

MINUTES OF PUBLIC HEARING ON A PETITION FROM TRUST COMPANY OF THE WEST AS TRUSTEE OF TCW REALTY FUND II REQUESTING CHANGE IN PREVIOUSLY APPROVED SPECIAL DEVELOPMENT DISTRICT KNOWN AS CORBINS CORNER PARKADE ON THE EASTERLY SIDE OF NEW BRITAIN AVENUE FOR THE PLACEMENT OF A SIGN BAND ALONG THE LOWER PORTION OF THE SHOPPING CENTER CANOPY, MODIFICATION OF THE SIGN CRITERIA, INSTALLATION OF AN ENTRANCE SIGN AND MODIFICATIONS TO THE EXISTING PYLON SIGN

June 28, 1994

Council Chambers

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President Sandy F. Klebanoff called the hearing to order at 8:00 p.m.

Present were Councilors Robert Bouvier, Owen Eagan, Sandy F. Klebanoff, Charles R. Matties, Patrick McCabe, Madeline S. McKernan, Larry Price, Bernard Kavalier for Andy Schatz and Deborah Buckley for Alfred Turco.

President Klebanoff: For the record before we begin, I will just read into the record exhibits. We have a May 16th, 1994 hand delivered letter to the Council which contains the application and the affidavit of interest and a description of the property. We have the June 21st, 1994 letter to the Council from the TPZ recommending approval. We have the CRCOG referral signed by Kelly Sharpe stating that CRCOG has reviewed this referral and finds no apparent conflict with regional plans and policies. We have the June 23rd, 1994 letter to the Council from Donald R. Foster as secretary to the Design Review Advisory Committee, also by unanimous consent recommending approval with conditions. Mr. Feldman, does the administration have a presentation?

Barry M. Feldman, Town Manager: Madam Mayor, Don, you have some slides on this, I believe.

Donald R. Foster, Town Planner: I have a few which I will willing pass on. You are all very familiar with this, unlike you would like to look at them for some specific reason. There is a term used in the Design Review Advisory Committee letter that may be a little confusing and one of the slides does illustrate what a sconce is if you would like to see that.

President Klebanoff: Is there definition of a sconce something other than the common definition?

Mr. Foster: It is a shield surround or a cover to the lights and it appears on each of the columns throughout the design.

President Klebanoff: Is there anyone who wishes to see the exhibits which delineate the sconces?

Mr. Foster: We have those for background.

Councilor Price: Do they have those flowers and stuff. Do you know, the flowers we had before, do you have that?

Mr. Foster: I'm getting so modest about my camera work here. You guys have me all intimidated. I don't even want to show my slides anymore. I just would like to make one addition verbally to the Design Review Advisory Committee meeting report to you and it was omitted inadvertently in the letter and it was dealing with the letter color on the main sign band. The Design Review Advisory Committee did discuss at some length, making a recommendation to you that the letters be white as opposed to multi color in the general tenancy sign. As the applicant presents his exhibit I think you will see what we are talking about in that regard. The new sign band falls over the front of where the existing signs are and is a green plastic panel that goes all the way around. The Design Review Advisory Committee was suggesting white letters in that area.

President Klebanoff: I know we are going to miss your slides but we will try to do without them.

Mr. Foster: There are only five.

President Klebanoff: Thank you. Is there anyone who has any questions for Mr. Foster before we hear from the applicant? If not, Attorney Pearson.

Attorney Pearson: Good evening, Madam Chairman, members of the Council. My name is Robin Pearson, for the record. I am an attorney with the firm of Levy and Droney in Farmington, Connecticut and I'm here this evening on behalf of the applicant TCW Trust Company of the West. The applicant is represented this evening also by members of the management team and I would like to introduce them before we begin. I'm not planning on incorporating testimony from all of them but there may be individuals to whom you would like to direct some questions at the end of our presentation.

