

Town Clerk

TOWN OF WALLINGFORD, CONNECTICUT

SPECIAL TOWN COUNCIL MEETING

MONDAY, JUNE 14, 2004

4:00 P.M.

The following is a record minutes made and acted upon by the Wallingford Town Council at a Special Meeting held on June 14, 2005. The meeting was Called to Order by Councilman Steven Knight, at 4:08 P.M. in the Robert Earley Auditorium of the Wallingford Town Hall. Responding present to the Roll Call given by Town Clerk, Kathryn Zandri, were Councilors Lois Doherty, Gerald E. Farrell Jr., Stephen W. Knight, Robert F. Parisi, Michael Spiteri, Vincent F. Testa. Iris F. Papale arrived at 4:09pm and Jim Vumbaco arrived at 4:12pm. Councilor Vincenzo M. DiNatale was absent. Kathryn Zandri left the meeting at 4:12pm and returned at 5:11pm. Mayor William W. Dickinson, Jr. attended the meeting from 4:30pm to 4:45pm.

Mr. Knight: We're here to discuss the Caplan-Wooding property assessment with the Jonathan Rose Group, and I would appreciate if you would start by introducing yourselves. Not all of us have met you and would the clerk make notice that Iris Papale has arrived.

Munsun Park: Thank you very much. My name is Munsun Park, and I am the project manager from the Jonathan Rose Companies.

Larisa Ortiz: My Larisa Ortiz. I am a project manager from Jonathan Rose Companies as well.

Alan Plattus, Professor of Architecture and Urbanism, Yale University:
My name is Alan Plattus. I am the director of the Yale Urban Design Workshop at Yale University.

Surrey Schlabs: I am Surrey Schlabs, a designer with the Yale Urban Design Workshop.

Mr. Knight: OK, great. Who would like to start.

Ms. Park: I can begin by giving an introduction to our meeting. First of all thank you very much for giving us this opportunity to work with the town on the Wooding Caplan property. We're really excited. In fact, on Friday afternoon, we took another site visit of the property and the surrounding area with Jonathan Rose, and he gave us his insight on the opportunities, and clearly, there are a lot of opportunities on the site. So really we're excited to start this. We had our kick off meeting on May 10, 2004 with

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TOWN COUNCIL CHAMBERS OF TOWN HALL

AGENDA

1. Pledge of Allegiance and Roll Call
2. Discuss the Caplan Wooding property assessment with the Jonathan Rose Group – James M. Vumbaco

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AT 3:20 P M AND RECORDED BY

Katherine J. Andre TOWN CLERK

the sub-committee, and we've enormously appreciated the input of the sub-committee so far. Since that time we have started our baseline conditions analysis and stated to look at some of the conditions within the town residential, commercial and other market conditions as well as the existing conditions with the site and the surrounding area. This meeting is part of a series of community meetings that we've scheduled that is part of our scope for the Wooding Caplan property study. Earlier today we met with town officials and heads of town departments. Tonight we'll be meeting with some residential neighbors of the property, and then tomorrow morning we'll be meeting with the commercial sector, and we'll also be scheduling a meeting with the general public as well for them to provide some input on the property and the surrounding context. How we structured this meeting and the other meetings is basically a form where we would like input from the Council members on the Wooding Caplan property but just only on the property but on the property relates to the uptown area, the downtown area and to the Town of Wallingford as a whole. We welcome your comments on all of those areas because we don't look at the site in isolation. We also realize that the town has enormous base of knowledge on the site, having owned the property for many years and that is another reason that we have been having these committee meetings and we really look forward to getting your input on the property. How we have been structuring these meetings is basically ...I will very, very briefly go into some of the principles and objectives that the sub-committee laid out in its summary report to the Town Council a year ago, which is on the record and we've also just distributed a summary of those principles to the Town council today. After that the primary focus of this meeting is to talk about the range of potential uses for the site and the issues, opportunities and constraints related to the site and the surrounding context. In terms of the principles and objectives in front of you, they are the base. They are guiding us. Rather than go into them since you have them in front of you and you received them a year ago, they are consistent with how we believe you need to integrate into urban design. Basically, a summary of them could be stated in a few statements or so and that is that we will be looking to identify re-development opportunities for the site that will provide economic opportunities, that will revitalize the uptown and the downtown areas while being very sensitive to the surrounding context, including the surrounding property owners. With that said, I also wanted to ask...in our community meetings we typically write as we have comments sent back and forth, and if that would be appropriate we may do that as well but I don't know what is standard at these meetings. If you prefer us to stay seated, we can do that as well.

Ms. Ortiz: Hello, I've been conducting some of the initial marketing research that will really be required to determine what kind of uses are feasible on this site, and we'll be looking at four uses today, and we'd like your input on these uses that are a result of this study, the first being residential development, the second being commercial development, the third being public space and the fourth being parking. We'll try to keep to that order but our last meeting showed that parking seemed to have a priority. I'd like to hand the discussion over to Alan (Plattus) who will talk to you a little bit about the design principles that we see as guiding the design development of this property so we can put what we're doing in context and you have something to respond to.

Professor Alan Plattus: I direct a community design center at Yale School of Architecture, called the Yale Urban Design Workshop and we've worked all over the State of Connecticut over the last twelve years or so in towns many of which are similar in size and issues to Wallingford, some of which are larger, some of which are smaller and have a fair amount of familiarity of the dynamics of communities around the state of Connecticut. What distinguishes them as unique, and we think wonderful places, we're very happy to be part of this team. We haven't had the opportunity in working with Wallingford before, and we're looking forward to this, and we're also looking forward to interacting with other members of the community like Sam Sargeant, who has worked on this site for many years. He will be consulting with our team as well. We hope that together between the expertise that exists in this town, I and some of the new ideas that we might bring to bear that we can come up with a successful framework for development. That framework is what I want to address very briefly and layout six or seven issues that I think are probably obvious to most of you but I think that we need to remind ourselves of this as we move forward.

