

1 - - - - -

2 JOINT HEARING BETWEEN

3 WEST HARTFORD TOWN COUNCIL

4 AND

5 WEST HARTFORD TOWN PLAN AND ZONING COMMISSION

6 - - - - -

7

8

9

10 VOLUME 7

11 JUNE 24, 2004

12 West Hartford Town Hall

13 50 South Main Street

14 West Hartford, Connecticut

15

16

17

18

19

20

21

22

23 Reporter: Sandra V. Semevolos, RMR, CRR, LSR #00074

24 Brandon Smith Reporting Service

25 44 Capitol Avenue

Hartford, Connecticut

(860) 549-1850

Brandon Smith Reporting Service

1 A P P E A R A N C E S:

2

3 Present for Town Council:

- 4 Jonathan A. Harris, Mayor
- 5 Scott Slifka
- 6 Joseph Verrengia
- 7 Barbara Carpenter
- 8 Kevin M. Connors
- 9 Charles T. Coursey
- 10 Maureen K. McClay
- 11 Art Spada
- 12 Timothy Brennan
- 13 Carolyn Thornberry

14 Present for Town Plan and Zoning Commission:

- 15 Tanya Meck, Chairperson
- 16 David Brown
- 17 Leon Davidoff
- 18 John Begley
- 19 Booker T. DeVaughn
- 20 Theodore M. Doolittle
- 21 Jeffrey Daniels

22 Also Present:

- 23 Joseph O'Brien, Esq.
- 24 Corporation Counsel

25

Brandon Smith Reporting Service

1 INDEX OF PUBLIC COMMENTS

2 SPEAKER

PAGE

04-06-24f

3	Bob La Perla and Barbara Lerner	983
	Claudia Storm	988
4	Pat Newton	989
	Leann Sherman	991
5	Brenda Kurz	994
	Nan Streeter	997
6	Michael O'Connell	1001
	Joyce Burke	1010
7	Bob Dunn	1012
	Sheila B. Amdur	1014
8	Virginia Vocelli	1016
	Cheryl Harrington	1020
9	Kristen Levesque	1025
	Wayne Armillei	1026
10	John Lemega	1029
	Michael Aron	1033
11	Carol Storey	1035
	Bob Neems	1036
12	Kim Roth	1039
	Ronald Mancuso	1041
13	Joe Spósito	1044
	Tom Faenza	1045
14	Melissa Rosen	1047
	Douglas Christie	1052
15	Raymond Shea	1054
	Elaine Shapiro	1058
16	Mark Gassner	1059
	Marleen Wenograd	1064
17	Jeff Digel	1066
	Alan Elstein	1067
18	Diane Thomas	1070
	Jerry Freda	1071
19		
20		
21		
22		
23		
24		
25		

Brandon Smith Reporting Service

961

1 (Hearing commenced at 6:29 p.m.)
2 MAYOR HARRIS: Good evening. We are
3 going to call this continued public hearing to order.
4 If we could all please rise for pledge of allegiance.

5 (Pause.)
6 MAYOR HARRIS: Roll call please,
7 Mrs. Cronin.
8 MS. CRONIN: Mr. Verrengia, sitting for
9 Mr. Bouvier.
10 MR. VERRENGIA: Here.
11 MS. CRONIN: Mrs. Carpenter.
12 MS. CARPENTER: Here.
13 MS. CRONIN: Mr. Connors.
14 MR. CONNORS: Here.
15 MS. CRONIN: Mr. Coursey I believe is
16 stuck in traffic.
17 MR. COURSEY: Here.
18 MS. CRONIN: Oops, Mr. Coursey is here.
19 Mr. Harris. Now I've got the wrong one
20 stuck.
21 MAYOR HARRIS: Here.
22 MS. CRONIN: Mrs. McClay.
23 MS. McCLAY: Here.
24 MS. CRONIN: Mr. Slifka is the one stuck
25 in traffic, he will be here. Mr. Spada.

Brandon Smith Reporting Service

962

1 MR. SPADA: Here.
2 MS. CRONIN: Dr. Thornberry.
3 MS. THORBERRY: Here.
4 MS. CRONIN: Mr. Brennan, as Council
5 alternate.
6 MR. BRENNAN: Here.

7 MAYOR HARRIS: Thank you, Mrs. Cronin.
8 MS. CRONIN: Ms. Meck.
9 MS. MECK: Present.
10 MS. CRONIN: Mr. Brown, sitting for
11 Mr. Roach.
12 MR. BROWN: Here.
13 MS. CRONIN: Mr. Davidoff.
14 MR. DAVIDOFF: Here.
15 MS. CRONIN: Mr. Begley.
16 MR. BEGLEY: Present.
17 MS. CRONIN: Mr. DeVaughn.
18 MR. DEVAUGHN: Here.
19 MS. CRONIN: Mr. Daniels. He is not
20 here at the moment. And Mr. Doolittle.
21 MR. DOOLITTLE: Here.
22 MS. CRONIN: Thank you.
23 MAYOR HARRIS: Thank you, Mrs. Cronin.
24 For the record, Mr. Daniels will be here. He is at his
25 daughter's graduation from King Phillips, so he will be

Brandon Smith Reporting Service

963

1 coming.

2 Thank you. Welcome everybody tonight to
3 this continued public proceeding. I want to give you a
4 quick summary of where we are and how we are going
5 forward for tonight and as we anticipate going forward.
6 First of all, again, thank you for being here in person
7 and also thank everybody that's tuning in and special
8 thanks to Channel 5, WHC-TV, not only for the station

9 and the people that work there, but for the numbers of
10 volunteers that have come out consistently night after
11 night to make sure that there is full public hearing on
12 this very important issue facing our community.

13 We moved into last night the public
14 comment portion of the public proceeding. We did
15 however though cut short at 8:30 last night because we
16 wanted to make sure we got to the public and didn't
17 have people waiting around too long, cut short some of
18 the questions by the Town Plan and Zoning Commission
19 and the Town Council, and what we said last night is we
20 were going to reserve some time, a half hour at most,
21 it seems like it might be a little less, to ask some
22 questions up-front tonight. So again, so that the
23 questions are heard by the public so that they can also
24 comment based on both the questions and of course the
25 answers. So we are going to do that first. And then

Brandon Smith Reporting Service

964

1 we will of course go into the public comment section.

