of Walter Wheeler Drive, LLC and Woodland Pacific, LLC

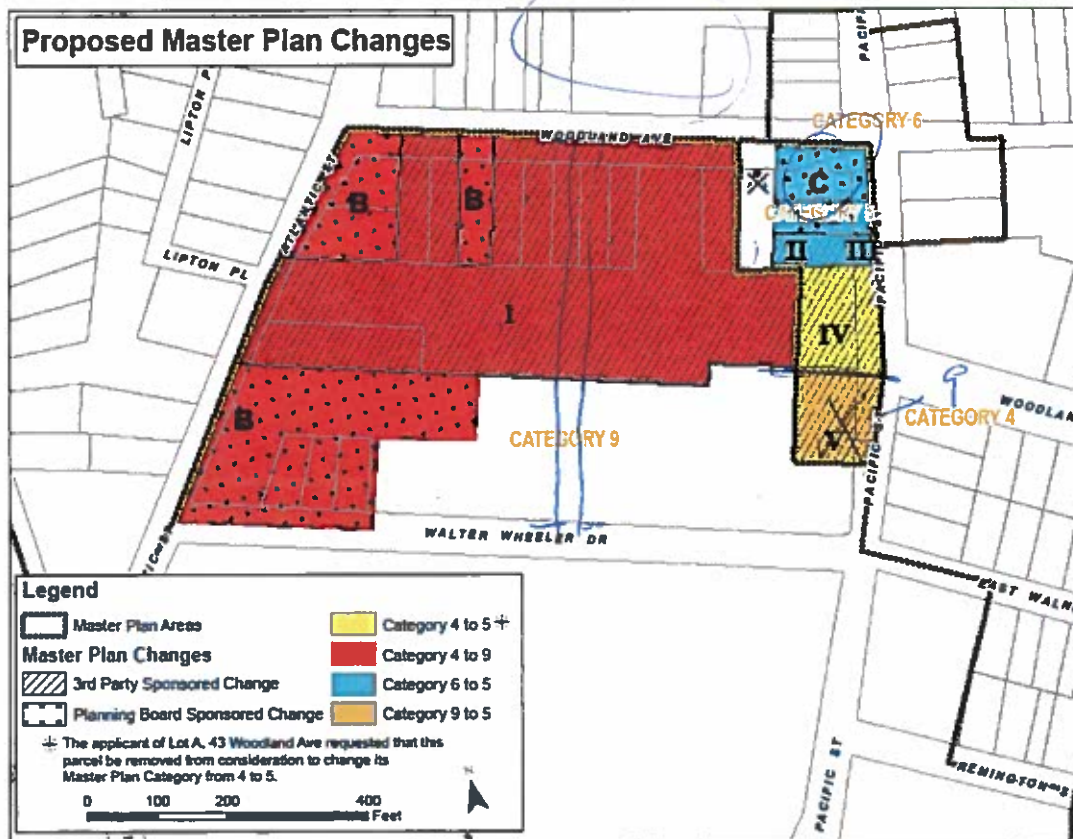
#MP-433

The Stamford Planning Board has filed an application to amend the City of Stamford Master Plan Map to change a portion of properties currently located in MP Category 4 (Residential - Medium Density Multifamily), MP Category 6 (Commercial - Neighborhood) and MP Category 9 (Urban Mixed-Use) to MP Category 5 (Residential - High-Density Multifamily) and MP Category 9 (Urban Mixed-Use). The subject properties are commonly known as 701 and 705 Pacific Street; 13 and 43 Woodland Avenue; 0, 784 and 804 Atlantic Street and 12, 18 and 20 Walter Wheeler Drive. Refer to the attached application and to the Map below labeled Area A, B & C.

The areas that are subject to the change are further described as follows:

Area A - Land to be changed from Category 4 to Category 5: WITHDRAWN AT THE REQUEST OF THE OWNER

Property fronting on the south side of Woodland Avenue, known as 43 Woodland Avenue



Area B - Land to be changed from Category 4 to Category 9:

Property fronting on the south side of Woodland Avenue, known as 13 Woodland Avenue

Property fronting on the east side of Atlantic Street, known as 0, 784 & 804 Atlantic Street

Property fronting on the north side of Walter Wheeler Drive, known as 12, 18 & 20 Walter Wheeler Drive

