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February 15, 2019

The Hon. Matthew Quinones, President
Board of Representatives
Government Center
888 Washington Boulevard
Stamford, CT 06904

RE: Petition to Board of Representatives in Opposition to Planning Board Approval to amend the City's Master Plan for an area roughly bounded by Atlantic Street, Pacific Street, Woodland Avenue & Walter Wheeler Drive in the South End neighborhood (Master Plan Application #432 and #433)

Dear President Quinones & Members of the Board:

On January 18, 2019 the Planning Board referred to the Board of Representatives a petition pursuant to Section C6-40-9 of the Stamford Charter to reject the amendment of the Master Plan approved by the Planning Board under Master Plan Application #432 and #433 on January 2, 2019 and published in the Stamford Advocate on January 9, 2019. The Planning Board approved amending the Stamford Master Plan to change a portion of a block bounded by Atlantic Street to the west, Woodland Avenue to the north, Pacific Street to the east and Walter Wheeler Drive to the south in the South End Neighborhood from Master Plan Categories 4 (Residential - Medium Density Multifamily) and 6 (Commercial - Neighborhood) to Category 5 (Residential - High Density Multifamily).

When considering the petition, the Stamford City Charter requires the Board of Representatives to "be guided by the same standards as are prescribed for the Planning Board in Section C6-30-8 of this Charter" and to weigh the considerations and reasons the Planning Board employed in its decision.

Below please find a summary of the Planning Board's consideration in this matter and how it came to the conclusion that amending the Master Plan from Master Plan Categories 4 and 6 to Category 5 is appropriate, meets the goals of the City's Master Plan and is based on sound planning principles.

A. BACKGROUND

1. Existing Conditions

The block for which the Master Plan changes are sought is currently mostly vacant. A large portion of the block was formerly occupied by a garbage carting operation (B&S Carting). Prior to the carting operation, the site was occupied by Excelsior Hardware, a lock manufacturing business. The industrial uses of the site resulted in the contamination of the soil, which will require significant remediation. Redevelopment of such contaminated areas is costly not only because of the required clean up but also the lengthy process of securing permits, clean up verification and monitoring, and liability issues.¹ Clean up of the B&S carting site would begin once the site is being redeveloped.

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, an air-conditioning business on Atlantic Street, north of Walter Wheeler Drive, and a construction business near the intersection of Woodland Avenue and Pacific Street.

The area to the south of Walter Wheeler Drive has been redeveloped with high density residential buildings as part of the Harbor Point Development and Commons Park. To the east of Pacific and the west of Atlantic streets is a mix of low scale multifamily buildings, many of which are located in the South End Historic District, as are parts of the area considered for the Master Plan change. To the north of the block is the City-owned Lathon Wider Community Center which contains, among other community facilities, a branch of the public library, a clinic and the DMV. On the on the remainder of that block are several multifamily homes. The block is less than half a mile from the Stamford Transportation Center, the State's busiest train station and hub of the Stamford bus network, thus providing excellent transit options.

The block in question currently falls into three different Master Plan Categories. The south east corner on Walter Wheeler Drive and Pacific Street is in Master Plan Category 9 (Urban Mixed Use). The northeast corner on Woodland Avenue is in Category 6 (Commercial – Neighborhood), and the remainder of the site is in Category 4 (Medium Density Multifamily). Master Plan Category 9 allows, among other uses, for high density residential, neighborhood retail and office uses and caps development at a density of up to 162 housing units per acre; Category 6 allows for primarily neighborhood retail and commercial uses and residential densities between 17 up to 25 units per acres; Category 4 allows primarily for residential uses with maximum densities between 29 and 44 dwelling units per acre.

The City's Master Plan is a policy document that sets very broad development and preservation goals such as uses and maximum densities. It is not a static document but takes into account developments such as the closure or relocation of significant uses and sites such as the sale of the B&S Carting site. It is important to note that the Master Plan in itself does not allow for any development, but only sets general parameters. Development rights on a site are solely determined by Zoning, which was not changed as part of this application. However, in order to change the Zoning, the Planning and Zoning Boards must make findings that the Zone fits into the appropriate Master Plan Category. Therefore, the change of the Master Plan Category for the block in question does not determine final height, setbacks or specific uses on the site.