2 I will say, and I'm going to repeat
3 several times tonight, and we will try to publicize it
4 in as many ways as possible, we had anticipated seven
5 nights, someone said four nights last night, but
6 actually seven nights, over 30 hours of public comment.
7 We are now on the second night. The sign-up sheet
8 tonight that I have, there might be a second sheet
9 there, but there is about 14 people tonight, and as
10 we've said from the beginning, this is a flexible

11 process that we are trying to essentially feel our way
12 through as we go along, and I just want to put people
13 on notice of two things. First of all, the weekend
14 sessions, we are planning on being here Saturday
15 morning at 9:00. The scheduled time is from 9:00 to
16 12:00. Sunday we are planning on being here at 12:00
17 and the scheduled time is from 12:00 to 4:00. But I
18 urge people to come early and sign up, because once
19 nobody is here or everybody has testified, I should
20 say, we will stop the public hearing that day. So you
21 shouldn't expect to come at 11:30 and then be able to
22 be heard, and we'd like to be able to do that, but we
23 are spending about 70 hours as volunteers away from
24 family, jobs, other obligations, so if you could help
25 us out with that, that would be really important to us.

Brandon Smith Reporting Service

965

1 By the same token, because of the way
2 the public turn-out has come, it appears as though the
3 last two nights, the five hours scheduled on Tuesday
4 night and the five hours scheduled on Wednesday night
5 might not be necessary. So I'd like to give the public
6 advanced notice that at this point it appears as though
7 we will close the public comment portion of the
8 hearings on Monday night. So I urge people that want
9 to come out to make sure they come out this weekend.
10 You can still come out tonight, of course, or come out
11 on Monday night, because at Monday night at 9:00 if
12 there are no people left to testify, at that point we

13 will close the public comment period and move into the
14 applicant response and further questioning by both of
15 these bodies, into that phase.

16 If anyone has any questions, they could
17 call me at 523-3142. They can e-mail any of us to ask
18 procedural questions. Of course call the Town Clerk's
19 office.

20 So that being said, I will now move into
21 the questioning period, and I know, Mr. Brown, you had
22 some questions last night that you didn't ask to allow
23 the public to begin, so we can start with you, please.

24 MR. BROWN: Thank you. Through you,
25 Mr. Mayor, I wanted to ask our financial guru, Jim

Brandon Smith Reporting Service

966

1 Francis, one question regarding the tax implications of
2 the project. After all of these are taken into
3 account, is there any chance that our residential real
4 estate property taxes will be affected in a favorable
5 way?

6 MR. FRANCIS: Through you, Mr. Mayor,
7 the property taxes, if this project goes forward, we
8 have a, what will affect that is the balance between
9 commercial and residential property. If this were to
10 go forward, the balance would shift slightly towards
11 the commercial side from where we are presently.

12 As you may have known in the reveal that
13 was conducted but not implemented this year, there was
14 a considerable shift to residential property and the

15 value of our grand list, and this would help to offset
16 that shift.

17 MR. BROWN: So that there may be some
18 minor impact to what we see on our tax bill?

19 MR. FRANCIS: I don't have numbers on
20 that, but I would look at that as being a minor impact,
21 yes.

22 MR. BROWN: Okay. Thank you.

23 MAYOR HARRIS: Thank you, Mr. Brown. I
24 believe Mr. Spada also had some questions last night.

25 MR. SPADA: Thank you, Mr. Mayor. Good

Brandon Smith Reporting Service

967

1 evening. Just two quick questions. The first is
2 financial. I know Mr. Heapes had talked about the fact
3 that his organization has spent, to this point, roughly
4 7 million dollars. From the Town's perspective, can
5 you give us maybe not to the dollar, but a sense of how
6 much Town money we've expended to this point, and then
7 which fund, in light of some of the recent budget
8 concerns and angst, what fund that money comes from.

9 MR. FELDMAN: Mr. Mayor, Mr. Spada, most
10 of the expenses that we have incurred were for support,
11 legal issues. There -- as you know, we had several
12 independent experts help us. I don't have a sum right
13 now, but if you'd like, we can do that, and provide
14 that to you. I'd prefer not to guess, maybe just to
15 help to be responsive though to your question, it's
16 probably going to be -- probably the low to mid-six

17 figures. That would be, I think, all inclusive, and
18 again, I can provide that to you if, again, if the TPZ
19 and Council members would like, we can certainly give
20 you a breakdown of those costs.

21 MR. SPADA: That would be appreciated.
22 The second question on parking, and I apologize in
23 advance, this may have been asked, but in terms of
24 library usage, I tend to be, and there are probably
25 hundreds, maybe thousands of us that the day before a

Brandon Smith Reporting Service

968

1 book is due we race up to the library, leave our car
2 running, drop the book off in the slot where it needs
3 to be dropped off and go back to our running car. Will
4 folks, if they simply want to return books or videos
5 and not visit the library necessarily, are we going to
6 set up bins in and around the library where they can do
7 that? And if so, where would they pull up and park and
8 all that stuff?

9 MR. VAN WINKLE: Through you, Mr. Mayor,
10 Ron Van Winkle. If you look at the picture of Blue
11 Back Square, there is a little indent on Isham Road and
12 our intent was to put a collection box out by the road
13 where you could pull in, jump out of your car, leave
14 your car running, drop your books in that bin and hop
15 back in your car, so many of us do the same thing, and
16 that was the intent, to create some spot where you
17 could pull over, drop off and go on.

18 MR. SPADA: Thank you. Thank you,

19 Mr. Mayor.

20 MAYOR HARRIS: Thank you, Mr. Spada.

21 Mrs. Carpenter.

22 MS. CARPENTER: Yes. What I have before
23 me is a report that I got from you, Mr. Feldman. It
24 was written by Ronald Mancuso and it was the results of
25 financial meetings that you held for three months prior

Brandon Smith Reporting Service

969

1 to the proposal.

2 First of all, if you could tell me a
3 little bit about those meetings, and then I do have a
4 follow-up question about that.

