

PLANNING & ZONING
COMMISSION
Telephone (203) 563-0185
Fax (203) 563-0284



TOWN HALL ANNEX
238 Danbury Road
Wilton, Connecticut 06897

**WILTON PLANNING AND ZONING COMMISSION
Wilton Center Area Master Plan Subcommittee MINUTES*
March 29, 2023 SPECIAL MEETING, 5:00 PM
(CONDUCTED ELECTRONICALLY VIA ZOOM)**

PRESENT: Chair- Rick Tomasetti, Melissa-Jean Rotini, Chris Pagliaro, Barbara Geddis, Sam Gardner

ALSO PRESENT: Town Planner- Michael Wrinn.

NOTIFIED INTENDED ABSENCE: Rick Stow

REGULAR MEETING

- A. CALL TO ORDER** at 5:02 PM. By Chair Tomasetti
- B. SEATING OF MEMBERS** – All 5 members present were seated by Chair Tomasetti.
- C. Work Session : Review of Wilton Center Area Form Base Code, Properties over 5 acres, discussion with Kimco Properties**

Attorney James Murphy introduced his team; Nick Brown of Kimco, Craig Flaherty of Redniss and Mead, Ahmed Aly and Brian O'Conner of 3 Cube Architects and Mat Renauld, Landscape Architect.

Mr. Brown commented that this is a real time test of the master plan and those objectives. They have over 20 acres and several portions that have underperformed.

Mr. Flaherty shared the aerial and property outline, concentrating on the 2 southern parcels, which are 12 acres in size. Shared a chart of 30 properties in Wilton Center core, showing Kimco owns 47% of the property in this core area. Shared the master plan concept, with the entrance between the 2 existing southern buildings, calling it Kimco Drive for lack of a better description.

Discussed parking setbacks and the fact that the master plan was calling for parking to be behind buildings, which is difficult to do in this situation. Is under the assumption that the 30% parking waiver currently in place in Wilton Center will be carried forward and will apply to this area. Regarding civic space, thought it should be proportional to the size of a project and need to define what it includes.

Mentioned that the lot frontage types for this property only include pergola and arcade, which may not allow a breakup of the building, would like to see the storefront option included. Orientation of the building is important, as shade may make a portion darker. Building setbacks should be different as it relates to a large size building and that they have almost 500 feet of building frontage. Currently there are very specific setbacks at a particular height, which limits design options, should consider average setbacks.

Building height is a concern, looking from page 17 of the draft overlay; looking at 9' ceilings for apartments with a 2' ceiling to floor while retail is 12'-14' with a 3'-5' ceiling to floor, 54' to top of parapet, with 3 ½' parapet for fall protection. Should allow parts of the building to go up 5 stories, with a setback for the 5th floor. Could limit that to a portion of the footprint or floor below or possibly take part of the floor below and add that to the floor above, need some flexibility.

Mr. Tomasetti noted that the whole idea of building height and stories has not been resolved yet, concerned if a building is very flat, does stepping back 7'-10' create a real setback? How does this break down into separate buildings? This is something that the Subcommittee needs to flesh out, this is a proposed 500' of wall with no passthroughs; needs a larger public realm space. Building behind should have some aspect of the overlay, its just shown as 2 or 3 rectangle bars on the site plan. Could have a 5-story with a 4-story next to a 3-story, minimum setback of 10' gets used, which becomes non-formed based.

Ms. Geddis thanked the applicant's team, saying they have a superpower site that they want to develop. See's this as too tentative, too formulaic. On the macro level, this 500' is the most walkable part of the river, should be 2 buildings, 2 corners, angled parking. Look to corners, this is the entrance to Wilton Center from the south, break up the 500', add civic and public realm. Riverwalk is key.

Ms. Rotini is concerned with the street frontage, that the same height is carried all the way down the street with this version. 5 stories is not where we are. Makes it very dark on "Kimco Way". Purpose of the arcade was to break up the façade. Concerned that this is creating 2 downtowns, a smaller one and a larger one. Height seems high, this has not been finalized.

Mr. Gardner thinks a subdistrict could be used here, have created a wall, not modulating in the horizontal. 2 buildings would break that up. Good idea to get through the buildings, in favor of linear public space. Make an architectural feature out of that corner; regarding scale and height, not opposed to 5 stories. Looking to create a 3-story street wall downtown, would like to see that here along River Road. Gateway moment when entering from the south, the river is special here.

Mr. Pagliaro thought that the feedback is productive. Biggest concern is looking at very generic

architecture. Mr. Flaherty brought up Baywater in Darien, which was of individual buildings and different from this situation. Mr. Pagliaro saw this as trying to build apartments and that this is not village architecture. Agrees that entrance from the south is important, in favor of 5th story on the main street, should have a tower or architectural feature. Could “Kimco Drive” be shut off as a public space for events? Streetscape, which defines it here? A variety of architecture is needed, one asset does not make a village.

Mr. Tomasetti highlighted the idea of a village but knows we need to deal with economics; does not see this as 2 buildings but not enough differentiation between horizontal and vertical. Advice is to be visionary, architects need to lead this development effort. Feels this need to be a sub-area of the master plan.

Mr. Flaherty offered that as a path forward, a subarea is reasonable to do, offered to do a text amendment to the subcommittee.

Mr. Brown understood the comments on the gateway corners.

Mr. O’Conner said he heard a lot of interesting ideas, while still trying to understand what good village architecture means as it relates to the economics of the site.

Mr. Pagliaro said it’s a tough call with the size of the proposed building and the economics. Saw some of downtown Stamford and Norwalk as having the look of disposal buildings, fake materials, no recesses to windows, for instance. In contrast, Corbin Corners creates useable public spaces. Here the building form does not go far enough, understands form costs money Bethesda, MD has retail, court-yard and open to the public.

Mr. Tomasetti noted we lost the movie theater, which was huge loss, as it was destination place; people came from out of town. Wilton is no longer a destination, maybe for dinner. Retail needs to draw out-of-towners, needs a theatre or other draw. Asked what attractions you can bring and what can be offered to you to do that?

Ms. Rotini said that parks draw if there is retail associated or close. Mr. Pagliaro brought up Bedford Square in Westport, good planning with luxury apartments, which was agreed with by Mr. Gardner.

Mr. Brown said that theatres were failing nationwide, can’t find a replacement, just not realistic. Ms Geddis said there’s nothing to do but go to restaurants, how about a music venue, other entertainment? Mr Tomasetti offered that as a community, we need these active activities, what about incentives such as parking reductions, density or other incentives for these uses? Mr. Brown responded that he is bringing the bodies to the doorstep. Mr. Pagliaro said looking at the bigger picture, arts center or something else to stimulate everyone.

Mr. Brown responded that these uses are based on demographics in the area to get those uses. This site is difficult, don’t have a blank slate given existing leases. Need to park these uses, the garage challenges the cut throughs. Do have design limitations.

Ms. Rotini asked if there are any rooftop uses overlooking the river.

Mr. Tomasetti thanked the applicants, saying he thought this was helpful.

ADJOURNMENT At 6:41, Ms. Rotini made a motion to close the meeting, seconded by Mr. Pagliaro, which carried 5-0.

***MINUTES HAVE NOT BEEN REVIEWED BY THIS COMMISSION AND MAY BE
SUBJECT TO REVISION IN FUTURE MINUTES. FULL AUDIO RECORDING OF
MEETING IS AVAILABLE AT: <https://www.wiltonct.org/node/86/minutes-agendas>**