



Memo

To: Project Applicant (Attorney John Bolton representing Costco)
From: Joshua Berry, AICP - Senior Planner
Date: July 16, 2020
Re: **Cranston Crossing – Pre-App Meeting Summary & Recommendations**

Per City Ordinance 17.100.040, a Pre-Application Conference was held on June 30th, 2020 for the Mixed Use Planned (MPD) District Major Alteration application for the proposed project “Cranston Crossing.” The purpose of this memo is to summarize the Pre-Application Conference and provide recommendations designed to inform and assist the preparation of the Final Overall District Plan (FODP).

The Pre-Application Conference was held virtually on Zoom due to the safety precautions for COVID-19.

Part 1: Meeting Summary

The meeting began with the Planning Director, Jason Pezzullo, acknowledging everyone on the virtual meeting then introducing the project and the reason for the meeting per the City’s MPD ordinance. He then gave the floor to the applicant’s attorney, John Bolton.

The following list summarizes statements made by Mr. Bolton:

- What is being proposed is a major amendment to the existing MPD ordinance, which by the City’s regulations, is treated exactly like a new MPD ordinance.
- COSTCO, a big box retailer, is proposed in the first phase of the project.
- The Overall District Plan (ODP) calls out 5 proposed parcels to be accessed by new private roadways intersecting New London Ave and Howard Ave.
- Proposed Parcel 4 is intended to be sold at a later time for single-family residential development. The applicant does **not** intend to provide a site plan for this parcel as part of the MPD/ODP, but acknowledged that the plan would need to be approved by the Plan Commission through the subdivision process at the time a plan is proposed.
- Traffic analysis and testimony will be provided as part of the MPD process. A comprehensive traffic study will be provided and the applicant acknowledges that the City may require a third party peer review of the study at the expense of the applicant.
- There is a new 3-way signalized intersection proposed on New London Avenue.
- There is a land swap with the State that is not finalized for Parcel 1.
- There are two telecommunication towers on the site. The tower on Parcel 1 is to remain and the tower on Parcel 2 is proposed to be relocated to Parcel 5.
- Parcel 4 is proposed to be zoned as A-8, to be a combination of single family residential and an open space (no-build) area between COSTCO and the abutting neighborhood directly to the south (but not to the east).
- All of the commercial parcels are requesting zoning and uses akin to C-4 zoning.
- There is a cemetery located where the COSTCO building is proposed. Currently, the plan is to relocate the cemetery. The applicant has had discussions with Carl Santucci of the Pawtuxet River Authority (and Conservation Commission) about a potential location, although nothing has been finalized and the applicant is fully open to comments and ideas from the appropriate authorities. The applicant seeks approval of the MPD conditioned to the relocation of the cemetery.

- The proposed building heights will be no higher than 35'.
- After the pre-application conference, the MPD would need to be submitted to be accepted as new business by the City Council, then it would get a recommendation from the Plan Commission before going to the Ordinance Committee and City Council for a decision.

Upon completion of Mr. Bolton's introduction/discussion of the project, the floor was opened up to comments and questions. The following is a summary of points raised:

Bob Rocchio - RIDOT

- RIDOT does not approve or disapprove, but regulates access. Solutions have to be engineered.
- Route 2 intersection at Howard Avenue is currently at capacity, so the new signalized intersection is required for site access.

Marco Sciappa – RIDOA – State Properties Division

- Supports Mr. Rocchio regarding the need for the new signalized intersection.
- Intersection of New London Avenue and Howard Avenue is at or beyond capacity already.
- Confirmed that there is no land transfer deal yet with the State (*Staff notes that the State will need to be a party to the rezoning application.*)
- Expressed concerns about cut-through traffic coming from Pontiac Avenue via connection with Howard Ave.
- Concerned that the project abuts a medium security prison, so sight lines and heights of buildings must be considered.

Nick Capezza – Cranston Engineering Division

- Doesn't want to see traffic diverted to Sockanosset Crossroad.
- Asked the applicant to consider a roundabout instead of a signalized intersection due to proximity to the existing intersection of New London Avenue and Howard Avenue.
- Wastewater review would be conducted at a later time when design and analysis are available.
- Curious to see the proposed access to the residential portion of the development.
- Asked the applicant about possible connection to the neighborhood to the south to which the applicant stated that there is no plan to connect to the existing neighborhood.