First of all, and perhaps most obvious, this is a huge opportunity. It's very rare for a town as old as Wallingford to find a three acre parcel in the middle of its downtown district available for development, so it's a great opportunity but it's also a big responsibility, and I think that's pretty clear as you all haven't done anything with it yet. I think that you have thought very carefully about it, and you continue to think very carefully about it, and we want to help you think appropriately and carefully as you move forward. To that end, I think I'll summarize quickly some of the salient issues. \

This first has already been mentioned, and that is access. This is not a street frontage property. Most towns that we know, most cities that we know work on streets. That's what provides access to individual businesses and properties. This is so to speak a landlocked property and

providing appropriate access not only for residents or potential residents, business people, customers, the public but also for services – snow removal, fire service when it's needed, security, those sorts of things. These are big issues for this site, and they're not as easily addressed as they might be in a more normal situation.

Secondly, and related, and it's important, we think about how to integrate this site in what is already a walkable and pedestrian friendly downtown area. You all have a wonderfully scaled central business district, or downtown, in particular the area around North and South Main Street has been beautifully taken care of and improved over the years, and it sets a very high bar for the design standards that one would apply to future development, so we think it's very important that any new development enhance the character of what you already have, relate to it in terms of its scale, relate to it in terms of re-enforcing what is primarily, in spite of what is already a lot of cars, a pedestrian scale environment but also to enhance the character of the existing downtown. That's not just an architectural issue. That's also, as my colleagues will I'm sure remind us, an economic issue as well. We don't want to in our enthusiasm add something to this downtown that at the end of the day takes away from the vitality of the downtown. We want development that adds value and adds vitality that re-enforces the existing uses and the existing businesses and the existing residential areas rather than taking this off in a new and, perhaps inappropriate, direction.

This is the fourth point, we need to determine very carefully the appropriate scale, density and character of any new development and always assess its impact on what exists. I've mentioned scale and density. They are not the same issue. Density in Connecticut, and in New England in general, is often one of those words, the 'D' word. We can think of other words like that. People get very nervous when there's talk about density. We need to remember it's really an abstract issue that is a quantitative, formula based on how much of whatever use you get on however much of a given area. But at the end of the day the real issue for you is going to be the scale and character, what this looks like, how this feels, how it re-enforces the existing town. Density can be a tool in some cases just as it can be a liability in others, and this is something that we want to discuss very carefully.

Next, and very importantly, I've already mentioned safety and not just access but accessibility. Anything we do in the 21st century, I think we take for granted that it has to be accessible to the full range of citizens of a place like Wallingford, not just to a select few, and that along with that goes the public issue of safety. Safety in terms of curb cuts, traffic access, safety in terms of accessibility of services and emergency

vehicles but also safety in terms of the perception that we have of this place as a comfortable and good place to be. If we're going to solve our other problems, particularly our parking problems, we need to encourage people that it's a good idea to get rid of their car and get out of their car and operate as pedestrians. That will only happen if they have the perception that this new development, along with the downtown area, is a safe and comfortable place to be, that the lighting is good, that the signage is appropriate, that all of the things conspire together to make a good, attractive and safe feeling environment, and that, of course, brings us to issues of use, which we will talk about a little bit more in a moment.

A huge design issue is how open space of various kinds is integrated into this new development. Open space is one of those great generic words. It can be anything from an airport to a ball field to a park to a sidewalk, and it can also be, by the way, parking. Parking is not necessarily the enemy of open space. Parking is, when it is done well, a kind of open space and potentially a very attractive kind of open space. The next to last issue is the need, a very important need, as we've already seen from our discussions so far, to balance existing uses, potential new uses and the demand that they place on each other and on the town for parking, and then to do that parking in as comfortable and attractive a way as possible so that it enhances the character of what you've got, rather than taking away from it.

And then there's one final issue that I want to add, Munsun, that we didn't mention but certainly came out of our discussions but it's an important design issue and that's preservation. Which buildings are worthy of being preserved, how should they be preserved, how do we find appropriate new uses, which buildings can be changed, which buildings might not be ten years from now? All of these considerations interact together to create a design framework.

Ms. Ortiz:

I think with that in mind, we can begin our discussion of the uses we've been researching to date. The idea here is not to design the site, obviously, but rather gather information from you as to what you believe are appropriate uses for the site. You have the experience and the input from your constituents and have been dealing with the site for a while and determined what combination of uses you think are appropriate. I'll tackle residential first. I think generally what we've found from our previous meeting, we were told that there were two kinds of needs. A study had been completed by the planning office - affordable rental housing and empty nest housing, and we've done some research, and this is somewhat anecdotal as to the need for housing for empty nesters, so we're talking about individuals whose children have

since left home. They're moving to smaller homes so they no longer need a single family home on a large lot, and they'd like to stay in the community where they've raised their children and have friends and have become part of the community but they no longer need or want the homes or the maintenance involved with those homes. There is an increasing demand for this kind of housing. With that in mind, and thinking about this is in terms of not only the kinds of housing we're looking at but also the relative density of this housing, we should keep in mind that great downtowns have housing that's walkable to them. We'd like to open it up to you and get some of your input on your perception of the need for housing and different kinds of housing and at what levels of density, speaking to the issues of scale and character as well.

Mr. Knight: The empty nesters housing sounds more attractive to me than the affordable housing. Frankly it does sound like it is something from the demographics standpoint is going to be of increasing demand. I'm more interested in that.

