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News

Delamar West Hartford unveils hotel plans

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By Kathleen Schassler

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WEST HARTFORD>> Before introducing plans for its "flagship" Delamar West Hartford hotel, expected to open in 2016, Greenwich Hospitality Group founder Charles Mallory said the date coincides with the 100th anniversary of his family's involvement in maritime world.

Mallory's father started as an apprentice sail maker in Mystic seaport, he said. He hoped the panel would appreciate how his "lifelong attachment to maritime world" creates a deeper, personal meaning for that "flagship" title, he said.

The draft plans unveiled in the town hall auditorium on Tuesday show a stately, six-story building designed by architect Israel Smith, of Smith Buckley Architects of Burlington, Vt. The hotel was inspired by old-world buildings in France and Canada, as well as in 19th century New England, he said.

The development team detailed plans for the luxury six-story boutique hotel at the corner of Memorial and Raymond roads for town officials during a joint public hearing.

Officials will not yet vote on the application. PZC is expected to vote on numerous zone changes and related regulation amendments on June 2, and the council is set to vote on necessary approvals on June 10, according to Mayor Scott Slifka, the meeting chair.

Slifka sat alongside Planning and Zoning Chair Kevin Ahern and 20 panel representatives, mixing two town governing bodies and political representatives, Slifka said

Six applications are being considered, which will require 10 separate votes —some in a specific sequence— before the matter is completed, according to West Hartford Corporation Counsel Joseph O'Brien. Some votes are exclusive to each body, others require both, he said. First, the town council will receive its recommendation from the PZC.

The Delamar development team, including architects, landscape designers and an environmental scientist, discussed the proposal, showing site renderings and a video. The public hearing began at 5:30 p.m. and the group's detailed presentation to the panel finished after 11 p.m.

First, Town Manager Ron Van Winkle, wanted "to spend a minute on how we got here," zipping through timeline highlights, including a May 22, 2014 resolution that invited proposals for a hotel on surplus property at 90 Raymond Road. Of the seven RFP's, town officials met with the top three, and this one "stood head and shoulders above the rest," he said.

Delamar, a partnership between Greenwich Hospitality Group and The Matos Group, was chosen in December 2012. Delamar owns and manages six hotels, including the Delamar Greenwich Harbor, the Delamar Southport in Fairfield

and Hotel Zero Degrees in Stamford and Norwalk.

The hotel is expected to generate 120 jobs directly, and many others indirectly as support to vendors that will supply the hotel, Mallory said.

Delamar has worked closely with town staff and the town's volunteer design review advisory committee to refine the design and plans for the project, which includes a 118,892-square-foot, six-story hotel with a banquet facility, restaurant and retail facilities on street level and outdoor dining. A full service, high end spa, with four treatment studios will be modeled in the success of the Greenwich spa which "is a destination in its own right," Mallory said.

The hotels offer "traditional comfort and luxury, but with a flair and whimsy that people may find unexpected," said Mallory. "We want to be part of pedestrian ebb and flow of Blue Back Square but want it to have its own architectural vocabulary."

The 118,892-square-foot hotel would include a 260-person ballroom that could be divided up, plus a banquet facility, a 90-seat restaurant and bar, a 70-seat outdoor dining area, a 28-seat

Street-front cafe, and an outdoor lawn event space.

Mallory also said the hotel will adhere to the Leadership in Energy & Environmental Design gold standard certification for green building.

Plans include 38 on-site parking spaces, and the group has reached an agreement to share town-owned public lots and garages for the majority of its parking needs, which would include valet parking.

Langan Engineering Senior Principal John Plant, PE, discussed roads and traffic in detail. Saying it was determined "existing roads sufficient for hotel traffic and that parking facilities adequate," Plant added that the hotel staff will work closely with town staff to provide flexibility to adjust to activities and events.

"Customer service is a very high priority for Delamar hotels," said Plant, who outlined plans for "new textured crosswalks" – similar to ones on South Main Street— that will extend the sidewalk on the south side to the trail along Trout Brook Drive. Also planned are extended improvements "down Raymond Road, including fully audible pedestrian signals" already seen in spots around town. The crossing signals will include pedestrian-only phases with a goal of slowing traffic on Raymond Road, with a goal of eventually making Raymond Road less desirable vehicular traffic arriving to Blue Back Square.

Deputy Corporation Counsel Patrick Alair detailed a lease agreement for the project with an initial term of 50 years, with four renewal terms of a decade each. Base rent for the lease is \$150,000 annually, which would increase by 2 percent each year. The tenant would be responsible for all taxes and applicable charges.

The agreement also includes a purchase option for \$3 million, a figure that will increase by 0.17 percent each month throughout the lease.

The lease agreement also requires construction to begin immediately after zoning approval and be completed within 27 months.

Three residents spoke at the public hearing, including John Paindiris, owner of Effie's Place restaurant and co-president of the Park Road Business Association. Paindiris said he was "thrilled" to hear that the hotel was coming, adding it is "much needed and overdue boost to neighborhoods."

Resident Richard White applauded the design and questioned snow removal plans, before adding his support, calling it a "collaboration that worked out well."

Resident Judy Fowler voiced concerns about environmental efficiencies and how LEED gold standards are certified and plans to keep the construction phase environmentally friendly.

Smith explained that LEED gold is "something that is very important to us" and is achieved through a point system for building features. A total of 60 points are needed to qualify, currently there are 54 points that are "already agreed" and there are plans to adopt half of 20 that are currently "solid maybes," he said.

The hotel will also feature six suites intended for long term guests, based on a successful long term model in Greenwich.

"On the first day that Delamar Greenwich opened, an 89-year-old man walked in the front door and stayed for two years," Mallory said

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