

**MINUTES OF THE PLANNING AND ZONING POCD SUBCOMMITTEE SPECIAL PUBLIC FORUM HELD  
Wednesday, May 26, 2021 AT 6:30 P.M.**

**Call to Order** was at 6:30 pm.

**Roll Call:** J. Castignoli, J. Kader, P. Kearney, J. Mortimer, J. Quish, J. Griffith, D. Sulkis, M. Greene

**Other board members attending as citizens:** N. Austin, M. Zahariades

**Invited guests:** John Knuff, Steven Levin, Jon Meshel, Scott Pollack

Topic for discussion: Shopping Center Design District (SCD) Corridor Design District

**Chairman Quish** advised the board that this meeting was informational as a part of revisioning The Post.

**Mr. Levin** (founder and CEO of mall owner Centennial) thanked the participants for attending and confirmed that the presentation was available online to the public. He underscored that his team's effort to reimagine the mall came against the backdrop of a substantial investment in the community by Centennial. He said that reinventing major mall projects was being driven by the idea that going shopping was no longer dominant form of entertainment and the goal was to create a new project that is part of and welcoming to the community. He reminded the group that The Post is the largest mall in CT and that it, along with all the others, need to change. He said that few malls will match what The Post will do because such conversions are costly and time consuming. He reviewed similar conversion projects being done or recently completed by his company across the country. He described Phase 1, pertaining to the old Sears parcel, which is vacant, saying it would be home to a new proposed community-based plaza situated between residential buildings totaling about 300 units. He said the proposal was revised based on community objections raised at the original proposal in September of 2020. He said the project was integrated with community needs as well as for the residential units. He said demand for various uses such as office or medical would be created when the area becomes a destination where people want to live and work and that the 7-million-dollar plaza would drive that demand. He said the plaza was added to the plan to demonstrate to the community that Centennial's vision extends beyond phase 1; the plaza adding something new in Milford with outdoor dining, live music, art venues and family-friendly events—the plaza creates demand for Phase 2. He stressed that this phased strategy is already being deployed in other communities. He said Phase 2 will take down the wing of the mall now extending from the old Sears to the Macy's/Boscov area. He reiterated that the mall is too big to fill with tenants, but that Phase 2 will make The Post an 18-hour-a-day destination. He estimated Phase 1 as a 1-to-3- year project, and Phase 2, will run 3-10 years. He said Centennial is a best-in-class developer and listed 5 other communities where they are doing this same work as evidence of his claim. He promised to work with the community based on its heritage and culture. He stressed that other stores would be leaving the Post mall and that the traditional model of malls is fast disappearing. He offered to return to Milford to hold more public conversations.

**Chairman Quish** thanked Mr. Levin for his dedication and opened the meeting to public comment.

**Donna Dutko**, 236 Buckingham Avenue, said she loved new conceptual site plan with more of a residential community look, but suggested an aesthetic more closely resembling that of the newly completed MetroStar apartments at 188 Cherry Street with its Cape Cod/New England style.

**Mr. Levin** said he greatly appreciated the comment and stressed that the renderings aren't representative of what will be built. He agreed that a generic building doesn't belong in Milford. He promised to look at the building she referenced. He noted that all investment for the project is coming from Centennial rather than a municipal partnership, yet he still wants to address as many things as he can practically incorporate to make it a project for the community to embrace.

**Kathleen Fazio**, a Stamford real estate broker, said she had been following the Milford Post redevelopment efforts. She said she rarely goes to a mall but outlined several trends in real estate right now. She said there had been a perception at the start of the pandemic that office space leasing would follow the NYC residential outflow, but that trend has failed to materialize and the office market in Connecticut still struggles. She said that in her professional opinion, the best way to right-size the Post mall is to activate the space with people. She said she met with the owners of the Stamford mall as they struggled to figure out what to do with that space but there is no real plan. She agreed that a plaza is what is needed, rather than creating large office complexes full of Class-A space that can't be rented. She said that creating a huge plaza is a promising way to activate the area again. She reiterated remarks made in earlier POCD sessions that there are not enough retailers to lease big box space, so it is typically being converted to warehouse space. She said she recently represented the largest office space in Danbury consisting of some 1 million-plus square feet as it was converted to residential, medical office, and other uses. She said the conversion incorporated a plaza with restaurants that brought people into the space.