Mr. Farrell: I would echo some of that. I think it's a concern from the Town's perspective of the economic viability of the project and in terms of being able to float it financially that probably higher end, empty nester housing is going to put more dollars in there from my own perception. We have very little condominiums in the fore to the \$500,000 range. I constantly hear of that as a market that exists in Wallingford but is most totally unsatisfied. Those kinds of people particularly express the desire to be downtown but at the same time they want good parking, which is a conundrum.

Ms. Papale: When we purchased this property many years ago, it was in mind, and I think it was a stipulation, not that it was written in stone, it was a stipulation the Fire and Police Departments would remain where they are, and it was very important that there was property there for parking for the Police Department, and I was concerned what your thoughts would be as far as that situation.

Ms. Ortiz: As Munsun mentioned earlier, we just completed a meeting with various department heads, and Chief Dortenzio was part of that meeting, and this issue came up, and we are going to be speaking with him in more detail about his very specific needs- which of his parking needs need to be on site, his fleet vehicles, for example, and vehicles that need to be secured, which of his parking needs can be located off site, for example, policemen don't necessarily need to access their cars during shift can park a block away. I think it's important to determine what his actual need is and it's important to recognize it as an actual need and to

incorporate that into the plan for the site, and that's something that we're planning on doing.

Ms. Papale: At one time we spoke about selling the Fire Department, selling that piece of property and maybe moving it to another parcel in town but now I understand that the Police and the Fire Department would like their departments to stay there.

Ms. Ortiz: That was not mentioned. The Fire Chief was there as well and talked about the need for the site but we didn't mention moving the Fire Department.

Ms. Papale: At one time it was spoken of but, as I said, minds changed, and they would like to stay there.

Ms. Ortiz: Chief Struble did talk about their capacity or their need for future capacity, and he said that at the moment that they are quite satisfied with the current capacity on the site.

Alan Plattus: And of the buildings on the site, the Fire Station is one of the smaller ones. I don't think you would necessarily gain that much in terms of usable real estate, maybe an extra access driveway, but otherwise it's probable not worth doing unless it's going anywhere anyway.

Ms. Ortiz: I'd like to ask another question about housing. From your constituents, have you heard a perceived need of either rental or for sale units in this part of town?

Chairman Vumbaco: From the people that I've talked to, they don't want housing at all.

Ms. Ortiz: OK.

Chairman Vumbaco: I think it's more the neighborhood, and the comment I was going to make, one of the possibilities for this project is a mixed use of residential and commercial; however, when I talked to some developers about that, they've all come up with the same conclusion that they need to go high in order to make it worthwhile for them to either purchase the property or invest the money into the property to do that. To go high obviously needs zone changes, and also probably a commitment from the neighborhood, which does not want to go high. I think there are some serious, serious issues there. When you asked what residential meant there, I think it's got to be a mixed use.

Ms. Ortiz: I'd be interested in exploring what you just mentioned.

- Mr. Knight:** High is a relative term. Are you talking in the range of high-end condos, like Jerry is talking about in \$400,000 to \$500,000 range?
- Chairman Vumbaco:** No, I'm talking height-four or five stories condos or whatever to make it worthwhile. I wasn't talking about dollars. I was talking about physical size when I said high.
- Ms. Ortiz:** These are definitely the issues that we, as Jonathan Rose Company, will be doing as part of our scope. We'll be examining various schemes based on conditions analysis and based on these community meetings and the information that we are collecting and conduct financial performance and see how they are feasible financially.
- Mr. Farrell:** In regard to parking and how it figures into everything else, I've mentioned it to many people, and they tell me I'm wrong but to me it would seem that many of the problems with the site would be solved by putting parking underground. You have all the parking space the Police Department needs. You have all the parking spaces that the Post Office just plain takes up, plus if you're adding buildings to the site you're generating more of a parking need, and yet you run into the problem that Jim points out of how do you make it flow financially if all you can do is go up. Well, I suppose you could spread out further and be a little more low-rise, if you didn't have to put any of your parking on the surface.
- Ms. Ortiz:** From a pure financial perspective, an individual parking space can cost anywhere from \$30,000 to \$50,000, assuming excavation, so whether you can afford that depends on the value of the land, depends on the rents that you can garner. Generally in smaller downtowns, it's not feasible to do underground parking for that reason. In New York City where you can build an eight to ten story tower, sometimes it's not feasible.
- Alan Plattus:** Just to put it in a relative context, we usually figure that structured parking, that's above grade parking, which is the cheap stuff, is ten to twenty times as expensive as on grade parking. The conditions in small Connecticut communities that are generating that is where there is a high commuter demand and the State Department of Transportation money or even federal money to offset some of the costs. I don't think you are at a point right now. It's hard to imagine that you would be at a point that would drive the formula in that direction. It might sometime in the future. It doesn't mean that we won't all come back in fifty years and find a parking garage dropped into the middle of Wallingford. All in all that would be above grade, not below grade. So you increase the number of cars you can get but you don't save the area all together.

- Mr. Farrell:** Because parking is always going to remain problematic, particularly because of the Post Office. I forget what the figures were but it's something like 100 spaces that they take up of which they provide nothing.
- Ms. Ortiz:** Another issue related to parking that we found is that often times that there are a number of parking spaces that are within a one block walk of downtown that are under utilized, and if you think about parking and if you think about an individual who's going downtown to five or six stores to do a few things, they don't necessarily need to park directly in front of one individual store. They might be willing to park a block away. Malls are examples of how far people are willing to walk to do shopping, multiple shopping to visit multiple stores. Good signage that directs individuals and drivers to accessible lots is important. I'm making sure that employers and their employees are not parking in the prime spots right in front of their stores. I'm making sure that there is high enough turnover in downtown. There are ways to address parking issues, and we are going to be working with the planning office and the study they recently completed on parking that is within the vicinity we are talking about, probably one or two blocks. You may very well find that if you have certain strategy, there are strategies that you can implement, that will increase the amount of parking that you have downtown.
- Alan Plattus:** I would encourage you not to be pessimistic about that issue. It's clear that there are some choices that need to be made but I don't think from what I can see in a preliminary sense that they are going to close off all of our alternatives. What would be useful and valuable for us would be to hear from you what kinds of things in the best of all possible worlds you'd like to see happen in this site and in this area and challenge us to look at both their economic feasibility and our ability to come up with ways of making them work physically for Wallingford.
- Mr. Farrell:** Mr. Chairman, if I could ask one more question related to this. One of the questions that I get from people is how much will there be consideration in your study of the overall downtown, and I guess the way that's related to the parking question is, there's certainly enough people who are of the opinion that removing the Post Offices operations, maybe not their retail piece, but they're trucking in of the mail and they're trucking out of the mail should be a consideration for the overall downtown, which frees up a lot of parking. Are we going to get something that tells us about general marking (tape unclear) conditions and what the spin-off from Caplan-Wooding is going to be even right across the street from it.

