



## **Town of South Kingstown**

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September 3, 2020

The Honorable Town Council  
Town of South Kingstown  
180 High Street  
Wakefield, RI 02879

Re: Supplemental Narrative to the South Kingstown Planning Board's Recommendations for Amendments to the South Kingstown Comprehensive Plan, Zoning Ordinance and Zoning Map Authorizing the Re-Zoning of A.P. 50-4, Lot 12 from R-80 to Rte. 1 Special Management District.

Dear Council Members:

At the meeting of the South Kingstown Planning Board on Tuesday, August 25, 2020, the Board voted to recommend approval of amendments to the South Kingstown Comprehensive Plan, Zoning Ordinance and Zoning Map requested by Morgan Schoen Hospitality to support its application to re-develop property at 4780 Tower Hill Road, formerly occupied by the Immaculate Conception Academy boarding school. At that time, the Board also voted to send this letter to provide the Council with a supplemental narrative reviewing some aspects of its deliberations that are not reflected in its formal advisory decision.

The redevelopment proposal put forth by Morgan Schoen Hospitality would repurpose the existing structures – the former Rush Sturges residence and Immaculate Conception Academy buildings - as a boutique hospitality venue including 33 hotel rooms, a restaurant, an outdoor event space and a vineyard. Both the Board's deliberations and the comments received from the public were supportive of the project's goal of adaptively reusing and preserving the historic structures and amenities on this property. Indeed, as stated in its findings of fact, the Board's favorable recommendations in support of the requested Comprehensive Plan and Zoning amendments are grounded in the fact that this property is an existing, developed property previously occupied by an institutional use, and that the applicant is proposing to reuse, preserve and restore an historic piece of architecture (the 1930's era Sturges Residence) and its Beatrix Farrand-designed gardens. Accordingly, the Council should be aware that the Board's decision in this matter is inextricably linked to both the site and the proposal. Had the proposal involved the development of virgin greenspace or the demolition of the existing structures the outcome may have been much different.

During its deliberations on August 25, 2020, the Board also discussed an alternative approach to the amendments requested by the applicant that would have created a new zone, or sub-zone, rather than amend language applicable to the entire SMD. Specifically, the Board discussed the idea of a new "SMD/Hospitality" zone tailored to suit proposed hospitality and/or adaptive reuse projects. The rationale behind this alternative approach was that creating a new zoning district would prevent the extension of undesirable SMD uses to the subject property, and prevent other parcels within the SMD from taking advantage of requirements that are being eased to accommodate the adaptive reuse of this property. While a number of Board members were receptive to this concept, the Board ultimately recognized that the idea was a considerable departure from the amendments requested by the applicant and that the Board should focus on the project as presented. The applicant also noted its preference for proceeding with the amendments as proposed in order to avoid further delay. While the Board voted to approve a positive recommendation on the amendments as proposed by the applicant, the Board also wanted to inform the Council about the alternative approach discussed by the Board and to indicate that such an approach would likely be supported by the Board if the Council wished to move in that direction.

Very truly yours,



F. Steven DiMasi, Chair

South Kingstown Planning Board