

From: [Blessing, Ralph](#)
To: [Pia Jr., Charles](#); [de la Cruz, Virgil](#)
Cc: [Rosenson, Valerie](#)
Subject: Petition to Reject MAster Plan Amendments 432 and 433
Date: Monday, March 04, 2019 12:49:43 PM

Dear Co-Chairs Pia and de la Cruz,

Thank you for allowing Dr. Woods and me the opportunity to present the Planning Board's reasons in support of its decisions in the above-referenced matters at the Committee's February 27, 2019, meeting. As the meeting was long and filled with passionate statements from all sides, I am providing the following information in the hope of helping the Committee understand the context of some of the comments and other information presented.

Background and Policy Reasons for Category 4 designation

In 2014, the Planning Board intentionally re-categorized the B&S Carting property from Category 9 to Category 4, a "low" Master Plan category; because the Board wanted to be able to influence future development. At the Planning Board's November 27, 2018, public hearing on the proposed amendments (starting at time stamp 1:38) Dr. Woods reminded the Planning Board of the Master Plan Steering Committee's discussions in 2014 with the City's planning staff and consultants regarding the South End. One of the critical 2002 Master Plan goals, to "relocate the B&S Carting use and redevelop that site with high density housing," had not come to fruition. The purpose of this goal was to make the owner of B&S Carting aware that the City and the NRZ wanted not only residential use on the site in the future, but also to ensure that re-categorization would not make it prohibitively expensive for a residential developer to acquire the site, as the property requires significant environmental remediation. During the Planning Board's January 2, 2019 deliberations on the proposed amendments, the Planning Board's Chair reiterated that the property's Master Plan Category 4 designation was always intended to be a "placeholder" with a "promissory note" until more development details were available.

Stakeholder Involvement

The Planning Board "prepare[s], adopt[s] and amend[s]" the Master Plan, pursuant to Charter Sec. C6-30-1. However, the NRZ and other neighborhood groups and stakeholders have important perspectives that the Planning Board must take into account in making planning decisions. The Land Use Bureau understands the serious and vital role of stakeholders and the need for consultation. It listens to, and takes into account their input. This is why the South End Neighborhood and Preservation Study was prepared, which included seven public meetings and additional interviews with stakeholders. The proposed Master Plan amendments #432 and 433, follow the recommendations of the Study, and in addition, the Bureau met with neighborhood residents and gave presentations on multiple occasions.

Below Market Rate Housing Discussion

During the Land Use-Urban Redevelopment Committee's meeting, some members

expressed the view that BMR units are too expensive and that increasing density will not address the issue. The issue also arose at the Planning Board's November 27 meeting. However, because the number of BMR units is a zoning consideration, the Planning Board's Vice-Chair, Jay Tepper, reminded the Board that "we should not be making this decision on the number of BMR's we could get" and re-directed the discussion to the proposed Master Plan amendments.

Traffic Concerns in the South End

At the Land Use-Urban Redevelopment Committee's meeting, a comment was made that the South End Study established that with high growth, traffic capacity in the South End would increase to 180%, thereby significantly and adversely impacting congestion. The Study elaborates on page 38 that the left turn from Washington Blvd onto I 95 and northbound through traffic and northbound right turns from Canals St onto South State St could reach up to 180% capacity under the high growth scenario but concludes that "other movements at the five key intersections would still provide an acceptable level of service in both growth scenarios." Moreover, the study did not take into account the following mitigation measures:

- Prioritizing changes to signal timing
- Expected shifts in travel behavior (*i.e.*, fewer people using cars when transit-oriented strategies are used)
- Planned and considered infrastructure improvements, such as the ongoing widening of Atlantic Street Bridge, the improvements in Waterside which would improve access via Pulaski Street and are scheduled to begin this year, and the possible widening of Station Place and other area streets.

These changes anticipate that traffic would be acceptable for all traffic movements at all major intersections in the South End.

Consultation of HPAC

The petitioners quoted an email dated December 5, 2018, from then Chair of the Historic Preservation Advisory Commission (HPAC), Lynn Drobbin, in which HPAC requested to review proposed amendments #432 and 433. Under City Code Section 27-8, "All applications for development or demolition in any local, State, or National historic preservation district [such as the South End Historic District], of any historic site, or of any scenic, historic or rural road within the City of Stamford shall be referred to the [Historic Preservation Advisory] Commission for its review." A Master Plan change is not an application for development, and therefore is not subject to HAPC review.

As I explained to the Land Use Committee on February 27, Land Use Bureau staff contacted HPAC after receipt of Ms. Drobbin's email to clarify this issue. We explained and confirmed at that time that any application that would allow for development on the site, such as a Zoning Map or Text change or an application for Site Plan Review would be referred to HPAC. As a courtesy, the Land Use Bureau will in the future also send Master Plan Amendments to HPAC for informational purposes only, not as part of a formal review as this is not within the purview of the Commission.

“Transient Neighborhood”

At the Land Use-Urban Redevelopment Committee meeting, a comment was made that new development in the South End was turning it into a “transient neighborhood” dominated by renters. According to the 2000 Census, which reflects a point in time well before redevelopment on a large scale began in the South End, 799 (or 84%) of 953 units in the South End were renter-occupied. The South End was and is a neighborhood of renters and the fact that a dwelling is rented does not make it “transient.”

Transit Oriented Development District

It was suggested that the B&S Carting site was not in a Transit Oriented Development Area. The City of Stamford, CT Transit Oriented Development Technical Assistance Study, prepared by Smart Growth America, concluded that “Virtually any location in the South End is within walking distance of the STC, making the South End a prime transit-oriented development location” (p. 3) The B+S Carting Site is located less than .5 miles from the Transit Center making it an excellent location for transit-oriented development. Consequently, the South End Study proposes 1,130 units for the affected by the Master Plan change (or about 105 Dwelling units per acre) in the Moderate Development Scenario and 1,425 units in the High Development Scenario (or about 132 units per acre)

Thank you for considering the information provided above. I will attend the Committee’s special meeting on March 4 and am happy to provide additional explanations or information at that time.

Ralph Blessing

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