¹ Green Building Alliance: Brownfield Remediation, <https://www.go-gba.org/resources/green-building-methods/brownfield-remediation/>, retrieved 2/13/2019.

2. Planning Board Actions

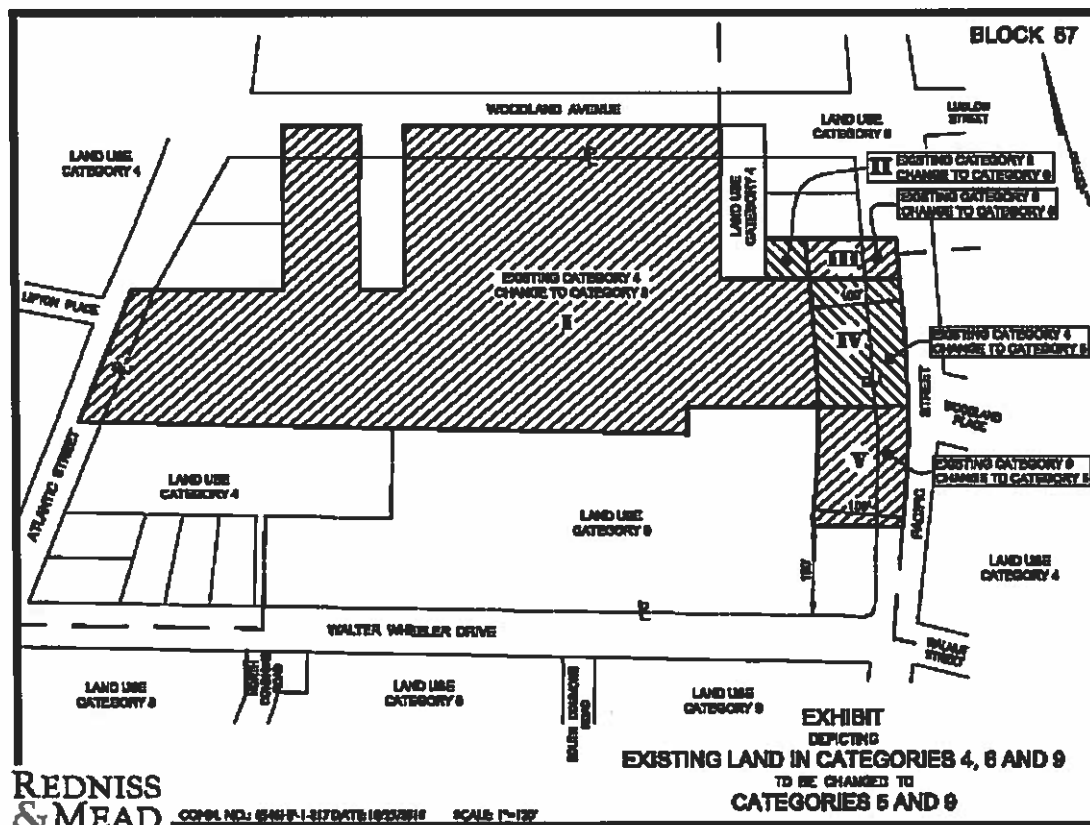
In the Spring of 2017, Building and Land Technologies (BLT) filed an application to change just their own property - the hatched area in Map 1 - from Master Plan Category 4 and 6 (Medium Density Residential and Neighborhood Commercial) to Master Plan Category 9 (Urban Mixed Use), at that time capped at a density of 108 units per acre, the same as Category 5, to bring it into the same Master Plan Category as the parcel BLT had already owned. This portion had been put in Master Plan Category 9 as part of the comprehensive redevelopment of Harbor Point, while the former B&S Carting Site had only been acquired later by the applicant.

At the June 27, 2017 Planning Board Public Hearing, the Planning Board raised three issues:

- 1) What exactly was being proposed for the parcel if the Planning Board approved the Master Plan Amendment to Category 9?
- 2) As the South End Neighborhood Study was just underway, the Planning Board wanted to wait for the completion of the Study to have the recommendations of the Study inform any Master Plan change in the South End.
- 3) The Planning Board raised the concern that not considering the whole block could be considered the Master Plan equivalent of "spot zoning".

