

The Proposed Newington Junction PD Zone:

Transit Oriented Development for Newington's Future

The proposed zone change for subject properties in the Willard Avenue/Spring Street area to a Planned Development ("PD") district, reference herein as the "Newington Junction PD Zone," would provide substantial benefits to the Town of Newington.

Chief among these benefits of creating a unified PD zone in the vicinity of the Newington Junction CTfastrak station would be to authorize the creation of Transit Oriented Development ("TOD") in the Newington Junction PD Zone in accordance with the Newington Plan of Conservation and Development. The advantages of TOD generally would include the maximization of residential, business and leisure space within walking distance of CTfastrak to establish a symbiotic relationship between the maximization of the use of public transport with a concomitant reduction in the use of personal automobiles while benefiting economic development and modern residential lifestyle. This change would enable the combination of lots within the zone to support vibrant multi-use development such as that shown in the attached conceptual plan.

TOD is supported as a development strategy recommended in the new 2020 Plan of Conservation and Development. The plan lists as one such strategy, the establishment of "transit-oriented sites at appropriate locations when transit stations have been established."¹ The 2020 plan also identifies the Subject Area as a "Transit Oriented" area.²

The advantages of TOD were cited in a March 2018 *Pilot Study* ("Pilot Study") prepared for the Connecticut DOT and the City of Hartford regarding TOD. For example, the Pilot Study states that "TOD that offers a complete lifestyle. . . has been shown to support vibrant communities. When these communities are bolstered by a well-connected network of transportation choices. . . they promote active, healthier lifestyles and reduce the reliance on personal automobiles. Moreover, TOD residents have better access to employment centers and expanding economic opportunity."³

The advantages of TOD are not simply aspirational; having provided real economic benefits to Connecticut municipalities. For example, a recent CTMirror.org article describing the economic benefits of TOD near the New Britain CTfastrak station states as follows:

Downtown New Britain is steadily coming back. Streets have been revamped and redesigned. . . a downtown park has been spiffed up, and historic buildings are being refurbished for housing and other uses. A new development, two five-story buildings with about 160

¹ 2020 Plan at p.24.

² *Id.* at p. 33.

³ *Pilot Study* at p. 4.

residential units and 20,000 square feet of retail space, is underconstruction. “More downtown buildings have been sold in the last two years than in the last 20 years,” said longtime city development director Bill Carroll, a New Britain native. “It’s a beautiful thing to see.” What’s driving this revival? The bus [i.e., CTfastrak].⁴

Meriden is another Connecticut Municipality that has embraced TOD. A publication of Meriden 2020 describes how “[a TOD] zoning district incorporating form-based regulations was formally adopted in 2013 for the area within one-half mile of the [a 2018 Meriden Transit Center]. The regulations were designed to encourage moderate and high-density mixed-use development within walking distance of the transit area, create a friendly and safe environment for bicyclists and pedestrians, and protect existing neighborhoods integrating new development in a context sensitive manner.”

This area of Newington near is well-suited to benefit economic development and vibrant residential opportunities near the transit stations. The Newington Junction PD Zone currently already contains a mix of Business, Industrial and Residential Districts and uses. The requested zone change would create a unified PD district where the commission receives and approves a concept plan that can include business uses authorized under Section 3.14 of regulations, special permit uses authorized under section 3.15 such as theaters, hotels and restaurants, including drive-through restaurants, and mixed use development with residential units location above first floor retail, office or service uses. Section 3.19.

Also included are more specific concept plans with respect to upgrading the Phillips 66 gas station to include a drive through Dunkin Donuts restaurant as authorized in the PD zone. The ability to utilize property designed drive-through food and beverage services has proved invaluable during the current pandemic and is consistent with the transit oriented economic development in association with the Newington Junction station.

It is notable that the historic residential homes in located on Willard Avenue in the near the various existing commercial, industrial, and residential uses in the neighborhood are excluded from the proposed zone to protect their residential status. The PD zone includes special buffering requirements for development near a residential zone. Section 3.18.4.

This unified district would encourage TOD by providing developers with a single palette of development options in the Newington Junction PD Zone, thereby enabling synergies with both the CT Fastrak station and adjacent developments and provided the Commission with the tools to protect existing nearby buildings and uses.

⁴ *Back to the Future with Transit-Oriented Development; CTMirror.org, July 29, 2019.*