Area C - Land to be changed from Category 6 to Category 9

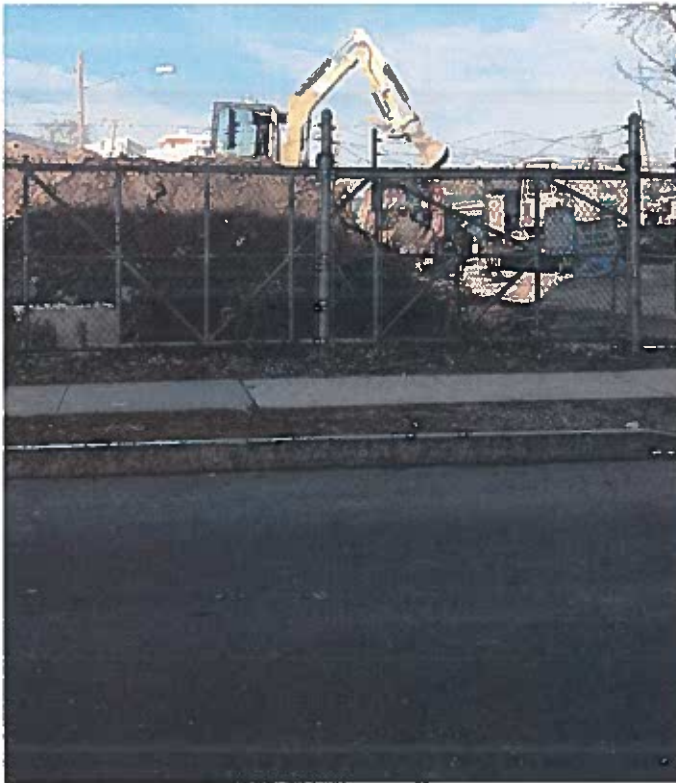
Property fronting on the east side of Pacific Street, known as 701 & 705 Pacific Street



BACKGROUND:

1. Existing Conditions:

- a) The area proposed for Master Plan Category Amendment by the applicant is currently vacant. It was formerly occupied by a garbage carting operation (B&S Carting). Prior to the carting operation, the site was occupied by Excelsior Hardware (lock manufacturing). The industrial uses of the site resulted in the contamination of the soil, which will require significant remediation. For over fifty years, residents of the South End advocated for both of these heavy industrial uses to be moved elsewhere in the City outside of the South End.



- b) The remainder of the block includes a total of nine multifamily buildings on portions of Woodland Avenue, Walter Wheeler Drive and Atlantic Street. Three of these residential buildings were converted from single-family to multifamily. The two multifamily residences on the corner of Woodland Avenue and Pacific Street have ground floor neighborhood retail uses including a bodega, deli and a beauty salon. Industrial uses on the site include an auto body shop at the corner of Atlantic Street and Woodland Avenue and an air-

conditioning business on Atlantic Street, north of Walter Wheeler Drive.

- c) The immediate neighborhood consists of a variety of uses including neighborhood retail, multifamily, industrial and the City-owned Lathon Wider Community Center. The zoning and Master Plan designations are reflective of this existing cacophony of uses (including the past use as a garbage collection facility). In order to achieve the long-standing, shared objective of revitalizing this important block in the South End, these designations must be modified to encourage and enable the desired type and scale of development. The proposed building for the eastern portion of the site steps down in height from the Harbor Point development approaching the Lathon Wider Community Center from the south.



- d) **Current Use:** The majority of the parcel is currently vacant and undergoing environmental remediation. A portion of the southwestern portion of the site within the existing SRD-S GDP is currently improved as a neighborhood dog park. During the Planning Board's deliberations on the 2015 Master Plan, the Board - as a place holder - designated the majority of this block as Master Plan Category 4: Residential - Medium Density Multifamily. The Board's reasoning was to designate that within ten years the Board anticipated that B&S Carting (see site below showing B&S Carting in full operation) would be converted to residential uses, and the Board wanted a say as to what level of development was approved, which would be required for any development proposal (as in this case) that wanted to develop at a higher density than allowed in MP Category 4 - 29 units per acre or 44 units per acre, if solely for the elderly. Since 2015, BLT acquired the parcel that was B&S Carting, and demolished the building, as well as mostly cleaned up what was a brownfield site. (Still in environmental remediation.)