First is Glen Grobard who sitting up front and is the tenant construction coordinator for the shopping center. He is with Konover Management. Also, with Konover Management is Dan Cherest who is the property manager and Lynn Swain will be providing some testimony this evening. She is President of Swain Retail Leasing and which is the entity which actually leases up the shopping center. The notice to the public hearing indicates that this proposal is for a very limited number of changes to the existing special development district and specifically the application requests a change in the signage criteria and implementation of a sign band across the lower portion of the canopy that

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over hangs the walkway next to the entrances to the stores throughout the Corbins Corner Parkade. The other changes involve a face lift to the existing pylon sign which currently notices the Toys R Us store as being a major anchor store in the shopping center and the inclusion of a new sign which is an entrance sign marking the driveway just to the north of the free standing bank building off of New Britain Avenue.

The sign criteria modifications are set forth on the cover page of the set of plans that you received as part of the application. In no instance is there any structural change or change in use or additional square footages that are requested as part of this application. It is truly an aesthetic change that is being proposed to this shopping center.

I would like to concentrate on probably the biggest change and the one for which the managers of the shopping center and the tenants are most interested in seeing take place and that is the change in the signaging for the shopping center as far as the front of the store fronts. The set of plans that you have contain elevations for which I am showing you one of the boards which colors up the prints that you have in your package of plans. These are found on pages a-1 and a-2 of your set of plans and it is this that shows most clearly the change that is requested. Instead of the current situation where signage is limited for non major tenants to spaces in between existing columns, there will be now a continuous band applied to the bottom of the canopy except for spaces in front of the major tenant store spaces.

The sign band will be made of aluminum. It will be an opaque green color. The lettering for the individual stores will appear because there will be cut outs within that aluminum for the lettering and there will be a clear plexi glass or white plexi glass applied to the back of those cut outs. The only illumination will be from behind the aluminum front of the sign and will show through where the letter cut outs are. The green band itself will not be illuminated. That is an opaque band. The sign band will be trimmed with a gold trim resembling the gold trim now that is on the wooden signs for each of the tenants in accordance with the existing sign criteria.

The size of the lettering is that which would be allowed by the town's existing zoning regulations. The current sign criteria has a limitation that says those tenants that are not major tenants can only have signage which is up to two feet in height. The lettering now will be able to be higher indeed the sign band itself ranges in size from three to five feet depending on where it is situated and the size of the lower indentation on the fascia on the shopping center canopy.

I would like to submit and pass around for you a photograph a collage really which shows for you the problem that is faced by tenants in this shopping center. This shopping center is an old one. It is designed a little bit differently from others in town in that it is set back so deeply from New Britain Avenue that it is very difficult to be able to see the names of the tenants within the shopping center. Only at this point Toys R Us is allowed on the pylon sign and indeed with this change that is proposed to the special development district, there will be no more than five tenants and they will be the anchors, the major tenants that will be able to put their signs on the pylon sign. Therefore, it is very critical for them, the non anchor tenants to be able to gain greater visibility from New Britain Avenue.

As you look closely at these photographs, you will see evidence of a banner that was prepared to try and illustrate for you the need for this sign. I will point at the middle photograph which is the largest and you will see where there is lettering that says grand opening. This banner was prepared in exactly the same size as the signage that is proposed as part of this new sign criteria and there are photographs taken from various vantage points from close up to the street and at various points in the shopping center where people would be likely to get out of their cars or pass by on the street and you can see that it makes an enormous difference in the visibility of tenant signage.

They have moved that banner around at various locations throughout the shopping center also so that you can see, depending on how far back the stores are, what the impact will be. I would like to submit this and pass it around for you.

To further illustrate the problem faced by tenants in this shopping center, I asked the Konover Management Company if they would prepare an illustration showing you exactly what the difference in impact will be for tenants. We also wanted to see whether it would be possible to create signage that would be visible enough and still be able to be placed within these columns and not have to create a sign band that is continuous all the way through. The first print that I am showing you is to scale and shows you what the existing signage looks like and reads, how it reads from the street. This is the second analysis which is as big as the signage could be based on the town's zoning regulations regulating sign size and working within the existing bay for any storefront. With the new signage as proposed this is what that same store could have for signage. The difference is significant between all three and I will pass those along.

The Design Review Advisory Committee has reviewed the signage criteria as proposed and the materials that are going to be used in the new signage. You have as part of the record their analysis. They have unanimously recommended approval of this change understanding the impact that it has for tenants as far as visibility is concerned and I would like to describe for you the changes that would be made to the sign criteria that is part of your application package and is on your site plan, the first page of the set of plans. The criteria would be changed to conform to their suggestions so that the section that reads each tenant sign band shall be separated by an applied vertical graphic will now refer to a diamond graphic and that the applied graphic shall be identical at each tenant separation area.

