

NEW HAVEN CITY PLAN COMMISSION PLANNED DEVELOPMENT ACTION

RE: PDD #49, Minor Modifications to the General Plans. (Applicant: Winchester Tract E South LLC; Agent: Carolyn Kone).

REPORT: 1608-08
ACTION: APPROVAL

Submission:

- Letter from Attorney Carolyn Kone, 5 sheets, dated and received April 21, 2022

BACKGROUND

The Developer is applying for site plan and detailed plan approval for a project known as Winchester Green (the “Winchester Green Project”). The Winchester Green Project includes the construction of (i) a 287 unit mixed-use building (11,985 sf of retail) on property known as 315 Winchester Avenue (currently a parking lot and a portion of Parcel L), (ii) an approximate 196 space parking lot on property known as 270 Mansfield Street (a portion of Parcel L), (iii) a public plaza to be known as Mason Place to be located on a portion of property known as 115 Munson Street (a portion of Parcel L), (iv) a private street running north to south from Division Street to a new private road to be known as Mason Street in the location of a previously discontinued portion of Sheffield Avenue to be known as Sheffield Avenue Extension (portions of Parcels B and L), (v) a private street running east to west from Mansfield Street to Winchester Avenue in the location of previously discontinued Mason Street (portions of Parcel L), and (vi) improvements to parking lots on 395 Winchester (a portion of Parcel C) and property known as Winchester Avenue (a portion of Parcel B).

Since the creation of PDD #49 29 years ago, plans for the PDD 49 Tracts have evolved with changes in the neighborhood and the city. Current modifications to the PDD 49 General Plans are proposed alongside the proposal for the “Winchester Green Project” to accommodate plans to improve circulation in the PDD, reflect updated Traffic Study data, and to capture new information regarding the vacant historic buildings on the site.

PROPOSED MODIFICATIONS

1. Reopen Sheffield Avenue and Mason Street as private drives that will be open to the public and maintained by the developer.
2. Eliminate the condition required in General Plans #6 for the approval of SHPO and NPS for the demolition of the buildings on Tract D.
3. Modify Traffic Improvements previously required at 65% buildout.

1. Reopening of Sheffield Avenue and Mason Streets

Sheffield Avenue and Mason Street were former City streets that were subsequently closed. The Developer plans to reopen these streets as private drives. Sheffield Avenue will be known as Sheffield Avenue Extension will run north/south from Division Street to Mason Street, and Mason Street will run east/west from Winchester Avenue to Mansfield Street in the historical locations of these streets. (See Plans being submitted with the Site Plan and Detailed Plans Application). Reopening these streets will connect Science Park to the surrounding Dixwell and Newhallville neighborhoods and increase access from Science Park and these neighborhoods to the Marsh Gardens and the Farmington Canal Greenway. The reopened streets will also create better circulation in the area and result in a more typical city-scaled street grid in Science Park, breaking up the superblock of Winchester Avenue, Division Street, Mansfield Street, and Munson

Street, and thereby making Science Park more walkable and bicycle friendly. Additionally, Sheffield Avenue Extension will provide new parking opportunities to replace the shared parking in the 315 Winchester Avenue Lot where the Winchester Green Building will be constructed.

2. Minor Amendment of Illustrative Demolition Plan – 270 Mansfield Street

General Plans #6 is entitled “Parcel L Illustrative Demolition Plan New Haven, Connecticut” and was part of the 2010 Amendment to PDD #49 to add Parcel L. General Plans #6 states that with respect to 270 Mansfield Street (a portion of Parcel L), the buildings on the property are slated for demolition “subject to the approval of the National Parks Services and the State Historic Preservation Officer.”

At the time of the 2010 Amendment to PDD #49 when General Plans #6 was submitted to the Board of Aldermen, it was anticipated that the then developer would be applying for state and federal historic tax credits for the redevelopment of the buildings in the Eastern Courtyard of 275 Winchester Avenue and, therefore, that the National Parks Service (“NPS”) and the State Historic Preservation Officer (“SHPO”) would be involved in such applications and would be in a position to approve the demolition of buildings 3-D, 4-D, 5-D and 6-D on 270 Mansfield Street. However, since 2010, the Connecticut State Department of Public Health has determined that the buildings in the Eastern Courtyard cannot be redeveloped due to the presence of toxic fumes which would prohibit the reuse of any of these buildings. Accordingly, no federal or state tax credits will be involved in the overall project, and, therefore, neither NPS nor SHPO will be reviewing the demolition of the buildings on Tract D. Accordingly, the condition required in General Plans #6 for the demolition of the buildings on 270 Mansfield Street, which is the approval of NPS and SHPO for the demolition of the buildings on that property, is not applicable under the changed circumstances of the development. Therefore, a minor modification to eliminate this no longer viable condition is presented to the City Plan Commission.

