



DONALD J. POLAND, PHD, AICP

SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT, URBAN PLANNING

PHONE: 860.655.6897 – E-MAIL: dpoland@gomanyork.com – www.gomanyork.com

Memorandum

To: Portland Planning and Zoning Commission
From: Donald J. Poland, PhD, AICP (Consulting Planner)
Date: June 12, 2016
Subject: Application #15-20: Proposed Text Amendments to ZR Section 9.17.1 – Mixed Use Development (Purpose). Application of BRT DiMarco PTP, LLC

The proposed amendment will limit the types of residential units allowed in mixed-use developments to studios, one and two-bedroom units and set the maximum number of two-bedroom units at 55% of total residential units. The proposed amendment also caps the total number of residential units in a mixed-used development to 240 units and provides an incentive—a density bonus—to allow an increased number of residential units only when the proposed mixed-use development incorporates the preservation of significant historic resources identified in the Town’s Plan of Conservation and Development.

Having reviewed the proposed amendment and the Plan of Conservation and Development, I provide the following remarks and findings:

1. The historic preservation incentive allowing a density bonus of up to 16 residential units per 5,000 square feet of commercial space will encourage and should accomplish the desire and need for historic preservation. The cost of incorporating—renovating and preserving—historic structures is most often costlier than new construction, creating an economic barrier to historic preservation. Allowing greater density spreads the higher costs of historic preservation over more residential units and as a result, makes the incorporation of historic structures more economically feasible.
2. Commercial office and retail space are experiencing disruption and contraction. Advances in technology—notably the internet—and changes in worker/consumer behaviors have decreased the demand for commercial office/retail space in recent years—a trend that is expected to continue. Therefore, the existing 1 to 3 residential units per 5,000 square feet of commercial space limits the potential and overall size of mixed-use developments, based on the amount of new commercial spaces that can be absorbed in the market. Allowing a higher ratio of residential units to commercial space (and higher overall residential density) will not only encourage the construction of mixed-use developments, but will better position such developments to prosper.
3. Residential developments—be they single family, multi-family, or mixed use—are often met with opposition regarding concerns of new public school age children generated by



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such developments. Unfortunately, such concerns are often based on past experiences and demographics trends that are no longer true. Household size and the number of children per household have been declining for decades (since the 1970s) and existing and new residential housing—single or multi-family, owner or renter occupied—today are generating very few public school age children. For example, Portland has 4,404 housing units and 1,372 public school age children enrolled in the school system (US. Census & CERC, 2014). That equals only 0.31 public school age children per housing unit. Furthermore, Portland’s housing stock is dominated by single-family detached residential units (81.5%), and 64.8% of Portland’s housing stock has three or more bedrooms. Portland’s existing housing stock is the housing stock most likely to attract families and generate public school age children. This is evident by Portland’s average household size for owner-occupied housing units being 2.47 persons, while the average household size for renter-occupied housing units is lower, only 1.83 persons.

The Rutgers University, Center for Urban Policy Research *“Residential Demographic Multipliers - Connecticut”* have shown that 1-bedroom multi-family rental units generate an average of 0.04 public school age children per unit and 2-bedroom multi-family rental units generate an average of 0.27 public school age children per unit—both are lower than Portland’s 0.31 public school age children per housing unit. A study I conducted in South Windsor of 21 multi-family developments (including both attached and detached housing units, and consisting of 1, 2, and 3-bedroom units) totaling 2020 residential housing units generated an average of only 0.25 public school age children per unit—higher than what I would anticipate based on the proposed amendments/limits.

The proposed text amendment has the potential to provide redevelopment and historic preservation opportunities for the Town of Portland. In addition, the proposed amendment will benefit the community by encouraging mixed-use development, and a greater diversity in housing stock. Most important, with the limits on the residential unit types and mix, the potential for increases in public school age populations are minimal, at best.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Donald J. Poland".

Donald J. Poland, PhD, AICP

SVP & Managing Director, Urban Planning