If you look at your first page and the elevations you will see that there is some vertical markings that have been applied to the sign band to distinguish between the storefronts because you are no longer hampered by the columns themselves. Design Review wanted to see something a little different from the white stripes and asked us if we would apply a design detail such as this. We have agreed. This will be exactly as you see. It will be a diamond applied to separate the name of each tenant and will define the storefronts for the tenants now. That will pick up on the same materials that will be used to frame the signage. The Design Review Advisory Committee asked us to make some changes to make this a more substantial detail to really make it stand out as a frame all the way around the edge of the sign band.

The sign criteria will also be changed to note that Design Review asked the signage appear only as white letters as submitted to you. It says that the illuminated lettering could be any color that the landlord found acceptable. This clarifies at their request that indeed the signage lettering color will be white. It will be consistent throughout that sign band so the colors we are talking about are the opaque green and white lettering all of which is consistent with the design colors that are now used in the center and conform to the design details of the pylon sign and the directional sign.

President Klebanoff: Can I just ask you a question to clarify what you just said, please, Attorney Pearson? Were you referring to the condition number one of the Design Review memo to us?

Attorney Pearson: No. That is a good question. No, actually I wasn't. I was responding to Don Foster's comment that the Design Review had not added in one of the restrictions they were looking for which is that on the sign band itself around the stores. That lettering will be white just as we showed you in that graphic. On the pylon

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sign itself, and I will show you a photograph. I will pass this around of the existing pylon. You can see that there are multi colors for the lettering for Toys R Us. The multi coloring letter can continue on this pylon sign but the background has to be white and that is what Design Review wanted so that the pylon when it is finished will have the same cream color for the supports as is currently the color for the shopping center. The accent colors will be in white as are now the sconces that were referenced to distinguish them from the pillars that will be cream color and on the pylon sign only the lettering can be colors that are necessary to meet the tenants requirements and the landlord's desires.

President Klebanoff: Thank you.

Attorney Pearson: With that I would like to ask Lynn Swain to come on up and talk with you about leasing agent's concerns and the tenants needs as far as creating greater visibility for tenants.

Ms. Swain: Good evening. I am Lynn Swain. I am President of Swain Retail Leasing. I have been leasing shopping centers for about twenty years and have been working on Corbins Corner for about a year now. I just want to share with you some of the problems of the signage particularly because that is generally a question that is one of the first things that a national tenant will ask me is the signage. What is the signage? What does the town require? What does the landlord require? In this instance, it is very definitely what the town will require. I want to give you a couple of examples. Eastern Mountain Sport which is an end cap of the shopping center right next to Filene's Basement would like to expand their store. They are currently in 5,000 square feet. They would like to do a state of the arts store at Corbins Corner and they would like to expand it to about 7,500 square feet but one of their primary concerns in the expansion is the signage. They have an end cap so at least you can see them because they are the closest tenant to the road. However, if they move in line, they are very, very concerned about the visibility of their signage so they are deciding whether or not they would move in line really depending on what kind of signage we can give them and can they be seen.

Coconuts is another tenant that is in the shopping center. They have a sign that you can see from a distance. They would like to down size and have talked about relocating in the center but rather than down size their store by 3,000 square feet, they are 8,000 currently, rather than down size to a 5,000 square foot store, which they find would be more manageable which would also give me another opportunity to lease to another tenant and make the center more exciting, they are afraid to give up their space because they realize

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that their sign is a premium sign in the center being that it is above the facade. The normal sign band goes on and you can see their visibility. When I lease to a mom and pop type of tenant which is what I define mom and pop for you is more of a local Connecticut tenant or tenants who perhaps are New England oriented and have maybe less than fifteen stores. They do not really get generally into asking about sign criteria as a mode of turning a deal down. The national tenants are very, very apprehensive because they generally move into a center and get their logo and that is what people recognize. So in an effort to give them a compromise here, we are trying to show you that it really is to make Corbins Corner move in a forward position, and also positioning itself in this retail environment that we truly do need more signage and I'm getting that from all of the national tenants that I deal with. Thank you.