e) At its June 27, 2017 Public Hearing, the applicant presented their earlier request asking the Planning Board to amend the underlying Master Plan Category for two contiguous parcels in the South End from MP Category 4: Residential - Medium Density Multifamily to MP Category 9: Urban Mixed-Use. The first change requested was for a 4.52 acre parcel from MP Category 4: Residential - Medium Density to MP Category 9: Urban Mixed-Use. The second area, encompassing a 0.15 acre parcel, was requested to be changed from MP Category 6: Commercial - Neighborhood Business to MP Category 9: Urban Mixed-Use. Four areas of concern were raised by the Planning Board at that time, which is why the applicant withdrew the request after the Planning Board closed the Public Hearing:

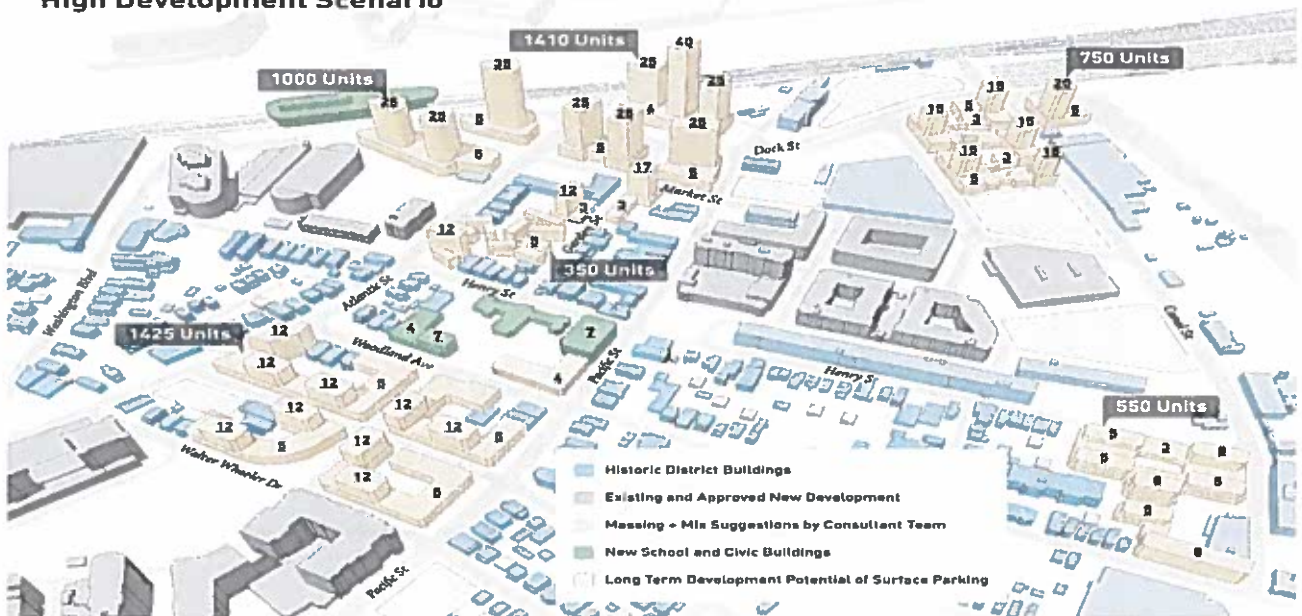
a) Since the South End Neighborhood Study was just commencing shouldn't the Planning Board allow the consultant team time to complete their study, and to provide their recommendations prior to amending the Master Plan?

Staff Comment: The Collective for Community, Culture and Environment (CCCE) also known as The Team just finished its study and recommends the high growth scenario including proposing 1,425 units, with a step down toward Pacific Street. In other words, the South End Study confirms that high-density residential is the best land use for this parcel with higher densities as the South End is developed adjacent to the Stamford Transportation Center.

**SUMMARY OF REVELANT PROPOSED ZONING FOR THE B&S CARTING SITE:
MEDIUM-HIGH-DENSITY RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT**

- Rezone the General Industrial District (M-G) and Residential District (R-MF) to a new or modified High-Density Residential District to permit residential development at a scale and density that bridges the high-density high-rise developments in Harbor Point (SRD-S) and the surrounding low-rise residential neighborhood.
- Permit increased density with the Transfer of Development Rights from historically significant buildings in Area E and other locations.
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- Extend Woodland Place from Pacific Street to Atlantic Street.

High Development Scenario



b) Is Master Plan Category 9 the right category for these parcels or is Master Plan Category 5 more appropriate?

