

RAMSA Proposal *Town Historian Response*

To summarize the key points that I believe we heard last night:

In general,

- A. The Board like the proposed building for the Bank of America site the most, it appears to need the least amount of work in terms of design.

I like Dave's suggestion of utilizing the curve of the off ramp intersection to be developed into more of a gateway with signage, of course, but also some public art.

- B. The Board encourages the idea of the Town Green and considers this an opportunity to create an exciting gathering place that Darien has never had, and would likely appreciate.

I certainly like the idea of a Town Green, always wished for but never attained, but in respect to its size this one is not really of a Town Green dimension, or an actual reflection of Darien's past. What about calling it the "Market Green"? It is a center of retail, and perhaps we should offer amenities such as a self-funding place for children to stay attended while adults would shop- such as IKEA has. I like the idea of pop up event, sports, as well as concerts and agree with Dave that obviously there has to be places to sit – perhaps some built in on low covered porch steps.

C. The Market Building causes some concerns, the appropriateness of the design, the functionality of the building with its elevated first floor and the impact of the columns on the presentation of the retail. Reference was made to the functionality of the retail space occupied by Jos A Bank in the Darien Theater Building, and the challenges that locating retail under the marquee has presented over the years. It would be helpful to see one or two alternative architectural approaches to that building. The ARB appreciates the concept of the market building and what it may bring to downtown Darien, but understands Baywater's desire to have an alternative use for the building as more traditional retail if the "market" concept does not work over time (i.e., make the building divisible, and have functional, strong retail storefronts).

I agree with the need having alternate uses for this building that currently speaks a bit more municipal than retail. Perhaps the impressive steps and centered columns are not inviting to retail. There certainly is a need for a focal point in this spot and it should fit with the other "Market Green's" buildings façades. Perhaps by having more ground floor windows, adding a one story porch on either side of the four columned one, and lowering all the porch steps would reflect retail use more. There is an image that, unfortunately, I am not able to download and attach, but is found by Googling : Burdicks

Walpole, NH images. This is a retail series of building with low steps, a continuous roofed porch and pilasters that includes retail food, restaurants, real estate offices with an end anchor of a Post Office. This configuration invites people to wander the length of porch, with the Post Office bringing in a great many people who stay, visit and shop. The covered porch is often set up with small tables. A small PO on the "Market Green" away from mail trucks might invite people to linger. Low porch steps on retail buildings around the green could be also used for lingering, sitting at pop up events, farmer's market and art displays.

- D. The Board wants to see a variety of storefronts and is concerned about uniformity in presentation around the Town Green (like at 1020 Boston Post Road). On the other hand, I think that the Board understood Gary Brewer's concept about the rare opportunity to create an ensemble of buildings around a Town Green, and the value of that opportunity. I think that the 3 buildings around the Town Green can appear as if they were done at the same time, as long as the storefronts are varied.

See my comments regarding C

- E. The Market Lane Building appears appropriate in the context of the project now, in terms of scale and style.

This seems fine.

- F. The Board would like for us to consider changes to the Office Building. The scale of this building is acceptable but the Board would like of us to consider adding a contemporary accent to it, perhaps adding more windows, lightening the treatment, revisit the entry off Corbin Drive

I agree that there should be one contemporary building and this one would be appropriate to make these changes.

- G. The Board greatly appreciates the reduced height of the Post Road Apartment Building, from 4 to 3 stories, and believes that lowering all building heights to 3 stories along the Boston Post Road is appropriate and sensitive to the neighboring buildings.

I agree.

- H. For all buildings, a detailed review of the materials to be used and color palettes will be necessary in the months ahead.

I agree

- I. Our effort to create a series of buildings utilizing different materials and styles is recognized.

I agree

J. In general, the Board seemed positive about the overall approach to the project and its design, in terms of height, scale and mass and does not see the project as being inappropriate or out of character for Darien today and in the future. We appear to be achieving the right balance between respect for the past, while creating buildings that look to the future of Darien.

I like the attempt at variety, reduced height, mass and styles of these proposed buildings. However, I think we all understand that in general they are not a reflection of Darien's past. The structures, particularly the ones on the "market green", insert a new formal historical style to Darien and it is not one that is "sensitive to its historical context". I am sure that we are all aware that Darien does not have any existing historical buildings with a national impact from which to draw upon. However, I think that we do have enough of the simple, front gabled porch structures still existing to understand that they do represent a significant part of Darien's past. We have even created a style for them (Commercial Vernacular) in the book of Darien's architecture titled Darien Observed. However, to build this style with multiple stories in order to create the space needed would be very difficult, if not impossible. As we go forward, we should all understand these formal proposed buildings that have a lovely appearance might have existed in a wealthy American seacoast town in the past, but never in Darien.

A somewhat formal acknowledgement of this summary would be helpful, if you agree that it is an accurate summation of what we heard, so that we have something from the ARB to use in our discussions with Robert AM Stern, but also, I would like to have a statement along these lines for the P&Z Commission when we go to them for the text amendment early next year.

I do not think I can write we are all in agreement with these initial statements.

We look forward to working with you and the ARB on our project in the months (and years ahead, hopefully only as it relates to building signage!).

Additional questions: What are your thoughts on "green building," "solar" as well as building with "community social responsibility"? You have offered a green area for community, and entertainment use which is great. Since there will probably be fairly high price for underground parking, would there be a possibility of a shuttle bus bringing people downtown from the Senior Center or other larger parking areas? This would certainly serve as "community social responsibility" as well as bring more shoppers. A small area to watch the very young, as I mentioned in B, would also fit into this same area of responsibility.

Marian Castell 3 pages

David