5 MR. FELDMAN: Mr. Mayor, Mrs. Carpenter,
6 that's a good question. We are blessed in this Town by
7 having any number of people that have significant
8 expertise in a variety of topics, and what I was
9 fortunate enough to do is to invite a variety of people
10 that had backgrounds in real estate finance, real
11 estate development, banking, lawyers, just townspeople
12 to meet with me and Ron and Jim over a period of, I
13 think probably ten weeks or more, and we met just about
14 every other Friday, and it was a very informal group.
15 We met 90 minutes to maybe two hours, and they did
16 essentially -- they were our trainers, I guess, I know
17 you can relate to that. They were the people that
18 pushed us. They were the ones that helped us
19 understand the complexities, helped us understand the
20 nuances, helped us understand perhaps just the impact

21 on the average West Hartford family, and gave us
22 insight that I cannot even put a value on. I'm not
23 sure that an independent consultant would have gotten
24 anything close to what they were able to provide us,
25 and it is to people like Ron and others, Ron Mancuso

Brandon Smith Reporting Service

970

1 and others, that I personally am indebted to.

2 After ten or so weeks, Ron Mancuso's
3 background, as he may have given you his resume, he is
4 a lawyer and also was a senior manager in a real estate
5 I think or in a real estate section or real estate
6 department of a major international bank, and he took
7 it upon himself to write a report, and that's what you
8 are probably looking at.

9 MS. CARPENTER: The other individuals,
10 what are the names of some of the other people, just
11 for information, who are involved? I know Ronald's
12 name was mentioned, but it wasn't signed by any other
13 individuals.

14 MR. FELDMAN: I think he did that only
15 because he did not want to, you know, I don't know
16 whether there was a formal vote taken where people
17 would say I'll sign it or not sign it. I think I can
18 represent to you that most, if not all of them,
19 anywheres between probably 8 to 12 people, depending
20 upon the Friday that arrived, I would say most if not
21 all would agree with that report. But I would prefer
22 not to, you know, to represent that firmly. I think

23 I'd rather, if he -- maybe he will testify before you
24 and he can relate to that.

25 If you want names, I think what I'd

Brandon Smith Reporting Service

971

1 rather do is not try to remember everybody because
2 inevitably I'll forget everybody. I'll try to
3 reconstruct the names and provide that to you and to
4 the other councilors and the TPZ members, but they are
5 all West Hartford residents and all wonderful,
6 wonderful folks who just provided invaluable civic
7 support, civic involvement and insight to us.

8 MS. CARPENTER: In particular, I think
9 that after last night's financial discussion, the
10 section on analysis of risk to the Town and offset to
11 said risk was very well done and most of the questions
12 of the risk and the offset were answered. Could this
13 be provided or be put on our website or be available to
14 people who have been closely following the Blue Back
15 application?

16 MR. FELDMAN: Mr. Mayor, that's a
17 wonderful suggestion. We will certainly try to do
18 that.

19 MS. CARPENTER: Thank you.

20 MAYOR HARRIS: Thank you,
21 Mrs. Carpenter.

22 MS. CARPENTER: Thank you.

23 MAYOR HARRIS: Mr. Connors.

24 MR. CONNORS: Thank you, Mr. Mayor.

25 Mrs. Carpenter actually asked the question I was going

Brandon Smith Reporting Service

972

1 to ask tonight.

2 MS. CARPENTER: That's because we've
3 been spending so much time together.

4 MR. CONNORS: If I could follow-up
5 though, in terms of the other folks that were on the
6 committee, I guess it really wasn't a committee, but is
7 there any way of finding out if they corroborate this
8 report? It would be helpful if there was, even as
9 informal as it might have been, group of people that
10 chewed on this information for three months, that I'd
11 be interested to know if they all agreed with it or if
12 there were dissenters among the group and what their
13 reasons might be. It's helpful to me.

14 MR. FELDMAN: Mr. Mayor, I'll certainly
15 do our best to try to encourage them to contact you.
16 I'd rather not have them go through me. I'd rather
17 have them contact you by e-mail or letter or maybe make
18 an appearance before you. But we will do our best to
19 ask them to do that. Actually you do have a letter
20 from one of the members, I believe the other night
21 Dr. Chris, I think she wrote a letter in support. She
22 was one of the folks that joined us for many of the
23 meetings, but there obviously are another seven, eight
24 or nine people and we will try to make contact with
25 them.

1 MR. CONNORS: That would be great. Just
2 if I can ask a question, following up on Mr. Spada's
3 question about what amount of money we spent by the
4 Town. Are you going to itemize what we might have
5 spent? And also to follow up on that, I'm wondering,
6 I'd be interested just to know what that first
7 rendering for the addition of the Town Hall for the
8 Board of Ed might have cost the Town just for my own
9 information.

10 MR. FELDMAN: Mr. Mayor, we will give
11 you that information. Mr. Connors, you want to know
12 what the architectural costs were for the initial
13 planning?

14 MR. CONNORS: Right. I would think that
15 would fall under what Mr. Spada was asking.

16 MR. FELDMAN: We will try to be as
17 comprehensive as we can. We will put it all in there?

18 MR. CONNORS: Thank you.

19 MAYOR HARRIS: Thank you, Mr. Connors.
20 Any other questions? Mrs. McClay.

21 MS. McCLAY: Thank you, Mayor Harris. I
22 want to ask another follow-up question about the
23 garages. I think that those two buildings are probably
24 of the most concern to many people from the different
25 letters and e-mails we've gotten. They are the two

Brandon Smith Reporting Service

1 largest buildings, and there is also our own Town
2 garage -- that's not our Town garage -- the garage
3 that's in Town now which I understand has hours of
4 operation that are not of the best, but still it's not
5 filled very much. So I'm just going to come out and
6 ask: Is it absolutely necessary to have two garages,
7 and could you lay out the use, and if it is going to
8 be -- they are going to be completely used, if it's
9 really necessary?

10 MR. VAN WINKLE: It is necessary.
11 Without those two garages, the cars that would come
12 here for work or to shop, or whatever, would end up
13 somewhere else leaving their car. We would end up with
14 more potential of persons to park in the neighborhoods.
15 We would end up with the potential that they would fill
16 the West Hartford Center parking lots to the detriment
17 of the Center, so what we really have here is a parking
18 analysis which was provided to you through Desman that
19 says this 1100 cars in public spaces, another 253 in
20 private underground, are necessary to meet the parking
21 demands at the peak hour, which is at weekday noontime.
22 If we were to reduce it even by one level, you would
23 end up with still having the draw, people would want to
24 come, and they would come here and find the garage full
25 and find another place. I mean, people are very

Brandon Smith Reporting Service

975

1 creative about what to do with their cars if we allow
Page 16

2 them to be.