President Klebanoff: I think Lynn makes the case very well for the need to have this signage flexibility in order to make this center the best possible center it can be. Granted the center as it is currently constructed is absolutely beautiful. When TCW came in back in the 1987 or 1986 they did a wonderful job on proposing a beautiful level or quality of construction and design. However, the signage while extremely tasteful just doesn't work for the tenants.

I would like to leave also with you a petition which has been signed by thirteen of the tenants in the existing center requesting that the signage be changed in accordance with this proposed plan. It reads specifically we the undersigned as tenants in the Corbins Corner shopping center support the proposal to change the signage for the center to provide much needed sign visibility for our stores. The existing signage places us at a significant disadvantage when compared with tenants of other shopping centers because it is difficult to read our signs from the street both during the day and in the evening. A sign band on which self illuminating lettering would be placed would be a real boost for our business. Thank you.

With that I would like to conclude by just saying that indeed the documents that you have as part of the record indicate that the TPZ has unanimously recommended approval of this application as has the Design Review Advisory Committee. We have taken the comments of the Design Review Advisory Committee to heart and will indeed comply with all the conditions that they have noted in their letter to you. We will also make sure that the sign criteria is amended to reflect the fact that the lettering will be white illuminated lettering on the sign band itself which is not a condition that currently is part of their request. I have nothing further to add and ask if you have any questions. I would be happy to respond at this time.

President Klebanoff: Are there questions of Mrs. Pearson?  
Mr. Kavalier.

Mr. Kavalier: There was a reference to the need for logos. Although you are proposing that the lettering all be white, the various tenants will use their own logos. It is not all going to be the same type?

Attorney Pearson: When you say logos, they will not use a design logo other than what their signage is far as the design of the letters themselves so as you saw in the elevation that was rendered and sent around, there are different type and that is something that will definitely be accommodated with this criteria.

Mr. Kavalier: Those top bases are consistent with those for example for the national chains that are recognizable to most.

Attorney Pearson: Correct.

Mr. Kavalier: Thank you.

President Klebanoff: Are there further questions? If not, I have a sign up sheet. Both speakers identify themselves as living out of West Hartford and we would require, that would require that Council suspend its rules to hear from them. The first one is Kit Hobbs and the second one is I think Jennifer Meister. If both of them wish to speak, I will entertain a motion at this time to suspend the rules for the purpose of hearing from both of them.

Vice President Eagan: So moved.

Councilor McKernan: Second.

President Klebanoff: A motion has been made and seconded, is there discussion? Hearing none, all in favor please say aye. On Voice Vote the motion carried. Kit Hobbs.

Ms. Hobbs: Hi. My name is Kit Hobbs. I am store manager of Dress Barn at Corbins Corner. I would just like to say it is really critical that we are able to change the signage at the center. I have a fairly large store, 1,600 square feet and if you are across the parking lot at night time you can't even read the sign. That is how bad it is. Business has been dropping for us I believe because of the signage. People are driving by. They really wouldn't even know we were in the center because you really can't even read it. It is that unreadable. That's all I would like to say. Thank you.

President Klebanoff: Thank you. Jennifer Meister, I think. If I am mispronouncing your name please correct me. I can't read it very well.

Ms. Meister: You did fine job. Most people do mispronounce it. Thank you for getting it right. I am Jennifer Meister. I am at Eastern Mountain Sports. I am from Milford, New Hampshire and if I may I would just like to read a letter from John Keenan who is our Vice President of Customer Satisfaction. If I may read it to you please. I think it pretty much states our concern and our position on the signage. It says Eastern Mountain Sports fully supports a proposal of the ownership of Corbins Corner shopping center to designate new criteria for store signage. The present sign restrictions are a detriment to businesses in the shopping center and customers in West Hartford. They simply do not allow for adequate store visibility and identification. They are the most restrictive we have encountered of any shopping center in which we lease space.

To work for retailers and the communities, store signs need to be both aesthetically correct and visible. Our present negotiations for our expanded new store location in Corbins Corner are dependent upon adequate signage to identify our store to potential new customers. EMS is fully in favor of the individual lettering of the larger size proposed as a new standard for this shopping center.