Staff Comment: After the conclusion of the June 27, 2017 Public Hearing, the applicant met numerous times with staff, the consultants, and the South End NRZ to review and consider different options in which the applicant would be able to build at a greater density than 29 units per acre, and the neighboring residents would not have a multi-story tower right on Pacific Street. With these goals in mind, staff recommended that the applicant access proposing both MP Category 9: Urban Mixed-Use, which purpose is to “encourage redevelopment and to provide an orderly transition from the more-intensive Downtown area (Category #11) to adjoining neighborhoods and to provide a mix of uses complementary to and supportive of the Downtown. Intended is a full array of uses including high-density residential uses as the primary use in this category, support including a dynamic mix of neighborhood retail and service uses, office, and recreational uses serviced by mass transportation and quality streetscapes that enhance connections between the Downtown and outlying neighborhoods of the City”; and Master Plan Category 5: Residential - Medium Density Multifamily, which is intended to “provide for and protect existing high-density multifamily development in areas convenient to shopping, mass transit and park and recreation facilities. New development can be accommodated in a variety of structures (by type and scale), and include such other compatible uses (e.g., limited ground floor commercial, schools, hospitals, houses of worship, etc.) as may be permitted by Special Exception being in general harmony with and supportive of such multifamily neighborhoods.” As a result, the applicant is proposing a more nuanced request to amend the larger portion of the parcel to MP Category 9: Urban Mixed-Use, and at the same time amend the Pacific Street side of the parcel to MP Category 5: High-Density Multifamily to designate this area as residential development that is considerably less dense than the rest of their proposal.

c) What exactly was being proposed for the parcel if the Planning Board approved the Master Plan Amendment to MP Category 9?

Staff Comment: Attached is the revised Preliminary Proposed Development Plan for this area which, if the Planning Board approves, the applicant and LUB staff will request to amend the Master Plan. The new development, enabled by the requested map and regulation changes, will result in a pedestrian boulevard linking Commons Park to the Lathon Wider Community Center and Yale & Towne. The applicant’s proposal to build the 540-unit building is the fifth (5th) iteration of the design and is reflective of a sixteen (16) month dialogue between the Applicant, Land Use Bureau staff, the Planning Board and community stakeholders. Important features of the most recent redesign include:

- *Orienting the towers away from Pacific Street, such that the towers would face inward towards the Commons Park South and Walter Wheeler Drive.*
- *Providing five (5) stories of residential housing along Pacific Street. This provides “eyes on the street” as requested by the South End NRZ and a lower scale along Pacific Street as requested by the Land Use Bureau*



- *Creating open and attractive streetscapes with enhanced landscaping, lighting and pedestrian paths. On-street parking is also being added on the southern portion of Pacific Street and along the South Commons Road extension.*
- *Applicant was requested to provide a minimum distance between towers of 100 ft. Applicant is providing 136 ft. of separation distance which preserves the view corridor and allows light to flow through the taller portions of the building.*
- *The street-level building design along Walter Wheeler Drive was reworked to include residential units and reduce the amount of requisite inactive space.*
- *All BMR units are to be provided on-site.*



The original proposal had shown the tallest building placed on the corner of Walter Wheeler Drive and Pacific Street; however, staff, in working through what could be proposed, strongly suggested the applicant relocate the 22-story tower some distance from Pacific Street and re-orient the building to face Commons Park, thereby, connecting this parcel to the rest of the Harbor Point community.

- d) **If the Board was going to amend the Master Plan shouldn't the Planning Board assess the whole block [Atlantic Street, Pacific Street, Walter Wheeler Drive and Woodlawn Avenue] and not just the parcels that the applicant now owns?**

Staff Comment: Actually, this suggestion was first raised by Marty Levine and the DSSD at the June 27, 2017 Public Hearing and staff concurred, which is why the LUB is proposing that if the Planning Board approves the applicant's request to amend the Master Plan categories, the Board also amend the remaining three parcels as suggested by staff.



2. Density, Height and Design:

- a) The applicant is proposing to build at a higher density on the Pacific Street and the Walter Wheeler Drive section of their acquired holdings away from the Atlantic Street side of this parcel. This is deliberate for the following reasons:
 - The southwest section of Atlantic Street and Walter Wheeler has three multifamily houses and Holy Name Catholic Church, which creates many issues in re-building this parcel; and

3. Proposed New Zoning Text R-HD Multifamily District, High- Density

Over the last eighteen months, staff has been working on developing a new Zoning District 4-AA-15 R-HD Multifamily District, High-Density [See Attached Staff Report on the R-HD Text Change and requested Map Change].