3 So it would be, it would be a
4 mistake to really cut it back because it would mean
5 that the Center wouldn't -- this side wouldn't function
6 very well. People would start making different
7 decisions, and of course, if we do cut it back, it
8 would have an impact on revenues. The garage generates
9 substantial revenues to pay off the bonds and reduction
10 there would come back and affect us on our bond
11 payments.

12 MS. McCLAY: Then I have another
13 clarification I'd like made. In last week's West
14 Hartford News, there was a letter to the editor that
15 had some information that was probably misleading, and
16 so I was hoping to have it clarified, and it states
17 that the agreement allows the developer to renege on
18 the residential portion of the project if
19 pre-construction sales or financing difficulties
20 indicate the condominiums are not economically viable
21 to create.

22 Perhaps Mr. Alair can -- this was just
23 by a person who wrote a letter to the editor and said
24 that this was in the agreement, which is not how I read
25 it but --

Brandon Smith Reporting Service

976

1 MR. FELDMAN: Could you just repeat
2 that? I'm not sure we all caught that. What's the
3 question that's being asked?

4 MS. McCLAY: I would like to know what
5 the agreement does state. This person says that the
6 agreement allows the developer to renege, albeit at a
7 de minimus cost, on the residential portion of the
8 project if pre-construction sales or financing
9 difficulties indicate the condominiums are not
10 economically viable to create.

11 I did not get the impression that the
12 developer would be able to renege, but if you could
13 just clarify.

14 MR. ALAIR: Actually, I had heard that
15 comment, and frankly, I'm a little bit baffled by it
16 because I don't know how somebody could have read that
17 from the agreement, the problem being that the various
18 provisions that deal with things are scattered through,
19 so it's possible somebody read a paragraph or a
20 sentence someplace and didn't see the others.

21 The Master Agreement really provides two
22 options or variations, two options, the first is: If
23 all of the preconditions have not been met to the
24 initial Town closing, then both sides can walk away.
25 That's the only point at which really both sides can

Brandon Smith Reporting Service

977

1 truly renege, if you will, on the deal, to use the term
2 that I think you quoted. Once the Master Agreement is
3 signed, once the initial Town closing occurs and the
4 Town property has been conveyed and we started to incur
5 cost, there is a sliding scale of penalties, if you

6 will. I don't think we intend to call them that, but
7 for ease of discussion, that's what they are, for delay
8 in building the residential, because the residential
9 was extremely important to the Town, and if I recall
10 the dates accurately, at month 30, from the date of the
11 initial closing, the Special Services District Levy can
12 be increased to the extent that the residential hasn't
13 been built out, and so an additional tax would be
14 imposed upon the commercial interests.

15 At month 48, the tax fixing agreement
16 that we talked about begins to kick in and over the
17 next four years, whether Building D, that first
18 residential building is built or not, the developer
19 pays taxes on it, 25 percent, 50, 75 and 100 percent of
20 the tax, based on an 18 million dollar value in each of
21 those next four years.

22 At month 74, which is, what, five
23 years -- six years and two months, I guess it is, if
24 they are not started Building D at that point, the next
25 step kicks in, and we actually get the property beneath

Brandon Smith Reporting Service

978

1 Building D back free and clear. Not at cost, not at a
2 charge to the Town, it comes back to us.

3 If they haven't completed Building D
4 within month 94, so another 20 months after the
5 deadline for starting it, again, we get the property
6 back. I don't view any of those as de minimus. I view
7 that as a sliding scale designed to negatively

8 encourage or to discourage them from not building
9 Building D.

10 Now, we don't own the property that
11 Building B is to be built on, so there is no provision
12 in there with respect to Building B that allows us to
13 take it back. We don't own it now, so we can't take it
14 back, but the Master Agreement provisions do apply to
15 Building B in that if they don't build it by month 30,
16 the levy increases, and the tax fixing agreement only
17 applies to Building D, so there is a slightly different
18 scenario with respect to Building D -- Building B as in
19 boy, rather. But overall I don't know how anybody
20 could say that they are allowed to renege, and
21 certainly not at a de minimus cost.

22 MS. McCLAY: Thank you, Mr. Alair. If
23 anyone was confused, I think that clarified it. Thank
24 you, Mr. Mayor.

25 MAYOR HARRIS: Thank you, Mrs. McClay,

Brandon Smith Reporting Service

979

1 Mr. Verrengia.

2 MR. VERRENGIA: That was also brought up
3 by someone in the community, and Mr. Alair, if I can
4 just refer you to the Master Agreement, Article 16,
5 Section 16-2, which is page 53, and I understand your
6 response to the question, and I guess if you just read
7 this section in the literal sense, if you look at the
8 last sentence, and the sentences prior to that, it
9 discusses how the developer agrees to develop buildings

10 D and B, but the last sentence says "However, the
11 parties acknowledge that market forces and financing
12 and equity presale requirements will affect the actual
13 timing and/or construction of such residential
14 housing. "

15 So I guess if you just looked at that
16 language in the literal sense, it's somewhat ambiguous.
17 It would imply that, well, if the market forces change,
18 then we will build the condos when we get around to it,
19 and --

20 MR. ALAIR: You are absolutely right,
21 and that was what I was afraid of when I heard the
22 quote that Ms. McClay read, is that somebody might have
23 read a piece and led to a conclusion without reading it
24 in the context of the whole.

25 I suppose it should be self-evident and

Brandon Smith Reporting Service

980

1 Mr. Hidalgo would be bopping his head in agreement at
2 the drop of a hat I think if I say this, if there were
3 by some bizarre, and frankly, I think it would be
4 bizarre set of circumstances, no market for these
5 units, it would be reckless for the developer to build
6 them. In fact, I doubt the developer could get
7 financing to build them, and at that point I would
8 expect that it would be perhaps more advantageous to
9 them to suffer the penalties that the agreement calls
10 for rather than building something for which there was
11 no market or being compelled to.

12 Now, bear in mind that the ultimate --
13 the ultimate club, if you will, that this Town Council
14 has on this developer is if the Special Development
15 District is approved, that building, and only that
16 building, is what can be built there, until this
17 Council approves something different. So it's not like
18 the developer could say, oh, I'm not going to build
19 this, I'll build something different. I'll build
20 whatever, you know, more office, more retail. That
21 would not be allowed to happen without further
22 approval.

23 MR. VERRENGIA: The question wouldn't be
24 so much as what would be built, it's more like when,
25 but I understand your response, and thank you for

Brandon Smith Reporting Service

981

1 clarifying that.

