

STATE OF THE TOWN ADDRESS
PATRICK J. DAMANTI, CHAIRPERSON
DARIEN PLANNING AND ZONING COMMISSION
DECEMBER 11, 2006

Good evening Madame Moderator, Members of the RTM, Members of the Boards of Selectmen, Finance and Education, elected and appointed officials, and the people of Darien. The Darien Zoning Regulations, immediately following the Preamble reads as follows:

There is hereby established a comprehensive zoning plan for the Town of Darien, Connecticut (hereinafter referred to as the "Town"), which plan is set forth in the text, maps, and schedules, which constitute these Regulations. Said plan is adopted for the purposes set forth in Chapter 124, Section 8 of the Connecticut General Statutes, to:

- a. Guide the future growth and development of the Town in accordance with the Town Plan of Development which is designed to promote the most beneficial and convenient relationship among the residential, commercial and public areas within the Town, considering the appropriateness of various uses in each area, and the suitability of each area for such uses, as indicated by existing conditions and trends in development.*
- b. Provide adequate light, air and privacy; secure safety from fire, flood and other danger; and prevent overcrowding of the land and undue concentration of population.*
- c. Protect the character and the historic, social and economic stability of all parts of the Town, and ensure that all development shall be orderly and beneficial.*

- d. *Protect and conserve the value of land throughout the Town and the value of buildings appropriate to the various zones established by these Regulations.*
- e. *Bring about the gradual conformity of the uses of land and buildings throughout the Town to the comprehensive zoning plan set forth in these Regulations, and minimize conflicts among the uses of the land and buildings.*
- f. *Promote the most beneficial relation between the uses of land and buildings and the circulation of traffic throughout the Town, having particular regard to the avoidance of congestion in the streets and the provision of safe and convenient traffic access appropriate to the various uses of land and buildings throughout the Town.*
- g. *Aid in providing a guide for public policy and action in the efficient provision of public facilities and services, and for private enterprising building development, investment, and other economic activity relating to uses of land and buildings throughout the Town.*
- h. *Limit development to an amount commensurate with the availability and capacity of public facilities and services, thereby facilitating adequate provision for transportation, water, sewerage, schools, parks, and other public requirements.*
- i. *Conserve and protect all of the natural resources of the Town, including, land, soil, air, water, wetlands, marshes, ponds and lakes, streams and water courses, shorefront and coastal lands, rivers and tidal estuaries, trees and vegetation, forests, aquifers and water tables, wildlife, areas of scenic beauty, and areas of ecological importance – in recognition of the important interrelationships among these resources and a suitable environment for human habitation, their direct influence on the Town's*

suitability for residential use, and their importance to the health, safety and general welfare of Darien and its larger environs.

- j. Assure that proper provision be made for sedimentation control, and the control of erosion caused by wind or water.*
- k. Improve the appearance of all parts of the community by requiring or encouraging as appropriate, reasonable and necessary steps as part of the application of these Regulations. (Article I- Purposes, Section 100 of the Zoning Regulations of the Town of Darien, Connecticut.)*

The Town's Zoning Regulations which follow "Section 100- Purposes", as those Regulations were originally drafted in the early 1950's, and, as time progressed, were amended, modified, added to and/or deleted to meet the changing times, are an articulation of the guidelines to meet those purposes. 1954 Darien with its finished basements/romper rooms, black and white TV, without an Interstate and with small adjoining cities of Stamford and Norwalk is far different from 2006 Darien with cable movies on demand/media rooms/great rooms, "hot wired" houses, the Internet, E-mail, Interstate 95, corporate headquarters all around and Casinos just a short ride (short in distance, but probably not in time on the road) down that Interstate. The Regulations, an ever evolving body of law, has met those changes and grown and changed as and when necessary and appropriate.

This year, I will expand upon last year's address relative to recent development, and again look to what we see on the horizon for 2007.

Last year I spoke about three topics: The 2006 Town Plan of Conservation & Development (the "Plan"); recent development; and what we plan to see in the year ahead. I am pleased to report that in June 2006, the new Town Plan was adopted,

after more than three years of work by the Planning and Zoning Commission and the staff of the Planning and Zoning Department. We believe that the Plan has proven to be a key roadmap for this Commission as well as government Commissions, developers, and residents. It has been distributed to a number of local decision makers, has been added to the Town web site, is available in the Darien Library, or for purchase in the P & Z Department. The Commissioners and staff believe that the Plan will be useful to the Town's residents and elected officials for many years. There has been an increase in the amount of non-residential development, and that is outlined herein. Last year, I reported that we anticipated receiving applications for a new Tokeneke School and a new Darien Library. The local land use boards reviewed both of those applications and approved them. Those two buildings, which each will be under construction for approximately a year, are expected to open in 2008, will be new buildings which will last, hopefully, for several generations, and will serve thousands of Darien residents.

As Evonne mentioned earlier tonight, a lot of change has occurred, and will continue to occur. The only constant is change. One contributor to this is that expectations and desires of Darien residents have changed in the past 10-15 years.

Before I continue, I wish, as always, to acknowledge the dedication and volunteer spirit of the four local land use boards--the Planning and Zoning Commission, the Zoning Board of Appeals, Environmental Protection Commission and Architectural Review Board. Each have done an excellent job and given great effort in reviewing and acting upon various applications. These volunteers, like you, are vital to the community. I thank them all for their continued service.