- Alan Plattus:** I think, as Larisa said, our first line of defense is to see if there's not someplace that some of that parking demand can go that's not so conflictual. Management, and I say this as an architect, is always better than construction. If you can solve your problems by managing things better, that's a first good line of defense rather than going to the option of relocating a facility. If that were in the cards anyway, we know that post offices are moving. They don't answer to anybody, of course. Just because we want them to, they won't do it. We may want them to move and in other places, we want them to stay and that doesn't always work out. We'll certainly look into that.
- Ms. Ortiz:** The issue of the Post Office came up in the previous meeting with the town department staff, and we'll be talking with the person who manages that facility. We would talk to that person and understand what and how they use that facility and how they park. We understand there are a lot of concerns in the town, and based on what we would recommend for the Wooding Caplan property in the summary report, we may ultimately have some recommendations in terms related to parking and potentially related to the Post Office.
- Mr. Farrell:** Thank you.
- Ms. Doherty:** To clarify, you said the underground parking per unit was \$30,000 to \$50,000.
- Ms. Ortiz:** Per space.
- Ms. Doherty:** Per space and what were you saying about the above grade parking?
- Alan Plattus:** That is substantially more expensive. That's around ten times more expensive than surface, depending on how you do it, structured parking, as opposed to surface parking.
- Ms. Doherty:** OK.
- Ms. Ortiz:** In some cases it depends on the topography of the land and the ability to excavate more easily, if there's rock..
- Alan Plattus:** And how sensitive you are as to what it looks like. If you don't care what it looks like, it can be a lot less expensive than if you have some degree of sensitivity to that but it's still a huge differential, which is why you don't see it except in more dramatic situations.
- Ms. Doherty:** Thank you.

Ms. Ortiz: Unless there are other questions about parking and residential, I think that we'd like to move the discussion over to another use, which will be commercial use. Our preliminary research into some of the commercial retail and office uses, just to give you a sense, I've found that after speaking with some brokers, downtown rents are between \$10 to \$15 a square foot. We own some property in downtown Rye, which is in Westchester, a relatively upscale downtown, not so dissimilar to Wallingford, we're looking at \$45 a square foot, and that's sort of a minimum threshold necessary to justify new construction. A developer would need to see a real basic return, so what we are finding, and these are really preliminary findings, but a developer looking at the same numbers that we're looking at, and we develop property for ourselves as well, would be unlikely to develop retail on site as it stands. However, one of the things that we've discussed is a phasing of development of the property, places where it makes sense to make new development are successful, high-end downtowns that have grown over time, so to speak, and so depending on what you put there first, over time you may find the opportunities to develop retail space on site. Thinking about a master plan for the area may incorporate that but at the present time this is what we've found. In our walkthrough with Jonathan on Friday, it seemed pretty clear that the viability of retail on the site as it stands is very low. It would be a very risky proposition for any developer to develop the site for retail, but again phasing is an option. I am the bearer of bad news perhaps but you might have heard this before.

Mr. Knight: Just following up on that, I think everybody that's up here is aware that Wallingford is not Rye and I can appreciate that this translates into what you just said. I would like it, if you would, to elaborate a little bit on the phasing because I'm not sure how we get to where we have to be with commercial development at all. We seem to be just so far out of the market.

Ms. Ortiz: I think some of what we're talking about is the chicken and egg scenario as to what comes first, the retail or the residential and what we've found is that you need residences to support downtown retail. Suburban development began with residential development and commercial development followed the people, and that's likely what we would find on this site, and there's no reason to expect any differently. Potentially if you were to develop your portion of the site for residential, depending on the density that you're looking at, you know eight units are different from twenty units is different from forty is different from eighty. Depending on the kind of density of the residential, the scale of the residential use proposed for this site, you might see a future demand for retail but it's difficult to tell without thinking about the kind of residential uses.

Mr. Knight:

Let me follow up and just ask you this to see if I'm on the right track. Who are you suggesting is that possibly the right type of residential development is put in place and proves attractive so that it raises the demographics for the whole area enough to start generating interest in the kind of retail that would appeal to these people, and therefore, attractive offers. Is that where we are going?

Ms. Ortiz:

The general principle is that the more people you have living downtown, the more it contributes to the re-vitalization of the whole downtown, and for this particular property, you need a residential base to ensure that any other commercial development could be successful. With that said, referring again to the other meeting and in our own internal discussions, this is an initial assessment based on current conditions. We are still exploring what other opportunities there are. If you put in a destination restaurant or other destination type of use, that is a unique segment of the commercial market that doesn't necessarily rest on the current rents in the surrounding area, we don't know. We still have to explore that in a little more detail. We're still early but there is that opportunity, and they could potentially sit on their own. We're still looking into it. From our initial assessment, it appears that certain types of retail wouldn't succeed as well as other types of retail. I think that's a fair assessment of the destination retail is a possibility but as we mentioned in our last meeting, it's a little difficult to determine whether something is going to end up a destination restaurant or not but there are ways to address this issue. For example, we talked about potentially splitting the site and a long-term lease or sale of a portion of the site to a well-known restaurant in such a way that incorporates the overall design of the site but it doesn't necessarily need the kind of frontage that a typical Main Street restaurant might. There are ways to address those issues with regard to design, with regard to how and where you put your open space to make that destination attractive, and if there's a way that we can incorporate access into the site, pedestrian and auto access in such a way that makes people go by, these are definitely opportunities. It would be a certain kind of retail, not someone developing retail on spec, speculative, which would what I was trying to address.