2 MAYOR HARRIS: Thank you, Mr. Verrengia.
3 We have a couple of more questions, but we are going to
4 go to public comment now and then we can, since we
5 don't have the huge number on the sign-up sheet, we
6 will have some time to return to the questioning after.

7 Let me give you a review of the
8 guidelines for the public comment section. Individuals
9 will be given three minutes -- excuse me, four minutes,
10 up to four minutes to speak, and we have a timer in the
11 corner that will give you, you will hear kind of a
12 beeping on your three-minute, and you will know that
13 you have a minute to wrap up for the four minutes.

14 Anybody representing a group that identifies themselves
15 as such can have up to seven minutes, and I believe
16 you'll have a six minute warning on that seven-minute
17 timer. When you come to the podium, if you could
18 please state your name and address for the record, and
19 to help the stenographer, if you could also spell your
20 last name so we ensure that the record is correct.

21 And again, I am going to repeat this a
22 couple of times tonight just because people tuning in,
23 new people coming in, I want to make sure they know, we
24 had initially scheduled seven nights, two days
25 actually, five nights and two days, of public comment.

Brandon Smith Reporting Service

982

1 We are intending to keep on that schedule with one
2 caveat, actually two. First of all, for the weekend
3 days, we have 9:00 to 12:00 for this Saturday scheduled
4 and we have 12:00 to 4:00 on Sunday. But I urge the
5 public to come at the beginning of those hours and sign
6 up, because once the sign-up sheet and the public
7 comment is exhausted during those days, instead of
8 having again these volunteers who are giving so much of
9 their time away from their families and other
10 obligations, we are not just going to sit for two hours
11 from say 2:00 to 4:00 on Sunday waiting for people to
12 come in, so if you could make sure you come at the
13 beginning.

14 Secondly, based upon the flow of
15 business with the public comment to date, it appears as

16 though it's possible that those last two nights may not
17 be necessary, and as we've said from the beginning, we
18 are going to be flexible on this. We will give more
19 time if more people come out, and we will adjust if
20 fewer people come out. So I'd like to just put the
21 public on notice now for the second time tonight that
22 please try to come this weekend and Monday night,
23 because if there is not a lot of people that come out
24 at those times, we will, based upon the decisions of
25 the two bodies, potentially close out the public

Brandon Smith Reporting Service

983

1 comment section on Monday night. So please come out
2 earlier rather than later.

3 We have a sign-up sheet, and the first
4 two people on the sign-up sheet I believe coming up
5 representing a group, Bob La Perla and Barbara Lerner.
6 Again, if you could state your name and address for the
7 record and spell your last name for the stenographer,
8 please. And after the first testimony, we will have
9 Claudia Storm and Pat Newton, and if you could move
10 towards the front row or the back there, so we have an
11 efficient transition between speakers, it would be much
12 appreciated. Thank you.

13 MS. LERNER: I'm Barbara Lerner. I live
14 at 37 Middlefield Drive. My last name is L-e-r-n-e-r.

15 MR. LA PERLA: My name is Robert La
16 Perla, L-a capital P-e-r-l-a, and I live at 26
17 Riverview Road in Glastonbury.

18 MS. LERNER: We would like to thank the
19 Council, the Planning and Zoning, the mayor and
20 Mr. Feldman for giving us an opportunity to speak.

21 Bob La Perla and I are the co-presidents
22 of the West Hartford Center Business Association, and
23 we're here speaking on behalf of the Association. Over
24 the past year, we have been meeting with Mr. Heapes and
25 his associates, Mr. Feldman, Mr. Rowson,

Brandon Smith Reporting Service

984

1 representatives of Save Our Town and others about Blue
2 Back Square. It has been of great concern to us as
3 established business owners in the Center what effect
4 this development would have on our retail businesses
5 and restaurants.

6 We have always felt that a greater mass,
7 more stores and restaurants, create a more vibrant
8 retail and dining experience, a perfect example of the
9 restaurant mix we have now. West Hartford Center is
10 known as the restaurant capital because of the quality
11 and variety of food. Every night of the week the
12 restaurants are full, people are dining indoors and
13 out, enjoying the sites and sounds of the Center. We
14 have a unique setup in the Center. You can park your
15 car and walk to any destination in Town. You don't
16 need to get in your car to go anywhere else.

17 We have a large residential population
18 that can do and can come to the Center. Blue Back
19 Square says one reason they are here is because of the

20 existing West Hartford Center. They are something they
21 want to build on and enhance. So Blue Back Square says
22 West Hartford Center is great. We think West Hartford
23 Center is great. Why do we want to add a project the
24 size and scope of Blue Back Square to the mix?

25 All around us towns are developing large

Brandon Smith Reporting Service

985

1 retail centers, trying to be what we already are in
2 West Hartford Center. Canton and South Windsor are
3 both developing centers now. We hope the design and
4 lifestyle setup of Blue Back Square will work with the
5 existing Center to create one large retail district.
6 We want West Hartford Center to be the first choice for
7 entertainment, shopping and dining in the area, while
8 at the same time maintaining its character and charm.
9 We need to do this together, Blue Back Square
10 Development, West Hartford Center Business Association
11 and the Town of West Hartford. Help us create one
12 large district.

13 The West Hartford Center Business
14 Association supports Blue Back Square, but we do have
15 certain expectations from Blue Back Square and the Town
16 of West Hartford, and I don't know whether you've all
17 gotten the list, but we did send a letter to the Town,
18 to Blue Back Square Development, and to the mayor
19 outlining our expectations. We expect full mandatory
20 participation in the West Hartford Center Business
21 Association by all landlords and all retail restaurants

22 and consumer service tenants, and this proviso is to be
23 written into every lease; participation in advertising,
24 promotion, events and gift certificate programs before,
25 during and after the completion of the Blue Back Square

Brandon Smith Reporting Service

986

1 Development; branding of West Hartford Center in all
2 advertising and promotional materials with the use of
3 the name "Blue Back Square" used as a destination
4 within West Hartford Center, as is LaSalle Road and
5 Farmington Avenue now; the creation of pedestrian
6 crosswalks and pathways throughout the Center with
7 directional kiosks in strategic locations; development
8 of a plan to calm traffic throughout area neighborhoods
9 or reducing noise in the Center; creation of a trolley
10 service joining Blue Back Square area with LaSalle Road
11 area and Farmington Avenue areas to be reviewed every
12 six months for effectiveness; increased security,
13 police presence with beat cops and bicycle patrols and
14 private security to the entire newly designed West
15 Hartford Center; parking, always an issue, a timetable
16 for parking plan presentation, a definitive plan to
17 develop and open more parking west of LaSalle Road
18 along Farmington Avenue; renewed and concentrated
19 effort to create a ramp between the J and S Parking
20 Garage, the flat top parking behind South Main Street,
21 Farmington Avenue and LaSalle Road, and a timetable for
22 completion of parking areas.