The purpose of the Multifamily High- Density District (RH-D) is to set aside areas, which have been and may be developed predominantly for transit-oriented, high-density high-rise dwellings within the appropriate Master Plan Categories 5 (High-Density Multifamily), 9 (Urban Mixed-Use) and 11 (Downtown). It is intended that development in these districts provide an attractive living environment and include open space for the use and enjoyment of tenants as well as the public. Where appropriate, neighborhood retail and other services are also encouraged. The regulations are designed to ensure that the highest intensity uses have a lot of area adequate to meet the parking and open space requirements of these regulations.

Members of both the Planning Board and Zoning Board have rightfully expressed frustration at the multiple sections in the Zoning Ordinance governing how to develop high-density multifamily developments with authorized uses, building regulations, open space requirements, parking, BMR requirements, site and architectural design, application and review procedures are all separate sections of the Zoning Code. This proposed new zoning text places all of these requirements in one location.

The applicant contends that this proposed development will be consistent with the *balance of the high-quality, new construction residential buildings* within the Harbor Point development immediately to the south and maintains sensitivity to the *scale of the existing neighborhood* on the eastern and northern portion of the site. In short, approving this proposal will further the vision of the Master Plan and the continued revitalization of the South End, providing a transit-oriented development, on-site affordable housing and environmental remediation of a long-contaminated brownfield site.

Staff Recommendation #MP-432 & #MP-433:

At the conclusion of the November 27, 2018 Public Hearing, the Planning Board closed the Public Hearing and set the January 2, 2019 meeting to decide on the requested Master Plan amendments

From a planning perspective, the Planning Board has two options, and Staff recommends Option #1 below:

Option #1: Adopt the Master Plan amendments, minus 43 Woodland Avenue, as proposed by the applicant and LUB.

Option #2: Deny the Master Plan amendments, which from a planning perspective, would not allow development at the appropriate density on this site.

Option #3: Adopt under category 5!

- The existing portion of this parcel that is currently designated MP Category 9 (refer to map above) is included in the current General Development Plan (GDP) for Harbor Point in their calculations of 50 units per acre for the development including Commons Park. One of the requests by the applicant, if the Planning Board approves this amendment, will be to amend the existing GDP and move the acreage that is currently part of the GDP to the west side toward Atlantic Street (any future development proposals in this area would thus be limited to meet the 50-unit per acre limitation).
- b) From staff's perspective, *height* per se is not as problematic an issue as bulk, setback, shadows, quality design, open space and relationship to other buildings inside the development as well as *compatibility with adjacent residential areas*. Thus, the 22-story building needs to be assessed as to its location with other buildings on-site and in relationship with the other buildings as part of Harbor Point, as well as potential shadows on neighboring properties, and the like.
- c) What the applicant has proposed is a much improved design over the original more generic designed buildings; however, from staff's perspective there are many improvements that are cost effective that can and should be done if this application gets this far. If the Planning Board approves the requested amendments to the Master Plan for this large parcel in the South End, the Board will need to consider whether the proposed final design meets the criteria of Master Plan Category 9:

Throughout the Urban Mixed-Use area, development *should meet superior standards of design* and consider such factors as: (1) *compatibility with adjacent residential areas*, (2) extensive planning and outreach directed or overseen by the Land Use Bureau (3) preference that the uses will not lead to a net decrease in habitable affordable housing (4) safe and efficient movement by pedestrians and bicyclists, (5) proximity to mass transit, (6) determination that the scale and nature of the proposed uses are compatible with available traffic capacities and public infrastructure system, (7) *final approval of architectural and site plans and requested uses by the Zoning Board*, and (8) compliance with the goal of directing regional commercial development to the Downtown.

While the criteria listed above designates the Zoning Board with the final approval of architectural and site plan requests, it is in the purview of the Planning Board to recommend whether the final architectural design and site plan does indeed meet the criteria of *"superior standards of design,"* and if in the opinion of the Planning Board any application fails that standard then to recommend denial of the application as presented.

This is why the Zoning Board is requiring the applicant to pay for an outside architectural review as part of the On-Call Professional Services program established by the Board of Representatives. Finally, given the extra costs that went into cleaning up this site for development, the applicant argues that it is appropriate to build at a higher density here; it is up to the Zoning Board upon the referral of the Planning Board to decide.