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**Chairman Quish** asked if others from the community wished to speak as he was hoping for more community input. With no further comments offered, he asked that the board members present would share their thoughts.

**Mr. Mortimer** said he too had hoped more people would participate, but maybe it was an indication that the community saw value in the proposal. He said he personally thinks it is a good proposal although local touches are critical to make it look like Milford.

**Mr. Kader** said he wants the downtown to be protected from the type of diversion experienced in the 1970s and raised concerns about the aesthetics. **Mr. Levin** noted that the mall pays taxes to the city based on its at its current scale and that high vacancy rates are a threat to that contribution. He said that he doesn't want to build anything not consistent with the Milford community aesthetic. He said a reimagined mall will define Milford better than what sits there today. **Mr. Kader** remarked that the board is sometimes criticized for letting Milford change and that Milford has become a very desirable place to live. **Mr. Levin** said the goal is to convert something that doesn't work to something that works, tearing down space to make the mall smaller and more engaging and consistent with the spirit of the city. He said no one will respect the community more than Centennial, but to do nothing is not going to be good for Milford—if the mall can't be leased, someone will come up with something else much less pleasant. He said that downtown will stay quaint, while this project will cater to more of a trade area featuring community events for families and kids. **Mr. Kader** said he appreciated Mr. Levin's comments, and that he takes his board role very seriously.

**Ms. Kearney** encouraged any non-board-member still on the call to speak up and thanked Ms. Dutko for her comments and Mr. Levin for his response. She said she likes the promenade and admitted to not having lived in an apartment for many years but expressed concern for tenants dealing with noise. She also said that she had seen a comment on Milford Patch with someone saying they would move to the mall if the changes were implemented and that NYC apartment dwellers may prefer apartments and be less affected by noise. She said she likes the idea of a medical office building complex like the one in Shelton's office park.

**Mr. Castignoli** said he likes the project but since it will take years to build, he wondered if trends may outpace the plan.

**Ms. Austin** said she likes project and would love to see a conversion of the mall. She said she was convinced downtown won't be replaced due to its historic nature. She thought the new plan will be attractive and is needed.

**Mr. Zahariades** said something needs to be done, but he was not sure exactly what. He expressed concern about a commitment to completing phase 2. **Mr. Levin** said he respects the comment but that the mall's underlying problems would not be solved by Phase 1 alone because Phase 1 won't make back Centennial's past investment or planned future investment. He said Phase 2 is the transformative part and that simply tearing down Sears building will take millions. He noted that the plaza loses money on its own but creates the demand for Phase 2. He reiterated that financial investor and backer USAA is a top-quality fiduciary that would do as much research as anyone in the country could possibly do; USAA won't invest capital in failure. He said the goal was to make Milford proud of The Post by leveraging the culturally rich community here with no impact to downtown.

**Donna Dutko** said she cares about the mall's tax revenue being lost because lost revenue will be impactful to the community. She wondered since buildings might have commercial below and residential above, perhaps spreading residential use throughout site.

**Attorney Knuff** said a thorough study estimated a \$1.2 million increase in taxes for a development akin to this one, but without further redevelopment, tax revenues would be diminished by \$1.6million. Attorney Knuff and Chairman Quish discussed proportionate levels of residential and commercial use.

**Mr. Levin** said he appreciated the time provided to speak to the board and to the public, reiterating that Centennial is open to discussion and trying to do what is financially feasible without asking for investment by the community. He said non-retail tenants must be found and the mall doesn't want to take them from downtown or other parts of Milford. He said he wants artisans and makers and local entrepreneurs to enrich and engage the community at The Post with a plaza intended for use by the whole community. He said his team knows their business and doesn't want to overbuild. **Attorney Knuff** said a new proposal would be submitted very soon.

City Planner Update: None.

Member Suggestions: None

Approval of Minutes of 4-14-21 and 5-12-21 was unanimous.

Adjournment was at 7:42; next meeting is June 9th.