24 Association and its current members with the full
25 understanding of our responsibility to continuing our

Brandon Smith Reporting Service

987

1 efforts to strive for excellence in the Center present
2 this letter of support to the Blue Back Square
3 developers and the Town of West Hartford in
4 anticipation of working together to reach our joint
5 goal of furthering the West Hartford Center reputation,
6 of being the premiere shopping destination in central
7 Connecticut.

8 MR. LA PERLA: I would simply like to
9 add that any idea as grand as this is very
10 revolutionary, and as a group and as a Town, the only
11 way to take something that is so revolutionary and make
12 it work is by accepting it work within the process that
13 you all here have established. I look at the Town
14 administrators, and I see the hard detailed work that
15 they have done and the months and months of
16 conversations we have had as a business association to
17 get to this point of accepting, and at this point, this
18 is no longer a revolution. It's an evolutionary
19 process, a natural growth, a very important strategic
20 business portion of our Town.

21 As a business leader here in the
22 community, we in the Center need to have a draw. With
23 these other programs and other developments throughout
24 the area being built, we do need to know that this will
25 remain the one Center where most people throughout a

Brandon Smith Reporting Service

988

1 60, 80-mile radius come for their shopping. Thank you.

2 MS. LERNER: Thank you.

3 MAYOR HARRIS: Thank you, Ms. Lerner and
4 Mr. La Perla. Next we have Claudia Storm, followed by
5 Pat Newton and then Leann Sherman.

6 MS. STORM: My name is Claudia Storm. I
7 reside at 31 Westminster Drive. I am wholeheartedly in
8 favor of Blue Back Square. There is no question that
9 this project will change the Center, but I believe it
10 will be a positive change. I was here last night and
11 see no need to repeat what was said by others who spoke
12 in favor of this project. I do, however, have a couple
13 of comments about what I heard.

14 More than one speaker last night
15 referred to West Hartford as a quaint New England Town.
16 I, too, grew up here, and I returned 14 years ago with
17 my husband to raise our family. I by no means want to
18 challenge my friends' and neighbors' attachment to our
19 community, but we are not Litchfield, we are West
20 Hartford. Litchfield for me is a better example of a
21 quaint New England Town.

22 While West Hartford is not without its
23 own charm and character, we are a suburb of Hartford,
24 and as such, I think West Hartford and Blue Back Square
25 are an excellent fit. Of course, there is risk

Brandon Smith Reporting Service

1 attached to a project of this size, but for me, the
2 greater risk lies in not approving Blue Back Square.
3 What might Raymond Road look like then? A vacant car
4 dealership replaced by a strip mall, or some older
5 project over which the Town has no control or input? A
6 developer in a project of this quality will not come
7 our way again for being Blue Back Square as an example
8 of good planning. Please approve this project.

9 MAYOR HARRIS: Thank you, Ms. Storm.
10 Next we have Pat Newton, Leann Sherman and Brenda Kurz.
11 I also want to tell people that we have a sign-up sheet
12 right over to my right, back there where Mr. Patrissi
13 is sitting and please sign up.

14 MS. NEWTON: My name is Pat Newton,
15 N-e-w-t-o-n. I live at 42 Castlewood Road here in West
16 Hartford. I've been a resident of this wonderful Town
17 since 1951. I'd like to make three points as a private
18 citizen demonstrating my complete support of Blue Back
19 Square and one point as the executive director of the
20 seniors job bank, which has offices on the second floor
21 of this building.

22 First of all, I think that Blue Back
23 Square will keep West Hartford on the cutting edge of
24 business destinations by enhancing the excellence of
25 the Center, a sentiment also voiced by the endorsement

Brandon Smith Reporting Service

1 of Blue Back Square by not only the West Hartford
2 Center Merchants Association, but the West Hartford
3 Chamber of Commerce.

4 Secondly, the development of Blue Back
5 Square is very timely in conjunction with the budget
6 concerns demonstrated by the recent referendum.
7 Millions of dollars will be generated annually to
8 support our municipal and education costs now mostly
9 paid for by residents.

10 Thirdly, this opportunity to develop
11 this important piece of property fell into the laps of
12 the Town Council and the Town administration, who with
13 prior administrations had been planning for over 30
14 years how best to use the east Center space, but did
15 not have the dollars to do it right. Something will go
16 in that area some day, a Wal-Mart or a Kohl's that we
17 may have very little control over. Let's grab this
18 extremely well-planned use of this space while we have
19 the opportunity to do it right.

20 Fourthly, as the director of the seniors
21 job bank, I see great opportunities for jobs for our
22 senior citizens who can work in the retail and
23 restaurant establishments as cashiers and hosts, in the
24 health facilities as couriers and building maintenance
25 folks, in the theaters as ticket sellers, in the

Brandon Smith Reporting Service

1 offices as administrative assistants, receptionists and

2 bookkeepers. It's such a great location for jobs.

3 Lastly, my husband and I want to be the
4 first on the list to sign up for the condos. Thank
5 you.

6 MAYOR HARRIS: Thank you, Mrs. Newton.
7 Next Leann Sherman followed by Brenda Kurz and then
8 Mayor Nan Streeter.

9 MS. SHERMAN: I think it's safe to
10 assume that all of the Town Council members and
11 virtually everyone here tonight has on numerous
12 occasions driven right past my little beige cape. I
13 live on Trout Brook Drive, a stone's throw from the
14 interstate 84 off ramp at Exit 43 Park Road. My
15 husband and I never open our windows because of the
16 blaring noise and penetrating soot generated by the
17 daily onslaught of traffic.