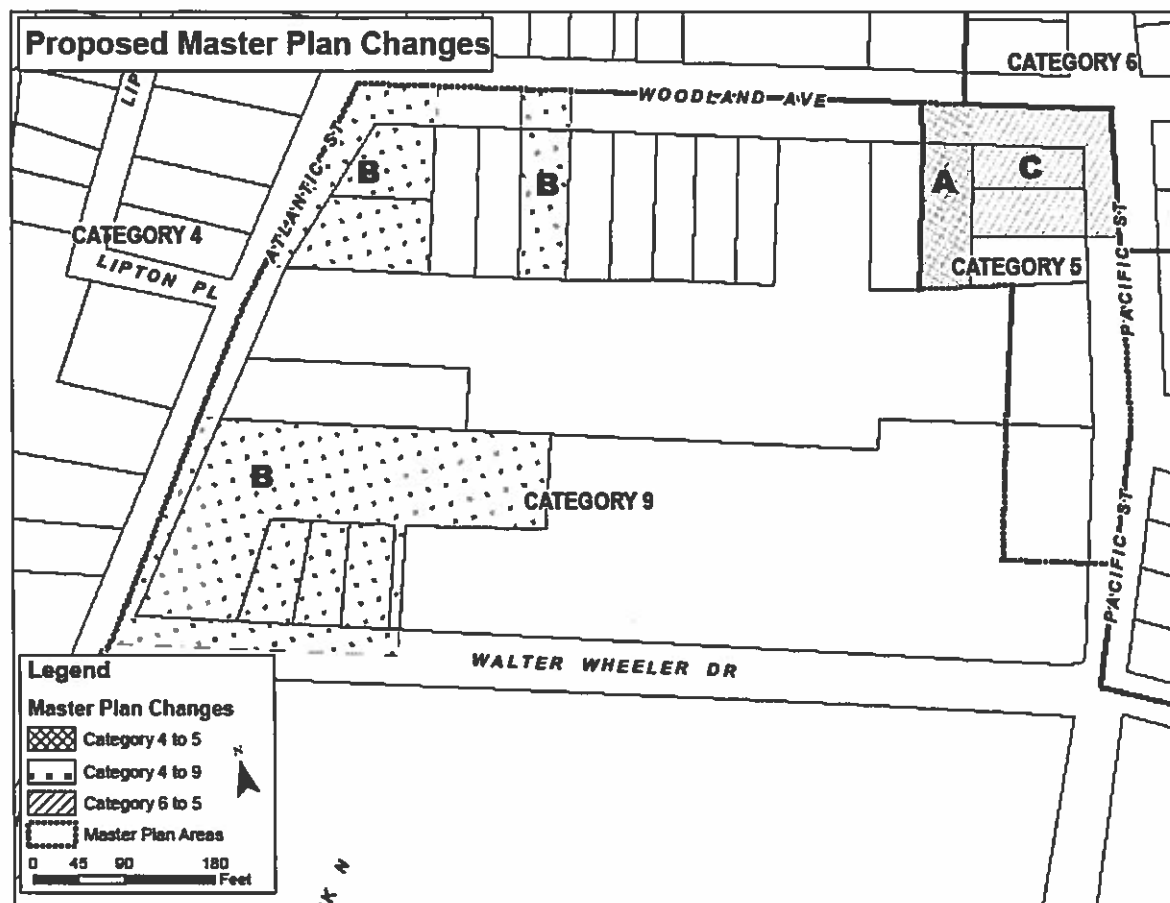
Subsequently, the applicant withdrew the application.

After completion of the South End Neighborhood Study, BLT filed subject application #432. This Master Plan Change proposed to change the area owned by the applicant from Category 4 (Residential - Medium Density Multifamily), 6 (Commercial - Neighborhood) and 9 (Urban Mixed-Use) to Master Plan Categories 5 (Residential - High-Density Multifamily) and 9 (Urban Mixed-Use) - See Map 1.



Map 1 Showing the Master Plan Changes proposed by BLT under Application #432

Subject Application #433 was filed by the Planning Board to implement some of the Land Use recommendations of the South End Neighborhood Study and proposed changing the Master Plan Categories for properties not owned by BLT from Category 4 (Residential - Medium Density Multifamily) and 6 (Commercial - Neighborhood) to Category 5 (Residential - High-Density Multifamily) Category 9 (Urban Mixed-Use) - see Map 2.



