

Norwalk Planning & Zoning Commission

125 East Avenue
Norwalk, Connecticut



July 24, 2023

To: Planning & Zoning Commission – Louis Schulman, Chairman
From: Bryan Baker, Principal Planner, City of Norwalk
Re: #2023-32 SP/CAM – City of Norwalk – 1 Meadow Street Extension – Construction of new South Norwalk Elementary School

Commissioners,

Since acquiring the property located at 1 Meadow Street Extension, an approximately 12-acre site formerly owned by Hatch & Bailey and used as a contractor's yard/landscape nursery, plans have been submitted to construct a new South Norwalk elementary school. The school will have a footprint of about 54,000 square feet and be two-stories in height, located in the center of the property with parking provided in the front (south) and open space with a recreation field to the rear (north). Most of the traffic will enter the site via Meadow Street Extension which accesses the main parking lot for employee parking as well as the parent drop-off/pick-up vehicle loop, and buses will enter and exit the site via Oxford Street to the west.

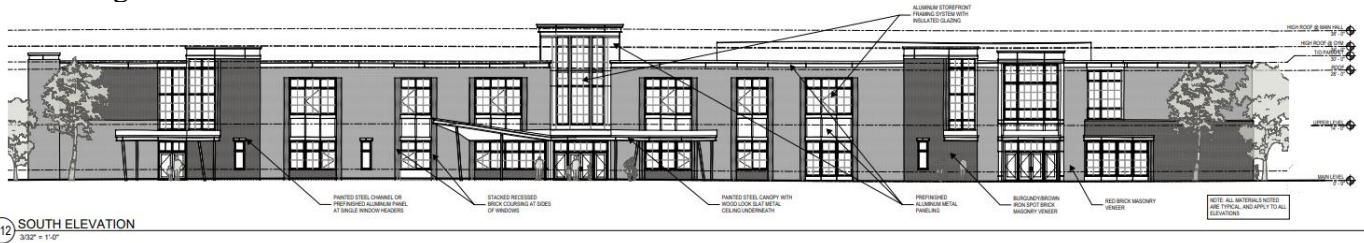
After the preliminary review of the application at the July 5, 2023, meeting, one of the outstanding issues to be addressed was regarding solar panels, specifically their location and the amount of energy that will be produced. The current plan is to install solar panels on the roof of the building as well as the eastern portion of the open space that is located behind the building. The proposed location of the panels is currently not completely finalized as the city is working with South Norwalk Electric and Water (SNEW) on an agreement for the solar installation. Therefore, it is recommended that some flexibility be incorporated into any potential decision on the application that will allow for a final agreement to be reached regarding the location and number of solar panels to be installed as part of the project.

Another topic that was discussed at the July 5, 2023, meeting was the issue of cars queuing along the streets during the afternoon pickup hours. The applicant stated that a traffic and parking management plan was being developed in coordination with Transportation, Mobility & Parking (TMP) to address this issue. Based on the physical characteristics of the property, the location and size of the building as well as the parking limits the overall amount of area that can accommodate off-street queuing of vehicles. Therefore, the traffic and parking management plan can be included as a condition of approval subject to approval by either TMP and/or the Planning & Zoning Commission.

As part of the project, the city will be looking into resolving flooding issues that occur at the southern most portion of the lot as well as making traffic and street improvements. This will be accomplished by providing funding to the Department of Public Works (DPW) as well as TMP who will draft proposed improvements and solutions to these problems as a separate phase of the area's development. In coordination with this application, two other applications have been submitted, one of which is an 8-24 Referral for the approval of the expenditure of capital funds for the project itself as well as for the allocation of \$1M to DPW for drainage improvements and \$1M to TMP for improvements to the intersections of South Main Street, Meadow Street, Wilson Avenue and Meadow Street Extension.

Regarding more technical components of the project and how they comply with the zoning regulations, it appears that the proposed development does comply with all relevant sections of the regulations:

- Use: The property is in the D Residence Zone and “schools” are a use permitted via special permit within that zone
- Building Height: Per the architectural plans submitted by Tecton Architects, the school is proposed to be two-stories and have a maximum height of 38 feet. The maximum allowable height for a school is four stories and 65 feet.



- Minimum Lot Size: The regulations require that twice the minimum amount of lot area is necessary for special permit uses in residential zones. The minimum lot area for a property in the D Residence Zone is 5,000 square feet, the size of the existing lot is 523,320 square feet.
- Building and Parking Location/Setbacks: The front property line is the property line that abuts Meadow Street Extension (the southern most property line), the side property lines are the eastern and western property lines, and the rear property line is the northern most property line. Special permit uses, like schools, require additional setbacks than as-of-right uses, including setbacks up to twice the minimum required for the zone in which the property is within. For this property specifically, the setbacks for the building are 80 feet from the front and rear property lines and 40 feet from the side property lines. **The proposed location of the school complies with all setback requirements.** In addition to building setbacks there are parking setbacks, which are less than what is required for building setbacks. The front setback for parking is 40 feet and the side and rear setback for parking is 10 feet. **The proposed location of all of the parking areas complies with all setback requirements.**
- Parking: The minimum number of parking spaces for elementary schools is one space per employee, which was recently amended during the Norwalk High School application. The school will employ approximately 94 people therefore requiring 94 parking spaces but will provide 127 parking spaces.
- Maximum Building Area: The maximum building area is ultimately determined by the size of the lot. The proposed school has a footprint of about 54,100 square feet. The regulations do not list any additional allowances or restrictions for uses such as schools in terms of maximum building area, so we assume that the maximum building area is commensurate with other uses allowed such as single and two-family dwellings. Therefore, the maximum building area is 131,530 square feet as determined through the following formula:

| Zoning District | Size of Lot Square Feet | % Maximum Building Area | Examples of Maximum Building Footprint Square Feet |
|--------------------------------|-------------------------|--|--|
| D Residence 1-2 dwelling units | UP TO 6,000 | 35% | 6,000 sq ft lot X .35 = 2,100 sq ft |
| | 6,001 – 8,000 | 35% for first 6,000 sq ft, 30% for excess lot area above 6,000 sq ft | 8,000 sq ft lot: 2,100 sq ft footprint for first 6,000 sq ft + (2,000 x .30 = 600) = 2,700 sq ft |
| | MORE THAN 8,000 | 35% for first 6,000 sq ft, 30% for excess lot area above 6,000 sq ft, and 25% for excess lot area over 8,000 sq ft | 10,000 sq ft lot: 2,100 sq ft footprint for first 6,000 sq ft + 600 sq ft for second 2,000 sq ft + (2,000 x .25 = 500) = 3,200 sq ft |

Because the property is located within the coastal area management (CAM) zone, the Commission is charged with assessing any adverse impacts that the property may have on coastal resources. The property does have a portion that is within the flood zone, which is considered a “coastal hazard area” and is included as a coastal resource per Connecticut General Statute Sec. 22a-93, however, no structures are proposed to be in the flood zone. Therefore, Staff agrees with the applicant that there will not be any adverse impacts because of the project and the new drainage system will help treat storm runoff on-site and limit excess runoff from entering the city’s stormwater drainage system.

In conclusion, the application complies with all the applicable zoning regulations and provides an essential public amenity within the South Norwalk neighborhood. Two outstanding items remain, which are the overall number of solar panels and their final location as well as the traffic and parking demand management plan. Both items can reasonably be included as a condition of approval as the city works with SNEW, DPW and TMP on finalizing such plans. Staff offers the following draft resolution for consideration by the Commission:

Draft resolution to approve Special Permit and CAM application with conditions:

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED by the Norwalk Planning & Zoning Commission that application #2023-32 SP/CAM – City of Norwalk – 1 Meadow Street Extension – Construction of new South Norwalk Elementary School be **APPROVED** subject to the following conditions:

1. That the site shall be developed in accordance with the following plans:
 - a. Per civil site plans, architectural drawings and landscaping plans provided by Langan Engineering and Tecton Architects, respectively, dated 5/24/2023; and
2. That a certificate of special permit and mylar map of the approved site plan shall be filed on the Norwalk Land Records prior to the issuance of a zoning permit; and
3. That any necessary lot revision maps shall be filed on the Norwalk Land Records prior to the issuance of a zoning permit; and
4. That any changes to the approved plans shall be submitted to the Commission’s Staff (Staff) for review and approval prior to implementation. If any proposed changes are determined to be substantive, Staff shall refer the changes to the Commission for their review and approval prior to implementation; and
5. That the city shall install rooftop solar panels to the greatest extent possible. Additionally, the city shall continue to work with South Norwalk Electric & Water (SNEW) to develop a renewal energy development partnership and use their best efforts to make installation of ground mounted solar feasible at the rear of the site with the final location and quantity of solar panels to be reviewed and approved by Staff prior to the issuance of a Certificate of Zoning Compliance; and
6. That should any building façade material become damaged or deteriorated, the property owner shall repair the damage and/or deterioration within thirty (30) days of notice from the City; and
7. That all erosion and sediment controls be installed and maintained prior to the start of any construction or site work and that additional controls be installed at the direction Staff; and
8. That a traffic and parking management plan be submitted to Norwalk’s Transportation, Mobility & Parking Department (TMP) for their review and approval; and
9. That any and all conditions required by Norwalk WPCA are applicable to this approval; and
10. That any and all conditions required by Norwalk DPW are applicable to this approval; and

11. That any and all conditions required by the Norwalk Fire Marshal are applicable to this approval; and
12. That all applicable Code Enforcement Agency Committee signoffs shall be submitted prior to the issuance of a zoning permit; and
13. That a Connecticut licensed engineer shall certify that all the required improvements, including any required off-site improvements, were installed to City standards prior to the issuance of a Certificate of Zoning Compliance (COZC); and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that this application complies with all applicable sections of the Norwalk Building Zone Regulations; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the effective date of this action shall be August 11, 2023.

Sincerely,

Bryan Baker
Principal Planner
City of Norwalk
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