3. Traffic Improvements

In 2010, the Board of Aldermen conditioned the approval of the amendment to PDD #49 to include Parcel L upon the performance of certain off-site traffic improvements including (i) the construction of a mini roundabout at the Hillside/Munson/Mansfield Streets intersection and (ii) improvements to Division Street between Prospect Street and Winchester Avenue to reduce the lane widths, and improvements at the intersection of Division Street and Mansfield Street, including the installation of raised medians and curb extensions, the installation of a left turn lane in the westbound direction from Division Street and the removal of a fence on the southwest corner of the intersection.¹ These two offsite improvements were deferred by the City Plan Commission (CPC Report 1445-01) until 65% of the square footage of Parcel L (422,500 sf) was built out in accordance with an agreement reached between the developer of the building at 115 Munson Street (currently known as Winchester Works) and the City’s Department of Transportation, Traffic and Parking. The Winchester Green Project will result in 65% of the square footage of Parcel L being built out. Moreover, in 2012, the City Plan Commission modified the condition of approval that a roundabout be constructed at the intersection of Mansfield, Munson and Hillside Streets to substitute in its place a realigned intersection at that intersection. CPC Reports 1468A and 1468-05.

The Developer has submitted a Traffic Study of the full buildout of Winchester Center, which includes the Winchester Green Project, as well as improvements in the Eastern Courtyard

which will be constructed in the future and are not part of this site plan and detailed plans application. The Developer is also submitting a Winchester Green Project Traffic Study that reviews the traffic impact of the Winchester Green Project by itself. As provided in the Traffic Study Addendum, new traffic improvements will result in the equivalent traffic benefits as were anticipated by the two off-site traffic conditions of approval described above, particularly in view of the changed conditions and plans for development of Parcel L.

With respect to the traffic improvements required for Division Street and the Division Street and Mansfield Street intersection by the Board of Aldermen, reopening the Sheffield Avenue Extension and Mason Street will provide alternative routes to Winchester Avenue, Mansfield Street, Division Street and Munson Street, thereby reducing traffic on Division Street and on Mansfield Street and making these improvements unnecessary. The Developer's Traffic Engineer has concluded that no capacity improvements or new turn lanes are needed at the Division/Mansfield Street intersection, as were required as conditions of approval by the Board of Aldermen due to the addition of these private streets, particularly because at the new intersection of Division Street and Sheffield Avenue Extension, Division Street westbound is already two lanes wide, which will permit traffic to easily enter the PDD #49 parcels. Additionally, the Developer's Traffic Engineer has determined that the medians and curb extensions on Division Street required as a condition of approval of the amendment to PDD #49 adding Parcel L would inhibit larger vehicle turning movements at the Mansfield Street intersection. Finally, the Developer's Traffic Engineer has recommended that striping the left turn arrow on Division Street as a double left turn lane arrow indicating that lefts can be made into either Winchester Avenue or Sheffield Avenue Extension will assist in directing cars and trucks to the PDD site, thereby increasing capacity on the nearby streets, which will obviate the need for the Mansfield/Division intersection improvements. (See Tab 3). In sum, the reopening of Sheffield Avenue Extension and Mason Street is more than equivalent to the traffic improvements required for the Mansfield/Division intersection with respect to traffic capacity and safety.

Regarding the requirement for a roundabout at the intersection of Munson, Hillside and Mansfield Streets, the City Plan Commission has already modified that requirement to substitute intersection improvements for a roundabout. The Developer is proposing some additional modifications to the intersection design which will provide the equivalent level of safety and adequate sight distances, as the intersection improvement plans approved by the City Plan Commission. These improvements include provision of a curb extension on the southeast corner of the intersection to better align the east and west through movements, replacement of the pedestrian ramps on all four corners of the intersection to provide ADA complaint crossings, and the striping of new crosswalks and stop bars on all four legs of the intersection.

Finally, the current Traffic Report indicates that traffic conditions and projections made in 2010 never materialized so that the improvements required by the Board of Aldermen are fully satisfied by the reopening of Sheffield Avenue Extension and Mason Street and the other traffic improvements proposed for the Project. The Traffic Report notes that (i) the future year traffic volumes projected in 2010 never were achieved and therefore there is greater available capacity at present at the intersections proximate to the PDD #49 than anticipated and with the full buildout of Winchester Center, (ii) multimodal use (bus service, Yale shuttles, improved pedestrian and bike infrastructure along the roadways and the Farmington Canal Greenway) has created less dependency on cars in PDD #49, and (iii) the master plan for Winchester Center proposes uses that will generate less traffic than the 2010 master plan would have generated. Accordingly, the Winchester Green Project Traffic Improvements now being proposed for the Winchester Green Project which are detailed in the Site Plan Application are more than equivalent to the mandated off-site improvements in 2010 in terms of roadway capacity and traffic study.

PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS

The proposed modifications and supplemental materials including the Traffic Study, have been reviewed by City Staff in the City Plan, Transportation Traffic and Parking, and Engineering Departments. A memo dated May 9, 2022 from the Department of Transportation, Traffic, and Parking supported the traffic improvements proposed in the Traffic Study and detailed additional Right-of-Way improvements to be completed by the Applicant.

ACTION

The Commission finds the Minor Modifications to the General Plans for PDD #49, Parcel L generally in accordance with the Planned Development District General Plans as amended and objectives in Section 65 (a) of the Zoning Ordinance, and hereby grants approval.

ADOPTED: May 18, 2022
Leslie Radcliffe
Chair

ATTEST: 

Laura E Brown
Executive Director