Map 2 Master Plan Changes proposed by the Stamford Planning Board under Application #433

After hearing testimony from the public and extensive discussion at its January 2, 2019 meeting, the Planning Board modified BLT's and its own applications to amend the Master Plan from Categories 4 and 6 to MP Category 5 instead of Categories 5 and 9. This modification reduced the maximum permitted densities from 162 units per acre in Category 9 to 108 units an acre, addressing some of the concerns raised by the public. The Master Plan adopted by the Planning Board is shown in Map 3.

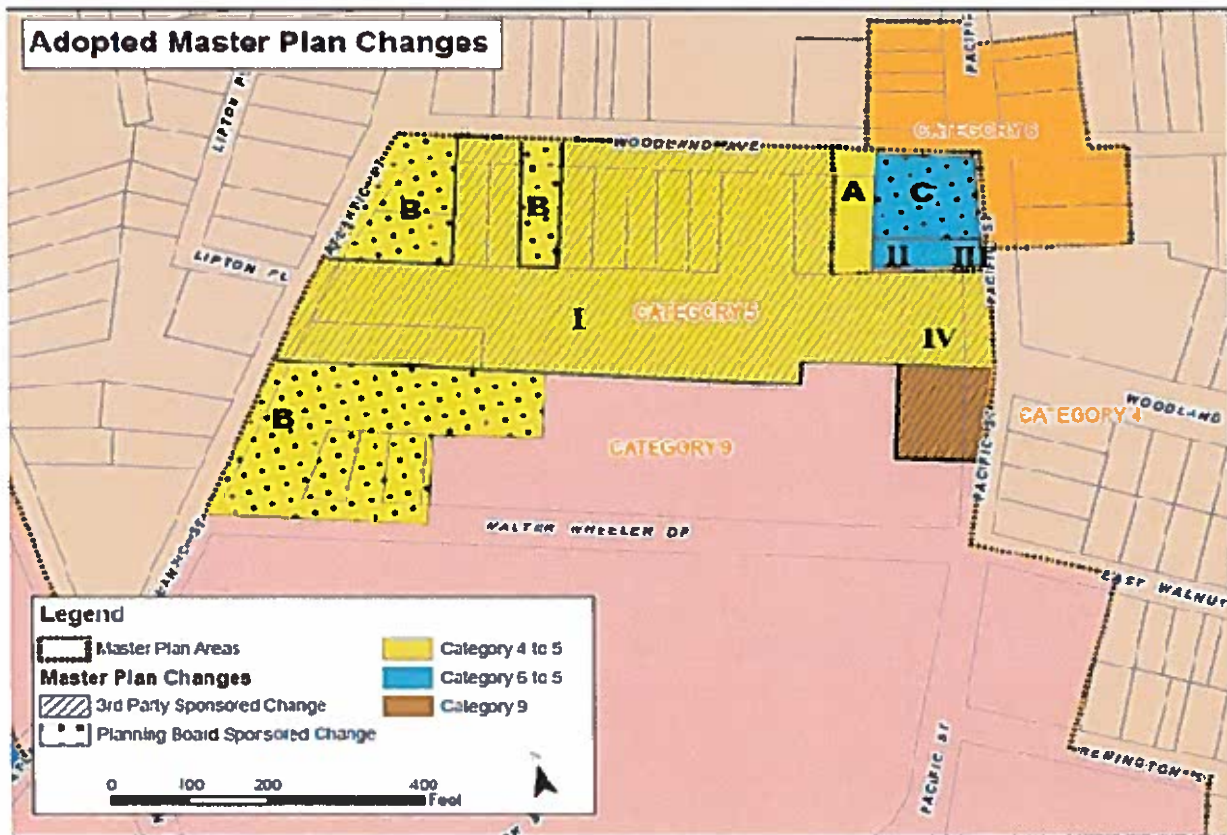
B. PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS

1. General Planning Considerations

The New York-New Jersey-Connecticut Region is experiencing a housing crisis. Between the years 2000 and 2016 the number of cost-burdened renter and homeownership households has dramatically increased.² In 2000, 41% of renter households spent more than 30 percent of their income in rent – in 2016 it was 57%. In 2000, 19 percent of homeowners in Connecticut paid 30% or more for housing, compared to 29 percent in 2016. Connecticut has one of the highest number of grown children still living (or living again) with their parents because of high housing cost and lack of availability in affordable housing.³

² New York City Dept. of City Planning: New York Planning Leadership Network (5/2/2018).