Another commercial type that we had talked preliminarily is the option of an inn downtown. We understand that there are a few places in the center of town, well, one place in particular, a bed and breakfast, and there are others on the outskirts near the highway but there aren't any others within the town, and that's something that we also put out there for discussion. We see that there can potentially be a demand among parents of Choate students and other visitors to the town.

Mr. Farrell: Could you be a little more specific about that? I know there was a proposal to buy the Caplan building and put a boutique hotel in there. Choate recently took their Headmaster's home and made that into, I think, an eleven room inn but we also hear that Courtyard by Marriott is booked to capacity pretty much all the time, so what type of inn or hotel are we talking about?

Ms. Ortiz: That was a conceptual idea. There were no specific ideas yet for that. We work with hotel consultants so obviously any idea that we would put forth would be with the backing and support of the research of a hotel consultant, if we, in fact, put that in among the schemes. We don't know.

Mr. Knight: OK, thank you.

Ms. Ortiz: It was just to get input from the Council members. Thank you for that information on other hotel projects. I guess the idea was to get general comments on your perception of an inn at the site.

Mr. Parisi: Excuse me, could everyone please speak into the mikes. We have a hard time hearing. You have to talk right into them.

Ms. Ortiz: Moving onto public space. The issue of public space is one that touches upon another issue, which the fiscal return on site, and we know that the study that was completed, it seems there is somewhat of a debate as to open space, and I should preface this by saying open space means many things, and I don't think we are talking about devoting the entire site to open space. We are talking about incorporating that as one of a few uses on site in such a way that is compliments those uses and makes them more attractive to any developer. The idea of open space is something we would like to bring up, and I'd also like to ask the question to you, Chairman Vumbaco, you mentioned residential housing was something that your constituents did not want. Was the option then open space?

Chairman Vumbaco: Most of the residents on Academy Street would like to see the whole property turn into a park or at least a significant portion of it. At least that's what I've heard, and again I only speak to the few people that have talked to me but I don't think there's much building that they would like to see happening on the site.

Mr. Farrell: That's accurate.

Ms. Ortiz: OK. Now one of the questions is the kind of fiscal return that the town is expecting on the site or would like to see. A site that's devoted

entirely to open space would require maintenance and would mean the loss of your initial investment so the answer to that question is really what is your threshold, what is your desire for fiscal return of this site, if any?

Mr. Parisi: My impression, and one of the first proposals that I saw, was a mixture of residential, some specialty shops, and if there was room, some sort of a small sitting area, maybe a park. I have not had the comments about all open space, and I can't say that I have, and quite frankly, personally I think it would be an awfully expensive park. I would hope that there would be a mix, something close to what the original proposal was, which was residential, some commercial, and if it could be worked out, some sort of a small park.

Chairman Vumbaco: I wasn't advocating a park.

Mr. Parisi: I'm not saying you were.

Chairman Vumbaco: I was just telling you what I heard. Let me tell you . We paid too much money for that, for a park.

Mr. Parisi: I just wanted to clarify, Jim, that's all.

Mr. Knight: Just to get into the middle of that discussion, my own impression is that in terms of fiscal return, I'm not sure that this Councilor has interest in necessarily making money on this. We just don't want to lose a lot of money. What is going to play into it for me is the amount of money other than the original purchase price. It's eventually going to have to be invested by the town into the property to make this project viable. I have no illusions that we're not going to spend money to make this viable, whether that means demolishing other property in order to open up access. It may mean purchase of additional, adjoining property to the extent that we can minimize those kind purchases while still maximizing the viability of the project. Obviously that for me is important.

Ms. Ortiz: So what I hear you saying is there's a desire for open space that's incorporated into other uses that result in a development that is specifically sound that provides no loss, that results in no loss.

Mr. Knight: Well, the best of all possible worlds, of course, is what you ask for but I know that in order to make a project attractive, to make it viable, you're going to have to have some open space provisions, some of that's going to be parking, and as Bob suggested, a small park. It certainly would enhance the residential attractiveness. It's a whole mix of things that's

going to make it work. I don't see separating that out. The open space works with the residential, if there is some, which works with the parking, which is part of the open space, and so forth.

Ms. Ortiz:

We've developed projects with similar constraints on small parcels of land, and the developers, especially in urban areas, they like to have public areas. If it's a mixed-use project, they like to have public areas, they like people to come and spend time there. It will benefit the project, and it will benefit the town to include public space on the project. We'll have to look at the different schemes and the different options to figure out what are some of the thresholds from a developer perspective, and then balance that with the other uses for the site. I think the bottom line is open space adds value and what a developer wants to do is capture that value in their developments, and so the design that's proposed for open space has the potential to create a tremendous amount of value, depending on how it's designed and incorporated into the rest of the site that could make it very attractive, so it would be a worthy investment on behalf of the city and could potentially allow them to sell the property. It would be an investment that would result in a return to the city.