Ken Mason – Cranston Director of Public Works

- Confirmed that sewer is available at this location.
- Easements will need to be incorporated into the final plan for all utilities as the internal road network will be privately maintained (*Staff notes this will also apply to any residential development*).

Stephen Mulcahy – Cranston Traffic & Safety Division

- There are challenges at the external access point.
- Concerned that there is only a single access road for the entire development, but will wait for data before providing comment.

Larry DiBoni – Cranston Director of Economic Development

- Generally supported the redevelopment of the site considering the current owner no longer pursuing the existing business.
- Acknowledged that the tax revenue would be beneficial to the City.
- Stated that he is very familiar with the site, and that topography could present challenges in screening the proposed COSTCO from abutters.

Stephen MacIntosh – Cranston Fire Chief

- Recommended a second means of access/egress to the project in the event the only proposed access is impeded. He recommended another access point to Howard Avenue which could be gated/locked, and/or could be through the state property (emergency use only), or through the residential community with a fab gate, to which the applicant's engineer (Sam Hemmingway) replied that they wanted to locate the COSTCO as far away from the existing residential neighborhood as possible.

Peggy Malcolm – Cranston Historic Cemetery Commission

- Wanted to know why the building was proposed where a historic cemetery is located and why the site cannot be redesigned as to leave the cemetery in place?

Greg & Mary Mierka – Cranston Historic Cemetery Commission

- Conveyed that the appropriate Native American community should/must be contacted.
- Asked if the applicant knew who was buried at the site or where it was proposed to be moved to. The applicant replied that they had correspondence with Carl Santucci of the Pawtuxet River Authority and that the idea was discussed about possibly relocating the graves to a cemetery near the canoe launch near the Cranston Landfill site, although this was very preliminary. Greg stated that he has had no contact from Carl Santucci.

Mike DiGuseppe – Applicant team/Coastal Partners, LLC

- Shared that the Condon family was buried at the cemetery on site.

Charlotte Taylor – RI Historic Preservation and Heritage Commission

- Explained that the State cemetery laws require the council to grant a variance to move the cemetery.
- Stated that her recommendation was that the cemetery be left in place, not relocated.
- If the graves were moved, archeological measures would be required.
- If the graves had to be moved, she recommended the open space portion of Parcel 4 as a potential location, stating that proximity to the original site is desired.

Jeff Emidy – RI Historic Preservation and Heritage Commission

- Seconded Charlotte's comments.
- Recommended that the graves NOT be relocated to the State Cemetery or offsite.
- Cautioned that if veterans were buried that more organization would need to be involved.
- Stated that he thought Howard Avenue will be/become a cut through.
- Stated that the Narragansetts would need to be contacted, which is triggered by the federal review process for the telecommunication tower relocation.

Joshua Berry – Cranston Senior Planner

- Recommended that the proposed buffer be located between COSTCO and the proposed residential. The buffer is currently shown between the existing residential and the proposed residential, but the City does not typically require buffers from single-family residential to single-family residential.
- Expressed that buffer must be part of the Costco phase, not a later phase. The buffer between the proposed residential and the Costco can be stipulated by the City Plan Commission when the time comes to develop.

Douglas McLean – Cranston Principal Planner

- Put the applicant on notice that the relocation of the telecommunication tower may require a special use permit.

- Put the applicant on notice that there are other towers within the setback radius of the tower to be removed, and therefore a variance from the setback may be required.

Part 2: Planning Department comments & Recommendations:

Land swap with the State

- As one of the property owners, the State must sign the MPD application.
- Staff would like to have additional information to clarify the requested land swap with the State.