18 According to the Town of West Hartford
19 Division of Engineering, 15 vehicular accidents have
20 occurred at the corner of Park Road and Trout Brook
21 Drive in the last 12 months alone. On page 4 of the
22 June 2004 Blue Back Square News, a developer's
23 promotional piece, an article states that West Hartford
24 residents will not experience any disruption in their
25 life styles due to the traffic resulting from Blue Back

Brandon Smith Reporting Service

992

1 Square. It goes on to say that a comprehensive traffic
2 plan is proposed that is designed to minimize impacts
3 on the roadway network of West Hartford, as well as

4 correct many existing problem areas.

5 In point of fact, this so-called
6 comprehensive plan at Trout Brook Drive and Park Road
7 involves a few feet of striped paint and an adjustment
8 to a traffic signal, making it only more conducive for
9 drivers to speed up around the turn. The developer of
10 this project, Mr. Richard Heapes, speaks of blue sky,
11 green space, and so-called traffic-calming measures.
12 Neither he nor the Town Council, however, has explained
13 how allowing a double left-turn lane onto Trout Brook
14 Drive from Park Road and directing additional traffic
15 our way will improve the serious traffic problem we and
16 our neighbors already face on Trout Brook Drive.

17 It seems the Town has countless millions
18 to spend on speculative commercial space, but no money
19 to deal seriously with the additional traffic nightmare
20 headed our way. Our Town's money and energies should
21 be directed toward fixing serious problems in our Town,
22 rather than creating new ones. I cite the beleaguered
23 and neglected village of Elmwood with all its
24 development and traffic problems as a more appropriate
25 candidate for this suddenly newfound bonding largess.

Brandon Smith Reporting Service

993

1 Mr. Heapes commented that there are no
2 places in Town for good breakfast and that people like
3 to walk to the movies. I'm all for a nice breakfast
4 nook and a theater. That's a far cry, however, from
5 the 20-acre mammoth proposal that will forever change

6 the landscape of our lovely Town, not progressively
7 over time, but in one fell profitable swoop for
8 Mr. Heapes. Mr. Heapes by his own admission will be
9 gone when this project is complete. After he returns
10 to Virginia to enjoy his ongoing profits, the
11 burdensome problems he leaves in his wake will be ours
12 and ours alone to fix.

13 The next time you enter West Hartford --
14 let me repeat that -- the next time you enter West
15 Hartford from Exit 43 and head north on Trout Brook
16 Drive, as you zip past my house, ours is the one with
17 the little red maple tree standing proudly on our lawn,
18 remember my neighbors and I live here too, and the next
19 time you drive through any busy intersection in and
20 around West Hartford, remember it will only be more
21 difficult and dangerous to drive through it if the
22 overly ambitious Blue Back Square is constructed as
23 proposed. Thank you.

24 MAYOR HARRIS: Ms. Sherman, can you
25 please, you didn't state your name and address and

Brandon Smith Reporting Service

994

1 spell your name for the record please,

2 MS. SHERMAN: Sure. Leann, L-e-a-n-n,
3 Sherman like the tank, 744 Trout Brook Drive.

4 MAYOR HARRIS: Thank you. Next we have
5 Brenda Kurz, Nan Streeter and then Attorney Michael
6 O'Connell.

7 MS. KURZ: Hi. I'm Brenda Kurz, that's

8 K-u-r-z, and I reside at 9 Burr Street. I'd like to
9 thank the members of the Town Council and Plan and
10 Zoning Commission and administration for your hard
11 work. I'd also like to thank those members of the
12 public who have spoken thus far. It's obvious that
13 many have studied the proposal in great detail.

14 I think you will find my statement of a
15 more personal nature. I have lived in West Hartford
16 for almost five years and have owned a condominium on
17 Burr street for almost three years. As you know, Burr
18 Street abuts the south side of the proposed project. I
19 am also the mother of an eight-year-old child and a
20 professor at the UCONN School of Social Work. Each of
21 these informs what I have to say to you tonight.

22 When I interviewed for my current
23 position at UCONN five plus years ago, West Hartford
24 was an unknown entity. I drove around Town as I
25 mentally prepared for my interview and was pleased to

Brandon Smith Reporting Service

995

1 realize that West Hartford reminded me of my hometown
2 North Hampton, Massachusetts, in density and size. I
3 felt my child and I could be happy here. I rented for
4 two years so I could better decide where I wanted to
5 buy. Of the options open to me, my present condo on
6 Burr Street seemed the best. The seller assured me
7 that the municipal green in front of the condo would
8 always remain a green. But being rather cautious by
9 nature, I inquired about this at the planning office

10 and was shown a model of the municipal campus with the
11 green quite intact. The only major change was the
12 addition of an ice skating rink which seemed a nice
13 modification to me.

14 This past fall I learned about Blue Back
15 and saw a new plan which replaced the green with a
16 parking lot, a parking deck, condominiums, retail and
17 wellness center and wondered how this massive change
18 from the plan I had seen had occurred. I would not
19 choose to buy a condo that is opposite a parking lot
20 and a parking deck and don't think any Town Council
21 members would choose to do so either. My child has
22 submitted her plan for the municipal campus to
23 Councilor Carpenter. It keeps the green in place and
24 intact as it should.

25 As a professor of social work, many of

Brandon Smith Reporting Service

996

1 my beginning students want to jump in and fix
2 everything without first listening and understanding
3 their clients. I am always asking my students, what
4 does the client say about this, what does the client
5 say about that? The client is the expert.

6 Members of the Town Council, I'm asking
7 you to listen to us, the citizens of West Hartford, and
8 wish you had involved us from the start. I believe the
9 proposed project would be smaller and more acceptable
10 had you done so. Here is what I have to say: One, the
11 movie theater. If there must be a movie theater, make

12 it smaller. My hometown of North Hampton has two small
13 artsy theaters, one with one screen, the other with
14 two. They seem to work very well and would require
15 less parking, which leads to my second and major point,
16 the municipal campus, the green and the parking garage.
17 Leave the municipal campus and green as they are. I
18 question whether this piece of Town property should be
19 developed at all and believe strongly that the voters
20 of West Hartford should make this decision.

21 Again, let us tell you what we want. If
22 the Council or preferably the voters decide that
23 condos, retail and wellness center are to be built on
24 Town property, then assess whether the existing Town
25 Center parking garage, which seems underutilized and

Brandon Smith Reporting Service

997

1 located only a block away, and the proposed North
2 Parking Garage would meet the need. Do we really want
3 and need three parking garages? Do not expand and
4 greatly reconfigure the existing paved parking on the
5 municipal campus. The lot is never fully utilized.
6 Change the zoning of the current municipal green so
7 that it remains green space, and we won't have to have
8 this conversation again. If desired, then make the
9 green more child friendly by putting a swing set or two
10 on it. My child plays in the field most days, don't
11 make us give it up. Listen to us, please.