Over the past year, the Planning & Zoning Commission and the P & Z Department has worked with Darien Revitalization Inc (“DRI”). DRI’s representatives have appeared and spoken at a number of the Commission’s public hearings. P & Z will be meeting with them tomorrow at a Parking Workshop they are sponsoring. Tonight, you will hear first-hand from Debbie Parnon about some of their accomplishments in 2006. DRI has also been actively involved in the ongoing Parking Regulations Study. This Study, which is a recommendation from the May 2006 Connecticut Main Street report, is being prepared by the consulting firm Fitzgerald & Halliday, Inc. They will review both the existing Darien Zoning Regulations relative to parking, and examine management issues relative to municipal parking. We expect a draft report from the consultant sometime next month. Depending upon the recommendations of their report, a formal proposal may be presented to the P & Z Commission for certain modifications to the existing Zoning Regulations.

Our work in reviewing commercial development was extensive in 2006. This included proposals for new non-residential and mixed-use buildings in downtown, and redevelopment and re-use of existing space elsewhere in the community. This continues some of our recent past approvals throughout downtown. I will note that the Commission has approved all of these new businesses, including restaurants and their associated outdoor seating/dining under the current Zoning Regulations. We expect that more restaurants will be reviewed and acted upon by the local land use boards in 2007. I credit my fellow Commission members for keeping an open mind with applications, revitalizing the downtown without compromising the existing Regulations, and being open to modifications and changes to the Zoning Regulations where necessary and appropriate.

I look back at the past eleven years as a member of P & Z, and actually, back to 1991 when I was first appointed to the Zoning Board of Appeals when there were many “see through” office buildings and an underdeveloped downtown. Think about all of the projects and redevelopment we have approved in Town since that time.

Randomly, in no particular order of time nor location

- Relocation of the Rainbow Shoppe (now a second relocation);
- Starbucks with outdoor seating and office space above (replacing gas station parking);
- Subway;
- Little Thai Kitchen (note that since 1996, the Commission has approved Moonstruck Chocolate and Katzenberg’s Deli, also in that West Avenue space);
- A variety of new tenants on Tokeneke Road, including Specs, Hands on Pottery, a new catering business, and Beijing Restaurant;
- Also on Tokeneke Road is Paws and Reflect and a vitamin store, within the historically significant and recently renovated Little Red Schoolhouse
- Pizza Pasta & Brew;
- Dunkin Donuts (replaced a gas station);
- Ching’s Kitchen Restaurant, with outdoor dining in the back of the restaurant to be constructed in 2007;
- T-Party Antiques;
- Darien-Rowayton Bank/Dolcetti project on Boston Post Road and Squab Lane (a mixed-use project including retail space and restaurants in three buildings);
- Upper Crust Bagels;
- Cosi;
- Outdoor seating in front of Cosi and Upper Crust Bagels;
- Replacing two existing buildings with First County Bank;

- Outdoor seating in front of the Sugar Bowl;
- Grove Street Plaza (mixed use development—retail, restaurant, apartments, with an expansion of a Town parking lot);
- Back office real estate office on Grove Street;
- Gofer Ice Cream, replacing a phone store, and the subsequent approval of redevelopment of the adjacent vacant lot across from the Sugar Bowl. This mixed-use project will include the razing of the existing building and the construction of a new building, including a mix of retail space, possibly restaurants, and six residential units, two of which will be affordable;
- Re-opening of the Darien Movie Theater with associated uses Ann Taylor Loft, Elizabeth Arden Spa and Sweet Dreams;
- Panera Bread with offices above (now under construction). This project will also include outdoor dining;
- WishList, in the space formerly occupied by Darien Antiques;
- Roundabout, in the space formerly occupied by a bank;
- Expansion of the Darien Sport Shop in 1997 and 2005.

Outside of Downtown, but significant, are the following:

- Avalon Hollow, an 189 unit apartment complex containing 42 units of Affordable Housing;
- Assisted Living Facility Sterling Glen, approved in 1996, replacing the Comfort Inn;
- Expansion and complete renovation of Shaw's (formerly Grand Union) supermarket;
- Aux Delices, with outdoor seating;
- Coromandel Indian Cuisine restaurant with outdoor seating.

- Michael Joseph's catering moving to space within the existing Nielsen's Florist building;
- A new Stamford Hospital Diagnostic Imaging Center within Thorndal Circle Office Park;
- New Veterinary office on the south side of Boston Post Road, eliminating backing into the Post Road;
- Replacement of a Veterinary Clinic with an expansion of Miller Automobile
- New Darien Library (construction to start in 2007);
- Expansion and renovation of Palmer's supermarket;
- Opening and later expansion of Orvis;
- Opening and expansion of Trader Joe's;
- Expanded Darien Golf Center;

I am sure that there were some that I did not mention, however, I think you can see the picture--times are changing and we have met the needs of the Town, without sacrificing the goals and purposes as articulated in Section 100 of the Darien Regulations.

Based upon a lot of hard work amongst members of the various boards, P & Z staff, DRI, developers, and many other residents of the Town, over the past few years, we have seen great improvements in Darien, especially in downtown Darien. We look forward to that continuing into 2007 and beyond.