

**APPLICATION OF
COMPASS CONNECTICUT LLC
1049 BOSTON POST ROAD**

OCTOBER 22, 2020

NARRATIVE

The Applicant, Compass Connecticut LLC, is a real estate brokerage firm with offices in several states. During the past two years, several long-standing Darien real estate salespersons have joined the Compass team. Compass has become an integral part of the Darien real estate market and hopes to make 1049 Post Road a home for many years to come. Compass requests a special permit so that it can move from its temporary location at 320 Boston Post Road to 1049 Boston Post Road.

The proposed space is located in the building at 1049-1053 Boston Post Road. Tina Dragone, a women's clothing boutique, occupied the subject space until the store closed during the COVID-19 pandemic, and the space has been vacant for several months. "Sipstirs: Fine Wines Artisanal Spirits Craft Brews" occupies the other side of the first floor (1053 Boston Post Road), and four small professional offices occupy the second floor.

The floor area of the subject space is 1,896± square feet. Compass proposes to convert the interior space from a typical retail store to a reception area, an open work area with open work stations, two small conference rooms, a private office, a rest room, and closets and utility spaces. The public entrance will face Boston Post Road, and a rear entrance will face the parking area behind the building.

The existing building has existed since 1922. Historically, the first floor has been occupied by retail businesses and the second floor has been occupied by various business and professional offices. With four on-site parking spaces, the property is nonconforming with respect to parking.

Real estate offices fall under the definition of Business and Professional Office, and in the Central Business District, are allowed by special permit on the first floor. To approve a special permit, section 724(g) of the Zoning Regulations requires that the Commission make a finding that the first floor space is "impractical, undesirable, and/or inconsistent with the standards under Subsection 1005(h)." The proposed Compass office meets these criteria.

Unlike many other business and professional offices, typical real estate offices are located in first floor space. In the Central Business District, for example, active residential real estate offices are located in first floor spaces at 893 Boston

Post Road, 1057 Boston Post Road, and 22 Old Kings Highway South, and in other business zones at 455 Boston Post Road, 671 Boston Post Road, and 780 Boston Post Road. First floor space in downtown areas provides visibility for pedestrian passersby and vehicular traffic, the ability for the public to view marketing photos on display in typical retail store front windows, and in many cases, easy access for persons with physical challenges. Restricting residential real estate offices to upper floors is not practical or desirable for either the offices or their clients.

In addition, real estate offices are not high intensity businesses. Digital business technology and the internet have reduced the need for in-office personnel to an administrator, one or two clerical workers, and one or two sales persons, with desks and conference rooms for use as needed. Indeed, relatively small offices are sufficient for real estate firms that have dozens of salespersons who work from home, meet clients at local coffee shops and eating establishments, and go to the office occasionally to deliver and pick up marketing and other materials, and occasional office meetings. The Darien Board of Realtors website contains a roster of local real estate offices that lists two small physical offices with over 30 affiliated salespersons each.

The proposed Compass office location is also consistent with the character of the surrounding uses in the Central Business District. As mentioned above, three other real estate offices are located in the Central Business District, and one of them is at 1057 Boston Post Road—a few steps from the subject space. In addition the proposed location is walking distance from the Darien Train Station, convenient for clients coming to Darien by train.

Parking

The proposed real estate office use requires fewer off-street parking spaces than the previous retail uses. Section 904(p) requires one parking space for each 200 square feet of retail space, and one space for each 250 square of office space. Although the existing site is nonconforming with respect to parking, the office use requires fewer parking spaces, thereby reducing demand on area parking. The nature of real estate office uses today will present even a lesser parking demand than other business and professional offices.

Town Plan of Conservation and Development

One of the goals for the Town Plan of Conservation and Development is to promote business and economic development. Economic development, as defined in Chapter 11 of the Town Plan of Conservation and Development, includes uses which produce more in tax revenue than it requires in service cost. Business and economic development in Darien, also as defined in Chapter 11, provides three key benefits to the community: 1) Jobs for residents of the community and the region 2) goods and services for residents of the community and the region 3) net tax revenue which helps support community services.

Compass will meet all of these goals in the proposed location. Compass employs local real estate salespersons, performs an important service for Darien residents and others in the region who are interested in moving to Darien, and helps create net tax revenue for the Town through local conveyance taxes resulting from sales. The proposed use meets all of the requirements of Section 1005(h), and the relevant goals of the Plan of Conservation and Development.

Compass looks forward to occupying this vacant space, and becoming a part of the rapidly developing downtown area. We ask that the Commission approve this application.