Telecommunication tower relocation

- The existing cell tower on Parcel 2 will need to be relocated consistent with all Federal/State/& Local regulations.
- The telecommunication tower relocation does not appear to require a use variance or special use permit at this time, but will require specific exemptions written into the MPD. The MPD will need to explicitly state that the relocation of the tower will not result in any changes to the height, size, or function of the tower in conflict with City regulations.
- City Code Section 17.76.010(m)(iv)(C) allows for the relocation of the tower on-site without violating the minimum separation requirements.
- The site plan states that Parcel 5, the proposed site for the tower relocation, is for "residential/telecommunications tower." Please clarify in the narrative and associated site plan that there are no residential uses proposed on Parcel 5, only the tower.
- Provide the tower height and show the distance between the tower and all proposed property lines to be compliant with a 1:1 ratio of height to distance to Parcel 2 and a 1:1.5 ratio of height to distance to Parcel 5 per City Code Section 17.76.010(C)(3)(c). Please show the setback(s) on any submitted plans on which the setback would be legible.
- There are setbacks for tower supports, peripheral anchors, and equipment buildings. Please show the setback(s) on any submitted plans on which the setback would be legible.
- Please anticipate that you will be required to provide a screening/buffer plan to demonstrate compliance with City Code Section 17.76.010(C)(3)(f).

Historic Cemetery

- Cranston's Comprehensive Plan Historic Preservation Element Action Item HP-6 recommends the Planning Department (and Historic Commission) "work with private property owners to encourage preservation of known archeological and historic sites on their land." The preservation of such resources was also echoed by several individuals representing organizations who work with historic resources and/or cemeteries. Therefore, in order to vet out the feasibility of preserving the existing cemetery, provide an alternative site plan, including the cemetery setbacks, which would not require the relocation of the cemetery. If this alternative plan is not preferred over the existing plan, please provide a narrative discussing why this alternative is not the applicant's preferred plan.
- Provide as much information as is available regarding the potential relocation of the cemetery, and if the cemetery is to be relocated on site, please clearly indicate the location and associated setbacks on the plans.

Housing on Parcel 4

- It is understood that the applicant does not intend to show the layout/site plan for the residential portion of the site. However, the traffic improvements will need to anticipate the trip generated by this portion of the development. Staff will be looking for a yield either through a traditional yield plan or via an analysis and breakdown of gross acreage consistent with the A-8 RPD cluster zoning.
- The narrative states that the residential development will serve as a buffer and a transition to the Costco development. A-8 housing is not traditionally considered as a buffer, nor a transition from A-8 housing to commercial development. Has the applicant considered multifamily housing with open space & amenities?

- There is an open space/no-build portion of parcel four. Will this be its own parcel to be subdivided at a later phase or will it remain permanent open space?

Road Improvements and Traffic

- Staff awaits the submittal of the initial traffic analysis, which will require a peer review.
- Specific considerations at this time are trip generation, impacts to existing streets and intersections, backups within the development, emergency vehicle access, reliance on a single access roadway network, drive-in uses/queuing, and potentially dangerous weaving conditions.

Buffers & Landscaping

- Landscaping details will **not** be required as part of the MPD, but will be reviewed during the Major Land Development application process.
- Although the specifics of the landscaping plans are not required at this time, the ODP should anticipate the landscaping and parking lot design & canopy requirements.
- The proposed Costco will need to be screened from the proposed & existing residential areas as part of the phase 1 plan.
- The 50' buffer shown between the existing abutting residential neighborhood and the proposed residential development may cannot be counted as to screen the existing neighborhood from Costco unless it were constructed as part of the phase 1 plan, not as part of another future phase.

Economic Impacts

- The narrative states that “the Project will create significant construction and permanent employment opportunities and tax revenue for the City and represents a substantial benefit to the community.” Provide any supplemental documents to expound on the anticipated jobs created, taxes generated and other economic impacts.

Parking & Loading

- Parking and loading requirements shall be determined during the MLD/subdivision review with the Plan Commission. However, please be aware that if special conditions or relief will be requested or required, that they should be written into the MPD proposal.

Signage

- Signage information is not required as part of the MPD process. However, please be aware that if special conditions or relief will be requested or required, that they should be written into the MPD proposal.

Please contact the Planning Department at 401-780-3136 with any questions.

Respectfully,

Joshua Berry, MURP, AICP

Senior Planner/Administrative Officer