Alan Plattus:

It's also potentially a political negotiating point in a good sense that if there's the right kind of development that can help pay for, and maybe even completely pay for, a small amount of open space, and in turn that becomes a tradeoff that people who would like to see it all one thing, or all another, might be able, we hope, to find common ground if it's done well. And I wasn't being facetious when I said that parking at its best is actually open space, and I think that we have to assume that given the constraints that exist here and given the constraints that exist in historic communities around the United States, we're going to have to get better and better at doing parking in an attractive way, the way they do in Europe and other places, so that public spaces can actually provide parking on occasion, and at the same time, parking can be landscaped and treated attractively, so that it is both friendly as a space and but also environmentally friendly. I think the days are past when we can just turn the whole world into impervious surfaces and assume that the runoff will take care of itself. All of those things are pushing us now to be more inventive on how we combine these uses.

Mr. Farrell:

Just to address the Academy, North Elm open space thing, the comments of some of the people that I heard were 100% open space, and that's probably an unreasonable position but, since I do live in that area, I guess what I would be seeking is something that minimizes the amount of noise that I share with my neighbors. The unhappiness over hearing the Police Department test their sirens at 6am or the garbage

trucks coming through as if it's an industrial site and banging the dumpsters. So maybe the open space has a fair amount of buffer to it noise wise. I know you can do that with plantings.

Ms. Ortiz:

I have an interesting anecdotal story about a project in Boston. In the south end, they developed an open space on a former railroad line and one side of the block didn't want access. They wanted their privacy. They didn't want people permeating. They didn't want anyone being able to walk into their neighborhood. Today they are kicking themselves. They wish that they had access to that space. It's a value. It's valuable to them, and now they have to walk all the way around and the grade is such that they can't access the site without a lot of additional investment. The other side, where there is access, is where you see the highest increase in property values in all of Boston, and so this is something to consider. Residential property owners often say the same thing. There is a lot of concern. I think the kind of design you're talking about, the kind of design we'd like to see is one that would be attractive enough that property owners would want access to it.

Mr. Farrell:

You'll hear the same thing here that you'll hear from the neighbors that they want the right of way that the town owns onto Academy Street, in effect, erased off the map, which I don't agree with.

Ms. Doherty:

I don't know if I'm getting ahead of you or not but we talking about residents versus retail, and I'm questioning the accessibility part of it. Do you have some type of criteria you go for to decide how wide an accessible area you must have for retail and/or residential?

Ms. Ortiz:

There aren't any set criteria. I'm glad that you are bringing up the access issue because we are just about to segue into that. When we walked the site again on Friday, Wallace Avenue is going to be the primary access and egress for vehicles and pedestrians. It's an existing road but it's clearly not wide enough. You mentioned some of the cost the town may have to incur potentially or the cost of demolition or of property acquisition. Clearly for this site to work, we're going to have to widen Wallace Avenue. It's only a one way, and it doesn't even include sidewalks. Where that occurs and how that occurs, we'll have to examine in a little more detail but that was pretty obvious when we walked the site. It was one of the first things that Jonathan noticed. At the beginning of this meeting, Alan Plattus mentioned some of the principles of design that you need, and you need visibility for the site, and Main Street would be one of the primary access points as well. We talked about this with the town departments, and there could potentially be different access points from Main Street. We understand that years ago, the SNET Company had entertained the possibility of having a

two-way access road onto the Wooding Caplan property from Main Street. We need to re-open that discussion with them and understand what their position is. That's not necessarily the only access point but that could be an option. There are other options as well. We'll be looking into vehicular and pedestrian access. Having vehicular access opens up the property a little more, and the pedestrian access could potentially work just as well, if we're trying to encourage pedestrian activity in this area. We're very sensitive to the easement onto Academy Street. That will probably be coming up in our meeting tonight with the residential neighbors. We do want to understand how they feel about this. We realize having it open to vehicles probably is unrealistic but potentially, maybe for pedestrian access. That's another option that we'll be exploring. We'd like to open this up for discussion and questions.

Mr. Testa: I have some concerns about whether strictly allowing or leaving it to a developer to try to put something in here that is going to be economically feasible for them would require concessions on our part that we're not willing to make. In other words, to make it for a developer to go in and put in something that they can get enough of a profit on, I have a hard time figuring out how that can be done without us saying, you know what, let's let something be developed there that we're not really crazy about. Whether it's big enough commercial or high enough residential. That's one issue that always concerned me and I think if it could be done easily, it would have been done already. I like the idea of providing additional parking at this site. I've always envisioned some kind of plaza type arrangement where there was some parking, a park, some type of park development and whatever building development was done, ideally along the perimeter, for some small shops, restaurants, and boutiques-type things. Maybe two stories with residential on the top to try to get some residential traffic there. That's where I'm coming from. I think to allow the businesses on Main Street to potentially use the inside portion of their buildings by developing the area into a place to go, I think would be beneficial. I'm trying to remember now, can you still go through the Caplan building to get to the back? It's closed off? OK. But that could potentially be an incentive to the property owner to allow that to be a pedestrian walkway. You used to be able to go into the old Caplan store building and their shops and go out the back. Incorporating incentive to allow that a pedestrian walkway obviously enhances all the shops in that building and anything either side and in the back of that building. That's been of interest to me. Certainly in the spring and summertime, perhaps have something again plaza like to allow for seasonal kiosk type retail in the plaza type environment. Maybe with some boutiques and restaurants. That's kind of how I picture it. I picture a large open area /

parking plaza/ park, whatever you want to call it, and along the back where some development might be done. I can see that happening. I'm on the road all the time, and I'm thinking of places. I see things like this. Downtown Guilford comes to mind down by the green where you pull in between buildings, and there are little plazas in there. I'm just trying to think what would be beneficial and feasible. I also want this to be a place to potentially attract people with the ability to then walk out of this place and go into the other part of downtown without having to go around, which is why I mention going back through Caplan's. No matter how many parking spaces we say we have downtown, it doesn't seem to attract people down there. If this is a place to start, and then allow people to walk from there to Simpson Court and further down Center Street to hit shops because they know that maybe the restaurant to finish at or start at is on the Wooding area. That's the way I envision this as opposed to saying let's go with a developer and to try to turn this into a commercial / residential complex, maximizing space because I don't see that happening. I don't think it's going to be economically feasible, or we're going to have to put in buildings that we don't like. That's my perspective from talking to people and what I see. In other words, my ideal is limited development, building wise and things to generate pedestrian traffic as much as possible. Thanks.

