

**STATE OF THE TOWN ADDRESS
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DARIEN PLANNING AND ZONING
COMMISSION
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Good evening Madame Moderator, Members of the RTM, other elected and appointed officials, and the people of Darien. I am pleased to give you this annual “State of the Town” address, updating you on the activities of the Planning and Zoning Commission and the other local land use boards within the past year.

As any casual observer of Channel 79, reader of the local news paper, web sites, or patron of the “Bowl” would attest, these past twelve months have been extremely busy on many fronts: commercial redevelopment including Whole Foods, affordable housing including the approved redevelopment of Allen O’Neal, the management of existing town facilities and resources such as the old library site, the expansion of community “quality of life” institutions such as the YMCA to name a few. It is notable that these activities

and projects all have “redevelopment” as a central theme. This should not come as a great surprise, however, since our town is fully developed and much of our existing stock of commercial and retail space was put in place many years ago. A primary focus for our land use boards, and principally Planning & Zoning, therefore becomes how we capitalize on these redevelopment opportunities to “add incremental value” to the town from which we all benefit while maintaining our residential character. No longer can we just wait for the next application to walk through the door. We must plan and think through how we optimize “incremental value”.

As detailed in our Town Plan of Development, our objective is to preserve the character of our Town. The demographic and economic forces generated by our immediate neighbors to our east and west cannot be taken lightly. I have spoken of these forces in past Town Addresses. You may have heard, for example, the term

“Transit Oriented Development” - a concept that has achieved a certain vogue in recent times. It is important to recognize this concept for what it truly is: a strategy designed to increase residential density along transportation corridors to support employment centers like our neighbors. To be sure, many outside our town (and some within our midst) view Darien as a housing opportunity regardless of its effect on the character of our town and existing housing values.

So where do we go from here to gain that “value added” redevelopment without impacting our Town’s character.

- We look to developments like 333 West Avenue, just north of Patton Drive This was essentially the merging of multiple building lots into an 8 unit “cluster development”- keeping basically the same density currently in the neighborhood while creating additional open space and common area. This type of approach

preserves scale and density, while reducing the on site costs for the developer.

- We look to the rezoning of Noroton Heights – potentially a 20 acre site currently comprised of many older structures with no cohesive traffic planning, architecture, or user friendly development. Try backing out of the Donut Inn onto Heights road. We have a critical drainage problem that needs to be fixed the solution for which could involve a public private partnership on portions of this site while creating “value added” upscale mixed use redevelopment. We have every reason to believe that redevelopment of this area can result in a more unified commercial zone – both comprehensively planned and coordinated.
- We look to Old Kings Highway South and David Genovese’s brand new office building under construction in place of an old one story structure. Think, for example, of converting that vast parking lot behind 1020 Post Road into a town green someday – moving all those parked

vehicles into, yes, structured parking tucked into the thruway embankment behind newly redeveloped buildings along Old Kings Highway South.

- We look to three bedroom residential development on the Procaccini property. Two bedroom development has its place, but try putting up your grown kids and your grand children in two bedrooms at Middlesex Commons. While P&Z approved 62 units on the Procaccini site in 2007, we are hopeful construction can begin in 2011.
- We look to continue working on the issue of affordable housing – the approval of the Garden Homes project earlier this year is an example of the private sector redeveloping an existing commercial property into an affordable housing use with no incremental site or neighborhood impact – a win win for all parties.
- We look to stimulate our business districts by encouraging retail development, new restaurants and pedestrian use and access.

Finally, we need to all take a bow as public servants. Rarely are we given validation for all the hours and due diligence we contribute to keeping our town what it is. I would like to cite recent statistics from the web site Zillo.com where in the average year over year sale price of housing through September in Darien increased by 12.1% compared to New Canaan at .4%, Westport at 1%, Norwalk at 3.8 %, Stamford at 3.8% and Greenwich at a negative 1.6%. While one could argue statistics can be skewed by individual components of the averages, one cannot help but conclude we must be doing something right. Thank you for the opportunity to address you this evening.