

Via email

To: Bryan Baker, Principal Planner
Steven Kleppin, Director
Norwalk Planning and Zoning

From: Frank Fish FAICP, Principal
Taylor Young, AICP, Senior Planner

Subject: Review of 143 Rowayton Avenue

Date: January 15, 2021

As per your request, the following memorandum includes our review of the 143 Rowayton Avenue application received by the City of Norwalk Planning and Zoning Commission. The Applicant, Hillcrest Partners LLC, is proposing to construct a 12,026 square-foot building that contains 4 residential units and 13 parking spaces at 143 Rowayton Avenue. The proposed project is located within the Rowayton Avenue Village District (RVD), which requires peer review. Some of the purposes of the RVD include encouraging new development to be compatible with the established character of the district and retaining public access to the waterfront. The development provides public access to the Five Mile River via a walkway on the north side of the building that connects to a public promenade and dock on the western side of the building.

The Applicant's submission was professional and we support many of their design choices. We reviewed the materials that were submitted by the Applicant, including architectural drawings, landscaping plans, a site plan, a site survey, and the site plan review application. BFJ Planning visited the project site and surrounding Rowayton Avenue corridor on Tuesday, January 5, 2021. Ten figures are attached to this memorandum. Figure 1 shows the project location, Figure 2 shows photos of the two existing buildings on the site, and Figures 3 through 10 illustrate our comments on the building design and function.

Based on our review of the submitted materials we have issued the following questions and comments:

Overall Development Comments

1. The proposed building design is generally compatible with the surrounding area. However, we think the western façade has more glass than the other three proposed building facades which are more traditional and complementary to the design of the Rowayton Avenue corridor. The Applicant should present their reasoning for the proposed design of the western façade to the Commission

2. We appreciate the design of the building with dormers on the third floor but think the roof overhang on either side of each dormer could be made narrower.

Basement Level Comments

3. The northwestern corner of the basement is designed with eight flood vents. Four of the vents lead into a storage room which then only has a single vent leading into the garage. There are more vents letting water into the storage room than there are letting water out of the room into the garage. The southern façade does not have any flood vents but may have been designed so the garage door would open during a flood event. The Applicant should discuss the details of the vent layout and design with the Commission to ensure the vents are placed around the building effectively.
4. The trash and storage room in the southwestern corner of the basement is bordered by an area of compacted fill and an exterior wall. The Applicant should explain why the fill is necessary instead of just having a larger storage area.

First Floor Comments

5. We are supportive of the design of the public walkway on the northern and western sides of the building. However, the architectural drawings seem to show that a member of the public could walk up the stairs to the patio of Unit B and peer through the ample glass into the unit. The Applicant should discuss security designs or precautions with the Commission.

Third Floor Comments

6. The third floor plan shows the location of mechanical equipment. The basement is located in the Flood Zone AE, so building mechanicals should be placed outside of the flood hazard area. The Applicant should confirm that all mechanicals, including the elevator and building heating and cooling systems are not located in the flood hazard area.

East Elevation Comments

7. The first floor and Unit A's garden patio is elevated three and a half feet above the sidewalk to be out of the Flood Zone AE. The Applicant should consider designing a safety railing for the raised patio.

South Elevation Comments

8. The eastern façade shows glass windows leading to the patios on the western side of the building. The south elevation does not show a door leading to the patio. The Applicant should explain to the Committee how the windows and doors would operate.

North Elevation Comments

9. A group of windows above the westernmost stairs on the north façade are not symmetrical. The two eastern windows could be moved further east to make the window layout symmetrical.

Building Materials and Colors Comments

10. The reference photos do not specify what type of cedar shingles would be used. The applicant should specify the type of shingles and consider presenting examples to the Commission.
11. The aluminum windows in Photo 7 appear brushed and the windows in Photo 8 are painted. The applicant should state what type of finishing will be on the windows and show where the different finishes would be applied.
12. Photo 8 shows metal windows with an operable panel, and those windows are shown leading onto the western patios. The Applicant should explain how these windows would work with a door to provide an entrance to the patios.

Appendices:

- A. Figures

Appendix A: Figures