

Mr. Masumian clarified that the street numbers are gold and asked if the green depicted behind the numbers is the true color. Marty Rogers said it will be darker, a hunter green. He also said the sign is not internally lit, but is flood lit consistent with other signs in the neighborhood. Mr. Masumian asked how high the overall sign is. Mr. Calise said about 8 feet.

Jon Halper said people would be looking for a street name with the number and Partridge Hill could be mistaken for a street name and confusing. Mr. Calise said it was a good point that he would consider. Mr. Halper said the design is fine.

Vesna Herman agreed that for clarity of information, Partridge Hill could be confused for the address and should be located elsewhere.

David Mann also agreed and said the sign design was fine. He asked if the use of high efficiency lighting and a timer could be considered. Mr. Calise said the electricity supply is low voltage and lighting will be on a time clock.

George Masumian said he agreed with all the previous comments.

THE SIGN DESIGN IS RECOMMENDED FOR APPROVAL WITH THE UNDERSTANDING THAT NAME, PARTRIDGE HILL, WILL BE RELOCATED AWAY FROM THE STREET NUMBER OR ELIMINATED. (Unanimous)

2. **Amendment #601:** Appl. #09-077 by Lawrence Weisman for a text amendment to the Westport Zoning Regulations to modify §30 Historic Design District (HDD) to delete language that prohibits office use on the ground floor and deletes language on maximum percentage of office space. The text adds language that requires not less than 10% of the floor area in the HDD be reserved for retail and/or restaurant use.

Appeared: Attorney Larry Weisman for the contract buyer; Brian Tolman, Architect

Attorney Weisman said he represented Greenfield Partners, the contract purchaser of the Inn at National Hall and its adjacent properties, excluding the antique shop at the corner of the Post Road and Wilton Road which is a separate property.

He said the current owners have had difficulties finding tenants and have experienced an over-all 74% vacancy rate. The purpose of the amendment is to create more flexibility in the Historic Downtown District regulations that apply to that part of the property in the HDD. Currently, first floor use is restricted to retail and only 10% of space above the first floor can be used for offices in the HDD. Display windows and signage are not allowed

on the Post Road or Saugatuck River sides of National Hall. Hotel, restaurant and residential use were not successful.

The buyers propose to use National Hall and its next door building on the Post Road as a corporate headquarters. If the zoning regulations can be changed, the applicants will return with minimal site plan changes eliminating some parking on the river to create a plaza, and a proposal for a restaurant in an adjacent building on the river. If the office use requested is allowed, there could be a chance to create a critical mass of people working in the building that could support retail space. If the amendment is unsuccessful, Mr. Weisman said the buyers will not purchase the property.

David Mann asked for clarification of the vacancy figures presented. Mr. Weisman explained the figures and said that the history of the property has been one of a big tenant turnover rate. The client's intention is to turn the main building into an office with low intensity use with a probable maximum of 72 employees. There would be plenty of parking.

Vesna Herman said she understood what the proposal is trying to do, but doubted that a maximum of 72 employees could sustain retail. Mr. Weisman agreed but felt it would at least offer a better chance. Ms. Herman said there are too many uncertainties and wondered if the plan is strong enough to be successful. She asked if there is a history of site problems. Brian Tolman said he didn't think there are any buried utilities on the site, and the buildings have no basements. They do have soil studies from the previous owner. Ms. Herman suggested that if all of the proposed office space was filled, the project might just function. Mr. Weisman agreed; the property is vacant because it is not desirable space.

David Mann asked what percent of the proposed minimum 10% retail space the antique store (Building G, not included in the purchase) represents in the HDD. Mr. Weisman said the ground floor is 1066 s.f.; 10% of retail in the project is approximately 3200 s.f. The proposed restaurant would probably use the difference. Mr. Mann asked if there are any other areas in town the proposed changes could affect. Mr. Weisman said no, these regulations were written specifically for this project, the only HDD zone in town. He emphasized that they want to retain the historic appearance.

Jon Halper said he wasn't sure how the proposal pertains to the ARB. They discussed why the 2 quality restaurants that had occupied the ground floor space of National Hall failed. Mr. Weisman said the historic designation would not allow the windows to be changed so there was no view of the river. The restaurants had no visibility in town because a sign was not allowed on the river side. Mr. Halper said it was a missed opportunity to make it a really great celebratory destination. Mr. Weisman said he thought the proposal is the only shot at success.

There was a discussion about the price of rents in the project. Vesna Herman and George Masumian wondered if, rather than the inability to attract clientele, the rents were too high to allow business to succeed. David Mann said he wasn't sure if it is zoning problem or an economic issue driving the request for the changes. Jon Halper suggested that the goal is to have the buildings used and well maintained.

George Masumian clarified that if the client does purchase the buildings, the first floor in National Hall will be used as office space. Mr. Masumian asked if residential use has been eliminated in the plan and was told yes. Mr. Masumian asked if someone wanted to put in a hotel, would it no longer be possible. Mr. Weisman said that a hotel would be retail use. Mr. Masumian asked the reasons for eliminating residential use. Mr. Weisman said the Planning and Zoning Department felt this was necessary. Larry Bradley had requested it.

David Mann asked if, at the end of the day the only difference is the 10% minimum requirement for retail space. Mr. Weisman said also the office use above the ground level. Mr. Mann was concerned that the changes would unfairly prejudice Building G's future use by unfairly locking it into retail. Mr. Weisman said they would take that into consideration and involve the antique shop's owners in the process. Mr. Mann said he still wondered if it was the zoning or rent prices driving vacancies.

Vesna Herman was concerned whether the project could succeed even with the proposed changes. Eventually the client may turn to all office use, creating a corporate strip in the middle of town with no access to public space.

Jon Halper thought they were making it too complicated. If the changes promote filling the buildings, he would support it. He agreed it would be better if it was a mix of uses, but if the need doesn't exist, it doesn't exist.

George Masumian said that Planning and Zoning will need to understand what the future might look like if the buildings are resold. They have to be careful not to limit the potential for other retail uses. He agrees that part of the reason the site has never worked could be the rents.

THE ARB RECOMMENDS THAT THE TEXT AMENDMENT NEEDS TO BE CAREFULLY ANALYZED BY THE PLANNING & ZONING COMMISSION.