Chairman Vambaco: Any other comments right now? Steve. I think we are under a time constraint. Do we have anything after access that you need to address?

Ms. Ortiz: I think we touched on the key issues, and we leave it open to discussion and comments.

Mr. Knight: I think that you have given us a lot to think about, and you've showed a framework for development. What I'm interested in is, what things have to happen, regardless of what kind of development goes in there? Certain things are going to have to be, infrastructure improvements, access improvements. You started to speak on access improvements. You talked about possibly demolition to make Wallace Avenue wider. My thought is, in the comments that I've heard, it would be very difficult ...when you're coming out to Fair Street, it's going to have to intersect as a full intersection, and I doubt that the State would allow an offset intersection. It sounds like it would be more confusing and probably add to the problem of access rather than solve a problem of access. Now if that's the case, there are some basics that have to be accepted by the community in order to get this piece developed at all, and I would be interested in ...even if you're giving us some bad medicine, we have to hear it and we have to take it.

Mr. Parisi: Following along with what Steve said, I would like to hear what can be done and what can't be done also. That was my idea of becoming involved with an outside firm in the beginning. We're not planners; we're not experts at development. I can come up with all the pie in the sky ideas you want to hear if you give me enough time but it doesn't mean that they are all feasible. I think you should establish – here's what you can work within, here's what we think has a good chance of working. You develop what you want in there as far as suggestions to you, right now I can think of a lot of things but I don't have any idea at all if they're feasible or not, or even close to it.

Alan Plattus: It's certainly our intention and our charge to illustrate a variety of different scenarios that you can then discuss, evaluate, pass around to other people, and at the end of the day, there are going to be some judgment calls to be made and one of them has already been eluded to and that's how much are you going to pay for, as Wallingford, and how much you'd like a developer help you do. The infrastructure improvements that are needed to make that a more attractive place along the lines that you were discussing, lighting, better paving, landscaping, even if it's left relatively undeveloped, are clear and desirable whether you mainly have parked cars there and open space or whether you have other kinds of development. The question is do you want to pay for them out of public money, or would you like a developer to add as many of those improvements as possible, including the infrastructure improvements. We're going to be looking at this balance of the carrying capacity of the site relative to the market conditions but I'm quite confident that at the end of the day, there is still going to be a lot of judgment involved on your part and on the part of your constituents as to what balance of uses and what financial formula is most desirable. I think the way Mr. Testa articulated the decision is not a bad way to start to say to yourself that we don't want to get caught in a position where we feel we have to approve something that left to our druthers, we wouldn't have at all. That's a pretty reasonable expectation. You shouldn't be in that position, and we shouldn't leave you in that position.

Ms. Park: That's absolutely right, and I also want to add, we do the analysis and we do come up with recommendations but ultimately, when we finish our summary report, give out presentation and also give you a development RFP, should there be certain types of development uses that we recommend, it is ultimately town leadership that will need to help guide this through and make sure that the adjacent property owners and other members of the town, your constituents, are cooperating and working on this together but for a project to work, we have always seen that successful projects rely on very coordinated town leadership.

Chairman Vumbaco: I just have a couple of questions. What do you see as the site impairments?

Alan Plattus: Well, I think we've already mentioned some. I think the access issue is a very difficult one such that it's not obvious how you're going to turn this to a broadly accessible site and that balances the public space issue. You can make public space but if people can't get to it conveniently, it's not going to be a highly used public space, however attractive it might be. It'll feel private and that might be OK in some conditions but access is a huge issue. I think the question of the capacity of the site relative to the combination of parking and development is a big question mark, especially since certain pieces of the site seem already to be spoken for. Munsun mentioned leadership. One of the things that leadership can do is to provide a climate of cooperation where people who control certain parcels might, without necessarily giving those parcels up, enter into a somewhat more cooperative relationship with their neighbors and with whatever new development occurs to share parking, to share and coordinate trash removal and service, all those things that are already somewhat difficult on this site, and according to Mr. Farrell even noisy in some cases. The more those things can be coordinated among private and public interests, the happier everybody is going to be at the end of the day. And that too, I think, is in part a leadership issue. I think there are a lot of opportunities here but I think there are some problems to be solved in order to make this project work for you.

Chairman Vumbaco: The second question I have is the discussion with the existing neighbor-owners of the properties, exclusive of the residents that you are meeting with tonight. You do have plans to sit down and talk or have you already talked with the owners of the buildings that surround the site? What type of commitment they're going to make to the project, if at all? I'm not sure if the town's willing to commit, and if a developer is willing to commit but if the neighbors aren't willing to commit to make the backs of their buildings somewhat nicer for the development, I think you're going to have problems with the project too, so I don't know what your plans are, or if you have discussed it already, or where you're going with that issue.

Ms. Ortiz: We'll be having ongoing communications, individual communications with the adjacent property owners.

Ms. Park: In addition we've invited for tomorrow morning, property owners and local businesses to a meeting, so tomorrow will be their opportunity to add to this discussion. You are absolutely right, not only improvements on the facades but improvements to a coordination of parking in the rear of the existing properties will be important. The question is if they don't

do anything or they don't choose to cooperate or collaborate, it makes it even more risky for a developer and for the town to invest in the Wooding Caplan property. Their cooperation is very important and that again is where your leadership will be important, the relationships that you have with these owners, and your ability to talk to them, and really convince them that this is as beneficial for them as it is for the town as it is for any developer that chooses to develop this site.

