

September 24, 2020

Town of Darien
2 Renshaw Road
Darien, CT 06820

RE: Business Site Plan Application #128-B, Special Permit Application #314 (7-Eleven, Inc.; 306 Post Road)

To the Attention of the Planning & Zoning Commission and the Architectural Review Board:

On Tuesday evening, September 22nd, I attended the scheduled public hearing, via GoToMeeting, to cover the referenced application to convert the existing Duchess restaurant into a 7-Eleven gas station and convenience store. The hearing ran into the evening and it was eventually stopped with a continuation to follow. Unfortunately, I did not have an opportunity to speak or to share the material I've prepared which highlights several important concerns that I have with site plan and development. In an effort to help everyone understand my points of contention, I've supplemented my original letter with bullet points that I hope the Commission and the Architectural Review Board will strongly consider:

Traffic Circulation: I must challenge the traffic discussion that was had at Tuesday's hearing. As a neighbor who has witnessed the activity at this property over the last 2.5 years I believe the engineers are underestimating the impact that, not one...but THREE uses will have on the circulation at this site. Each use attracts a different target customer; thus you have visitors coming for fuel, for convenience store items, and for the quick service restaurant, Roost. These visitors are NOT one in the same and while there may be overlap, in most instances these visitors will be separate and distinct. To evaluate this proposed development through the lens of a single use property is incorrect as the site will not operate as a single use site. Additionally, earlier this year, a pedestrian crosswalk was installed in front of my building. None of the data that has been analyzed for the Commission accounts for this addition. I would encourage Michael Galante to opine on both aforementioned points.

Preserving the Neighborhood: Make no mistake about it...this is a DISCOUNT brand. And the building, as presented, resembles a discount structure. I cannot emphasize enough the amount of time, energy and money I've invested into my own property and how important the impression of the neighborhood has on both prospective tenants and residents as the gateway to Darien. I executed on my project with every intention to make Darien PROUD to have my buildings in their town. As I highlighted in my original letter, the cadence and spacing between properties is being disrupted and I believe should be addressed from a site development stand point.

Appearance & Sightlines: I strongly encourage both the Commission and the Architectural Review Board to reference the attached 'photo essay' that demonstrates the impact of the

proposed development on sightlines from my property. As submitted, the site plan ignores a variety of structural elements that directly subjects my property to the applicants neglect and site plan faults:

- *Trash Containers* – Simply put, I don't want anyone seeing these. It needs to be relocated to the other side of the property where there are no neighbors. No matter the screening at grade, it is common to have open-topped trash bins – or tops that are not closed. The applicant should also plan to landscape and screen accordingly regardless of location.
- *Roof* – While the applicant is focused on customer experience and curb appeal, there has been little consideration to the views my tenants will have from their 2nd and 3rd floor private offices as they look down at the top of a gas canopy and the roof of the new structure. It is imperative that the following be a condition of approval and enforced:
 1. If the applicant is serious about keeping with New England architecture and wishes to introduce a building that's stylistically consistent with Darien, then a wood shingled roof should be required.
 2. The gas canopy's top must not be open. Such canopies are merely a flat ceiling with a 36" high "shroud" around the perimeter but the view down into the top exposes rusted structural steel and fire-suppression systems. Rather, in keeping with the intended New England vernacular accomplished along the Merritt Parkway, as well as at the Mobil station across Post Road from the applicant, a pitched canopy roof structure would not only reinforce the applicant's stated "New England charm". Please reference the photo essay provided for examples.
- *Odors* – I would like to understand how the applicant intends on mitigating odors as a result of gasoline, trash, cooking, etc. My buildings have operable windows facing the proposed site.
- *Mechanical Equipment* – The current positioning of the proposed building not only turns its back on my building, but it proposes an elevated deck (carved into roof form), which appears to be an elevated mechanical platform. One-half of my tenants will look directly into this mechanical platform. Therefore, I must request that sound attenuation be mandated for all mechanical equipment as well as full screening that eliminates this equipment from my tenant's sightlines. Additionally, it's not unreasonable to have tall, mature trees planted to provide further protection from unsightly equipment.
- *Signage* - The current proposal for the building's Post Road elevation includes not only an illuminated corporate logo, but a three-colored striping that reinforces their branding. These are in addition to illuminated 2 window signs; an illuminated "Welcome" sign; and an illuminated pylon sign with digital pricing for which a zoning variance is being requested. Cumulatively, the proposal includes four "7-Eleven" logos; a two-sided price board; "Welcome"; and the Roost corporate logo – all in addition to the striping.

Existing Plantings & Trees: If you take a closer look at the property line between my property and the subject property, you'll notice three fully developed, mature pine trees that sit on my property. These trees serve as natural screening of the Post Road and the major intersection of

the 95 entry ramps and the area in front of Mobil. Importantly, during the winter these trees provide added coverage and protection to tenants. Given the proposed site plan, I'm concerned that the construction of the building may damage or potentially kill these trees. The applicant must be held liable for any future negative impact to these existing trees.

Impact on Value: Should this property become mismanaged, or an eye-sore to the community or should the transient nature of patrons change the safety orientation, this will have a material impact on the marketability of my property. Value is determined by a variety of factors but is mainly driven by the property's ability to command *premium* rents...a discount brand does not attract the same folks that are looking for Class-A professional space. It's the same logic why Darien home values are meaningfully higher than those in other communities.

Lighting: Concerns were raised at Tuesday's meeting about how lighting at the proposed site would impact neighbors and commuters. In an effort to protect from spill over, I would strongly suggest that the commission require all lighting to be 'Dark Sky' to protect against distracting over lighting and any potential residual light.

I am happy to speak with the Commission, the ARB and/or the applicant on any of the above. I look forward to speaking and presenting at the follow up hearing.

Thank you,



Nick Fletcher
320 BPR Holdings
Partner