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New Corbin/Post Redevelopment Proposal Less High, with 749 Parking Spaces

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Heights for the tallest building in the Corbin/Post Road redevelopment proposal is now lower (at 71 feet), as are the four buildings along the Post Road, but to make up for the lost space, some buildings farther from the Post Road would get extra stories.

Those were some of the changes detailed at a Planning & Zoning Commission public hearing Tuesday night by Baywater Corbin LLC, the partnership led by David Genovese that wants to redevelop the large downtown site on the triangular block formed by the Post Road, Corbin Drive and Interstate 95.

THIS ARTICLE describes the many new elements of the proposal and focuses on building height, the most controversial element. AN ADDITIONAL ARTICLE will describe what was said at the public hearing.

Other changes in the proposal, as detailed Tuesday night:

The tallest point: a cupola/clock tower at the top of the "Meeting House" building facing Market Square: something over 74 feet high, which is the height of its base (just a bit higher than the 71-foot Market Street apartment building).

Total indoor square feet of the project is now 363,161 a reduction of 12,174 from the 375,335 in the plan as of last summer. The mixed-use development's retail space is down by almost 24,000 square feet; office space is down by about 9,000 square feet but residential space is up by almost 20,000 square feet (see table in the attached slides).

Proposed parking: 749 spaces, assuming 25 percent of the parking would be shared between users of the office space (who would have it on weekday work days) and restaurants and shops (who would have it during peak shopping times and restaurant hours in the evenings and weekends). Existing town regulations would call for 1,328 spaces. A parking study by a town-hired consultant assumes 40 percent of parking would be shared, resulting in only 609 spaces (cheaper to build than the developer's proposed 749). Almost all of the new parking would be underground, beneath the development.

Sidewalk widths are proposed to be 12 feet throughout the development. Current downtown sidewalk widths are as narrow as 10 feet in front of the building where Panera restaurant was located and as wide as 23 feet, 2 inches at the next-door Darien Playhouse building. A consultant from Gibbs Planning had recommended 10 to 12 feet.

Retail space ceiling heights on the first floors would be **12 feet** for buildings along the Post Road and **11 feet** for buildings on Market Lane. Originally, Genovese said those heights needed to be higher in order to attract tenants, who want them higher. The reduction in the newly revised proposal helped lower the heights of various buildings.

The hearing was for a zoning change which would allow the large development under somewhat different rules than the town already has for downtown zoning — higher building heights and reduced parking

requirements in a development where parking for office buildings tends not to be needed at times when restaurants and shops want it most.

The initial zoning proposal was rejected by the P&Z Commission late last year, largely over complaints about the height of the tallest buildings (particularly an apartment building over 95 feet high). Genovese later said the heights would be lowered.

At Tuesday night's meeting, Genovese, the project architect and a traffic consultant presented details about the proposed development to show how the zoning change would work. An official (and even more specific) site plan would be submitted to the commission for approval if a zoning change is granted.

A Selection of Slides from the Presentation

Later, you should be able to see the full slide presentation given at Tuesday night's public hearing at YourDowntownDarien.com, the developer's website, and possibly on the town government website:

How the Building Heights Change

Here are the height changes for various buildings, starting with the one proposed for the Post Road, next to the I-95 South Exit 11 ramp (all heights are from the midpoint of the roof line if the building doesn't have a flat roof, which is how Darien zoning regulations measure height, the tallest roof point for non-flat roofs is often several feet higher):

Along the Post Road

"Anchor tenant" building (where Bank of America is now) — originally 55 feet — NOW 50 feet (reduced 5 feet)

Two "sister" buildings on either side of the "Market Square" along the Post Road — originally 55 feet — NOW 43 feet (reduced 12 feet)

Apartment building on the corner of Post Road and Corbin Drive — originally 55 feet — NOW 43 feet (reduced 12 feet); EXCEPTION: A tower at the corner would be 50 feet high (and several feet higher from the peak of the roof)

Back Buildings

Along "Market Lane" (a new, private street parallel to the Post Road) moving toward Corbin Drive:

Annex building (to the right as you're looking at the Meeting House, see map for location) — originally 70 feet high, then 42 feet high — NOW 54 feet high (lowered by 16 feet from the original proposal, raised 9 feet from the last proposal to add another story)

Meeting House (facing Market Green, between the two "sister" buildings; also referred to as "Market Hall" in the slide presentation) — originally 70 feet high (five stories), then 41 feet high (three stories), now 55 feet high (four stories). The bottom of the copula on the top of the building would be at 74 feet (see the side-view showing heights of that building, above).

Meeting House East Annex (to the left as you're looking at the Meeting House) — originally 70 feet high (five stories), then 42 feet high (three stories), NOW 55 feet high (four stories). A 15-foot reduction.

Market Lane Apartment Building (corner of Corbin Drive and Market Lane, and the highest proposed building):

- The middle (higher) part of the building — originally 95 feet high (six stories), then 75 feet (five stories) — NOW 71 feet high (five stories), a 24-foot reduction.
- The two wings of the building, on either side facing Market Lane — originally 70 feet high — NOW 55.5 feet high, a 16.5 foot reduction (always four stories).

At the corner of Corbin Drive and Old Kings Highway South:

Office building — with a higher portion set back from the street so that only the front portion would be seen from Corbin Drive

- Part closer to the street — originally 70 feet high (five stories) — NOW 52 feet (four stories)
- Part set back from the street — originally 85 feet high — NOW 64 feet (always at five stories)

Not included in the list above are all the heights in a 2016 revision of the redevelopment proposal, where building heights were, for the most part, between the original proposal and this one. You can see those heights in the slides from the full presentation.

Genovese said on Tuesday that the ground height of the development, or at least the interior of it, is expected to be two feet below the present ground height, meaning all heights mentioned above are lower by that amount (they're a bit higher, however, if the actual peaks of sloped roofs are included, rather than average

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roof heights).