³ Belinda Luscombe and Chris Wilson: This State Has the Most Millennials Living with Their Parents, Time.com (9/15/2016) <http://time.com/4495481/millennials-living-home-parents/>, retrieved 2/13/2019.



In addition to growing inequities in income distribution an important factor contributing to the crisis is that the production of housing lags behind the population growth. Between 2010 and 2015, the population in the region grew by three (3) percent, but the supply in housing units by only a little bit more than a half of that (1.7%).⁴ Increasing housing production, therefore, is one crucial factor for maintaining housing affordability. While there is a plethora of issues that determine why housing is or is not being built at the appropriate levels an issue that manifests itself in Stamford and other parts of the region is that the City is pretty much built up, and that adding housing can increase traffic in an already overburdened road system. Stamford residents appreciate their neighborhoods and as a policy, the Land Use Boards are working to protect these grown and oftentimes historic communities with their own unique character. It was with this intention in mind that the Zoning for the City's Village Commercial Districts was changed to reduce permitted densities and, therefore, reduce (re-) development pressures in these established areas. But in order to balance neighborhood preservation with the need for affordable housing, new housing production needs to be focused on strategic sites that are available for redevelopment such as former industrial sites.

In order to reduce increased road traffic through development, such development should be located near mass transit and designed in a way that encourages walking and the use of mass transit and discourages the use of single-occupied cars. This type of development is called Transit-Oriented Development and requires minimum densities of at least 75 residential units per acre and a mix of commercial and office uses.⁵

⁴ New York City Dept. of City Planning Regional Planning Division, based on data from the 2010 census and the ACS 2011-2015 5 year estimates.

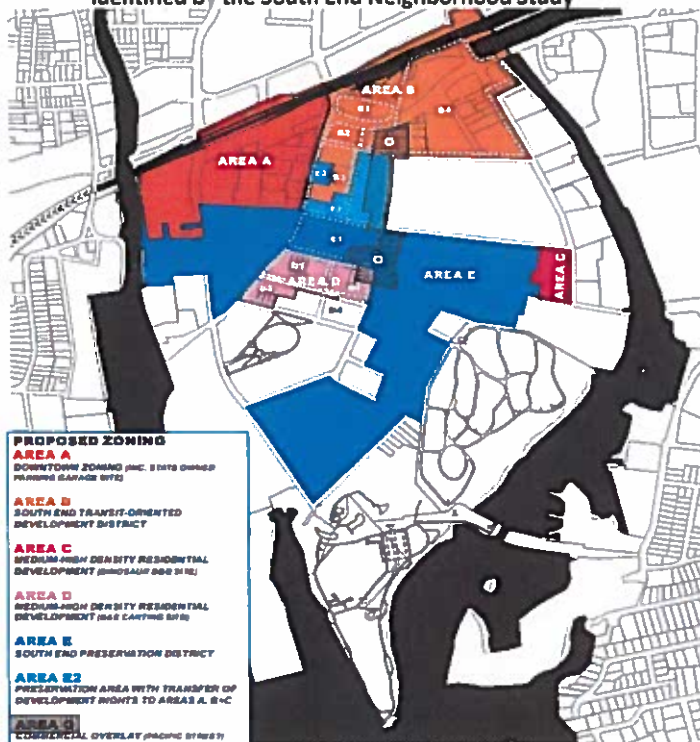
⁵ Metro Council: Land Use Densities – Guide for Transit-Oriented Development (August 2006) <https://metrocouncil.org/Communities/Services/Livable-Communities-Grants/Maps,-forms-misc/Metropolitan-Council-TOD-Guide-Land-Use-Densities.aspx>, retrieved 2/14/2019.

2. Area Specific Planning Considerations

Of course, general planning considerations require careful adaptation to specific neighborhood contexts such as the South End. As early as the 1970's the high concentration of noxious industrial uses in the South End had been identified as one of the causes for a concentration of poverty and low educational attainment in the Neighborhood.⁶ Repeatedly, the City's Master Plans called for reinvestment in and relocation of industrial uses from the Neighborhood. The City's current Master Plan identifies as key policies and strategies for the South End to "Balance New Development and Neighborhood Preservation" and to "encourage relocation of industrial uses from residential area."⁷ As a general housing policy, the Master Plan recommends to "encourage increased density along transit corridors and within downtown through land-use regulations and development incentives" and remediate brownfields, "some of Stamford's largest potential development sites for new mixed-income housing."⁸