Chairman Vumbaco: And the last question that I have is that as you go forward in your processes is there going to be a need that you're going to want to sit with this body again before you finalize your plan and present it to us because if there is, let me know or Sandy know as far in advance as you can, so we can coordinate it.

Ms. Ortiz: At the moment not beyond the schedule that we had submitted as part of our scope but if we see a need to have another meeting, then we will give enough notice.

Chairman Vumbaco: Are there any other comments or questions by Council?

Mr. Spiteri: I'm just curious if there has been any feeling out of any of the adjacent property owners that belong to the commercial category, now I've heard some great ideas today, but I'm wondering if the Wooding property is only going to be part of the equation, and if you might need more space to actually make it work and has anyone looked into maybe buying more property so that you've got what you need, and what that's going to be. Overall that's going to have a lot to do with whether it's going to be feasible or not.

Alan Plattus: If anyone would like to buy the SNET building for us that would be really.....laughs everywhere.....that would make a different project.

Ms. Ortiz: I think you are right. You speak to an issue we'd like to address. The more property that is available, the more attractive it is for development, and over the years there has been a chipping away of the property that makes it more difficult to create anything on the site, to create something of value on the site. It makes it more challenging. That's something that we're going to address, and we will need to look at the site in isolation assuming less cooperation from property owners and what can you do, assuming more cooperation from property owners. Those are two different plans. And I think we'll know what we can assume after our meeting tomorrow.

Chairman Vumbaco: Other questions or comments? Anything else you need to ask of us?

Ms. Ortiz: We'll be generating these meeting notes and distributing them. We also welcome any communications after this meeting. This is an ongoing task into next week, so you can contact any of us by phone, email or mail because we do encourage more information.

Chairman Vumbaco: Is your contact information with the Council secretary, so if anyone wants to contact you, we will have this information? OK. Thank you for coming.

Ms. Ortiz: Thank you.

Chairman Vumbaco: I'll take a motion to adjourn.

Mr. Farrell: So moved.

Mr. Parisi: Second.

Chairman Vumbaco: All in favor. We're adjourned.

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 5:20 P.M.

Meeting recorded and transcribed by:

Sandra R. Weekes
Town Council Secretary

Sandra R. Weekes

Approved:

James Vumbaco
Chairman

9/14/04
Date

Kristy J. Zedie
Town Clerk

9.14.04
Date

Principles of Development

The following Principles of Development were presented to the Town Council by the Wooding-Caplan Subcommittee in a Summary Report.

- 1. The site is a valuable town resource due to the fact that it is the only remaining parcel of land of its size in the downtown area.**
- 2. In view of the site's value, all site development should occur within a carefully planned long-term vision in the form of a Master Plan.**
- 3. The site should be a focal point and a source of community pride; it should offer enjoyment for the citizens in town.**
- 4. Development should enhance and improve the downtown area.** Since the downtown area consists of a variety of architectural styles, it is recommended that the development be consistent with adjacent architectural styles so that the setting is harmonious in appearance and unified in its architecture.
- 5. Given the site location as a primarily "interior" parcel, the value and usage of the site is significantly affected by all the abutting buildings and properties. Thus, a comprehensive Master Plan is required that would incorporate the entire block. The requirement for the Master Plan is particularly important since it is possible that the present location of both the police and fire departments could change over time.** The town has several entities that border the site, namely, the Fire Department, the Police Department, and the three-story brick building at 390 Center Street. The Master Plan for the site should take into consideration the requirements of these other town entities and give consideration to the development of the site as a totality rather than as a stand-alone entity without a relationship to the other buildings.
- 6. It is imperative that access to the site be improved for both vehicles and pedestrians. Successful site development requires increased visibility.** All the development experts who testified before the committee noted that the financial feasibility of any future development would depend in large part on how visible the site would be - the less visible, the greater the risk a site developer would incur.
- 7. In order to secure a favorable development agreement, it is likely that additional investments by the town will be necessary for infrastructure improvements and additional property acquisitions.** As noted above, lack of visibility and access significantly reduces the value and development potential of the site. The Town is in a better position than a private developer to widen Wallace Street by offering a fair price to abutting owners and asserting eminent domain rights if necessary—a process unavailable to a private owner. Although demolition and paving costs must be incurred by the developer, the offer of a "turn-key" parcel will reduce investment risks to the potential developer and maximize the Town's financial return.

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8. **The town should maintain control over the site development and management. This oversight could be structured as a public/private entity. Specific site controls could be created through deed restrictions or other legal means. Public input should be sought and considered as well.** The principle of ongoing Town control is important in order to ensure that all development on the site is consistent with the original vision of the town. The committee understands that there are various legal mechanisms by which to accomplish this goal, but the overriding concern of the committee is that future development be consistent with the Principles of Development and that the town, through an ongoing entity or a contractual relationship (deed, bill of sale, contract), ensure that the site be developed in accordance with these Principles of Development.
9. **The development of the site should result in identifiable revenues to the Town of Wallingford.**
10. **The development of the site should be sensitive to abutting property owners.** The committee is of the opinion that any development of this site should not negatively affect any of the adjacent neighborhoods bordering the property.
11. **The site development should enhance the adjacent neighborhoods.**
12. **Parking on the site should be adequate for its intended use.**
13. **While it is likely that the development will occur in phases, it is recommended that the process commence in early 2004.** The committee recommends that the Town pursue with all reasonable speed the development processes for this site. The Town must provide additional investments in this site as part of the infrastructure, improvements, and additional property acquisitions. Most of the developers who testified before the committee noted that a successful development would likely require additional infrastructure investments and, given the scope of this site, it is likely that additional property acquisitions would increase the viability of the development.

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