I would like to add, I am the Director of Visual Merchandising and Store Design for the company and one of the hallmarks and one of the things that our company is founded on is customer service and customer satisfaction. One of the things that we can do is obviously provide a way that they can see the store. I can't provide them customer service or satisfaction if they can't get to the store and they can't see the store.

As stated before, our present location people can see it. If we do move back though one of the major concerns is the fact that no one can see it and I certainly can't satisfy a customer if I can't get them to see the space. Thank you.

President Klebanoff: Thank you very much. Is there anyone else here this evening who wishes to address the Council on this public hearing matter? If not, are there further questions from the Council? Mr. Kavalier.

Mr. Kavalier: A further question for Attorney Pearson, the proposed monument sign which is to be added further down New Britain Avenue, I'm just curious as to what the rationale was in that placement.

Attorney Pearson: To put it close to the driveway so that it

would clearly mark the fact that there is another main access into that shopping center. People have a tendency really to concentrate on the entrance that is closest to the Papa Razi Restaurant further to the south.

Mr. Kavalier: Is it anticipated that that will either help the traffic flow or bring more customers to the stores above.

Attorney Pearson: It will definitely help the traffic flow which is one of the reasons additional identification is felt to be important also. Traffic flow is the main reason.

Mr. Kavalier: Thank you.

President Klebanoff: Are there further questions? Ms. Buckley.

Ms. Buckley: For Mrs. Pearson, in the Design Review Advisory Committee's recommendation, when they were referring to recommendation three about modifying the bottom of the sign box was that the small band that you were showing us? Is that what you were referring to?

Attorney Pearson: That was part of it but indeed there is a question as to how exactly the bottom of the sign box is going to be finished off as it relates to the existing piers and it is frankly somewhat technical and we weren't sure in meeting with Design Review that we would be able to resolve it satisfactorily without having the sign company there on the site but it was agreed that we would do whatever looked the best and work in conjunction with the Town Planner to make sure that the Design Review Advisory Committee's goals were met. It got fairly technical.

Ms. Buckley: I just have one additional question. Condition number four concerning the painting of the sconces and inverting them, I didn't recall in your remarks that you commented on that. Could you help me?

Attorney Pearson: I do have a photograph which I could show and pass around which indicates the location of the sconces on the pillars. The thought of the Design Review Advisory Committee was that we might want to paint those a white where as now they are painted cream to allow them to stand out further and provide some more architectural detailing once the sign band is applied. I will pass a photograph around which shows the area near Kids R Us and indicates where the sconces are located on the pillars and you can see that it might help indeed to add some detailing to the front if those were brought out more in a different color so they will be white. The side of the pillars themselves will be cream and it was indicated that if possible some lighting which currently projects upwards we try and see if we can

invert the fixture to be able to shine it down and give some more definition to the center.

Ms. Buckley: And what were your thoughts on that?

Attorney Pearson: At this point they are not sure exactly about changing the lighting but clearly doing the painting is not a problem whatsoever.

Ms. Buckley: Thank you.

President Klebanoff: Are there further questions? Mr. Bouvier.

Councilor Bouvier: Just a quick question, Attorney Pearson you are usually very thorough and you probably have mentioned when this is going to be undertaken and completed and I didn't catch that.

Attorney Pearson: Well, I didn't, so let me turn because I'm not exactly sure when they are planning to institute it. I believe it is soon but I would like actually to have Glen Grobard identify himself and respond to the question. Mr. Grobard.

Mr. Grobard: Good evening. My name is Glen Grobard. We are presently right now, I cannot tell you specifically when we are scheduled to go forward. It is all predicated on what and how and what turns out with the meetings and the hearings that we are presently going through right now so as soon as we are able to provide ownership with a response, a favorable response, at that time I will be able to basically give you a program and when we plan on phasing the whole situation.

Attorney Pearson: Thank you.

President Klebanoff: Are there further questions? Attorney Pearson, did you wish any time to sum up?

Attorney Pearson: No, unless there are any other questions, we will conclude our presentation.

President Klebanoff: Thank you. Are there further questions? If not, I will close the public hearing.

The hearing adjourned at 8:30 p.m.

Norma W. Cronin  
Recording Secretary