Based on the general recommendations in the Master Plan, the City analyzed how to specifically achieve transit oriented development in the South End and to balance development with neighborhood preservation. The results of these efforts were the "City of Stamford, Connecticut, Transit-Oriented Development Technical Assistance Report"⁹ (TOD Report) and the "South End Neighborhood Study."¹⁰ One of the conclusions of the TOD Report is that "Increased density in the South End and around the STC-both to the north and the south- is the key variable that will allow the neighborhood to convert from an auto-oriented, single-use area into an economically vibrant destination where people can live, work, shop, and play" (Pg. 6). The South End Study then specified which areas in the South End are suitable for development and which are to be preserved (Map 4).

Map 4 Preservation & Development Areas in the South End as Identified by the South End Neighborhood Study



The area for which the Master Plan change was sought is located in Area D which calls for Medium-High Density which would equate to a Master Plan Category of 5 or 9. The highest density Master Plan Category is 11 (Downtown). The reasoning from the members of the Planning Board to finally adopt the lower density category 5 focused on the Board's consistent viewpoint that this area of the South End, while within walking distance to the Stamford Transportation Center, should have a distinct step down from the Harbor Point development to the south with development increasing again as it approaches the Station. Given how little available and suitable acreage in Stamford is available for high density residential developments, some Planning Board members advocated for higher densities in that area.

⁶ South Side Neighborhood Plan 1977: pp. 34-36.

⁷ City of Stamford: Stamford Master Plan 2015-2025, (Stamford, December 2014) p. 117.

⁸ Ibid., p. 135.

⁹ Available for download on the Land Use Bureau webpage at:

https://www.stamfordct.gov/sites/stamfordct/files/pages/stamfordtc_tod_finalreport.pdf

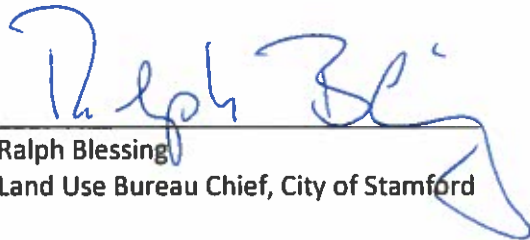
¹⁰ Available for download on the Land Use Bureau webpage:

https://www.stamfordct.gov/sites/stamfordct/files/uploads/10-23-18_sens_final_report_rev_2.pdf

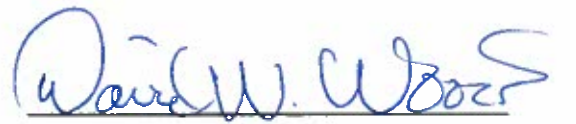
Development within a community always creates positive and negative impacts. As crime drops and more amenities become available, gentrification pressures, if unchecked, may arise. This is also true for the South End but is counteracted by Stamford's Below Market Rate Housing Program which has so far created 350 permanently rent restricted affordable units in the neighborhood. Most of these new units were built on former industrial land thus having minimal effect on the units that were already there. About 100 more below market rate units are under construction or proposed in the South End. New permanently affordable units account for more than a third of the number of housing units that existed in the South End in 2000 based on Census data, many of which in poor condition. Similar to the issue of housing affordability, the South End Plan also proposes strategies to address traffic and other potential issues in the South End. It also recommends a "Civic Campus" for the Lathon Wider Center that would improve the facility itself and allow for increased services provided there, and could add other community amenities such as a school and more affordable housing. Many of these improvements are expected to be achieved with contributions from the developers as has already happened with the realignment of Henry and Atlantic Streets (completely paid for by developers, cost: \$1,000,000), the preservation of four historic homes on Henry Street as affordable housing and the creation of a South End Workforce Housing Program as part of the Approval of Land Use application 218-04, to name only a few examples.

In summary, the Planning Board believes that Master Plan Applications #432 and #433 are fully in line with longstanding citywide and neighborhood specific planning policies and are based on thorough analysis and the application of sound planning principles. The applications will help the South End to further revitalize in a way that serves both new and long-time residents. The Planning Board, therefore, respectfully asks the Board of Representatives to reject the petition submitted by opponents of said application.

Sincerely,



Ralph Blessing
Land Use Bureau Chief, City of Stamford



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