12 The developer often says West Hartford
13 does what's right. He also says at the end of the

14 day -- at the end of the day show the developer that
15 West Hartford listens to its citizens and acts
16 accordingly. Make Blue Back, but make it smaller and
17 keep our green space. It would be the right thing to
18 do.

19 MAYOR HARRIS: Thank you. Nan Streeter,
20 Attorney O'Connell and then Joyce Burke.

21 MS. STREETER: Good evening. My name is
22 Ann Streeter, S-t-r-e-e-t-e-r, more familiar, known as
23 Nan. I live at 31 Brookmoor Road.

24 You have taken on an unbelievable
25 project. I think it's the hardest one that's ever been

Brandon Smith Reporting Service

998

1 faced by Town Council and Plan and Zoning. This has
2 all the elements of the problems and solutions that
3 we've been working for for many years, and each one of
4 these elements could take all summer for us to debate
5 and decide it, and I just want to bring a little
6 perspective from my knowledge of the late seventies
7 when we were in another era when we were making major
8 changes in the Center.

9 First of all, we believe, as you
10 believe, and as every Council has believed, that the
11 Center is valuable as a contained Center. If you live
12 on Pelham Road, you can be sure you are not going to
13 have a dry cleaners next door. In other words, we've
14 always maintained that there are borders to our Center.
15 We do not expand outward. And the reason for that is

16 why the Center is vibrant, because when somebody wants
17 to locate in the Center, instead of doing what they
18 usually do and build on the periphery, they have to
19 reinvest and go into the buildings that exist in the
20 Center.

21 So this has been a very important thing
22 for us. It has been hard a little bit for the people
23 who want to serve us, who want to come and develop
24 businesses because they have a small amount of space
25 that's available, and so our solution for this, of

Brandon Smith Reporting Service

999

1 course, is that we have the east side of our campus,
2 which has the potential for adding more space. It's
3 only these two spaces that are on the east side and the
4 west side of the Center that really are available, and
5 you look at the Town map, you realize one third of our
6 Town is nonprofit or else MDC or semi-nonprofit
7 development, and the rest of the Town, most of it is
8 residential. So when you come to talk about taxes in
9 our Town, you are looking at the problem that all the
10 Town's houses are the ones that bear the burden, and
11 that's why you have the large tax burden you have right
12 now. And we have desperately tried to build the
13 development of the industrial base and other places to
14 try to balance that somewhat. And so you have the two
15 main themes, first of all, to make the Center a place
16 where businesses can thrive and also to try to get some
17 money.

18 There is a lot of stuff that you are
19 looking at that was very much on our minds at the time
20 of the 1970s, and part of it was the Board of Education
21 and the Town Hall. At that point we had referendums
22 against our budget, and we had to be more efficient and
23 since then, we've closed seven schools, and I've
24 noticed that over the last ten years the Town Hall has
25 done a magnificent job in reducing their numbers of

Brandon Smith Reporting Service

1000

1 space in Town Hall, and so now you are going to be able
2 to move the Board of Education here, and I think that
3 this -- so when people think this is a big surprise,
4 this has really been a long going, ongoing thing.

5 Actually when I was mayor, they were
6 proposing either a hotel for this whole lot, from here
7 to Raymond Road, or else a business, an office
8 building, and it was only through a lot of effort that
9 we got to save Town Hall, and actually wanted to build
10 a new police station and the referendum went down and
11 we took the Whitman School and made that. So for a
12 long while this piece of property has been in
13 contention.

14 I would like to also tell about the
15 difficulties we had with dealing with the west side of
16 the Center. For instance, we tried to start a Special
17 Development District, but we couldn't get enough of the
18 individual lot owners to work together and agree on
19 that Special Development District. It's very hard. We

20 tried to build a garage actually between Arapahoe and
21 Farmington Avenue when they took down the A and P. All
22 right, I'll stop with the history.

23 I just want to say that the desire to
24 change is not very strong in West Hartford. It seems
25 to me that people like it the way it is, and I just

Brandon Smith Reporting Service

1001

1 want to comment that we want to be a dynamic Center,
2 not a static Center, but the people who you will be
3 hearing from say the character of the Center would be
4 destroyed -- this is what they said -- when they sold
5 the mini golf course on LaSalle Road and built brick
6 buildings there, when they closed the A and P and built
7 the bank building, when they closed the Burnham store
8 and replaced the area store with a brick building.

9 MAYOR HARRIS: Mayor, if you could,
10 sorry to interrupt.

11 MS. STREETER: All right. And then they
12 closed the Whitman School and the Hall High and the
13 central theater and took away the running track. All
14 of these, we were told, were going to ruin the
15 character of the Center. So you have to take into your
16 consideration what is it you want to see as the
17 character of the Center for today rather than
18 yesterday. Thank you.

19 MAYOR HARRIS: Thank you, Ms. Streeter.
20 Next Attorney O'Connell followed by Joyce Burke and
21 then Bob Dunn. Again, if people can move up towards

22 the podium when they are called, then also we do have
23 the sign-up sheet to my right.

24 MR. O'CONNELL: Good evening, Mr. Mayor,
25 members of the Council, members of the Planning and

Brandon Smith Reporting Service

1002

1 Zoning Commission. I am Michael D. O'Connell,
2 O'-C-o-n-n-e-l-l, of the firm of O'Connell Flaherty &
3 Atmore, and I am here, as you know, on behalf of the
4 group Save the Center. I want to just pause for a
5 second a little personal observation. While I don't
6 live in Town now, I did live for many years on
7 Farmington Avenue between the Center and Sunset
8 Triangle, and I recall listening to Mayor Streeter that
9 even back in the 1970s, we were fighting to keep the
10 character of this Town and the Center of this Town and
11 resisting the efforts to turn that strip from the
12 Center out to Sunset Triangle into a commercial
13 district even then. So I agree there is a long history
14 of having to fight this battle.

15 Save the Center, as you know, is a grass
16 roots group, made up of hundreds of volunteers. They
17 were successful in obtaining thousands of signatures on
18 their recent petition drive, and so I have come to find
19 that they have their finger on the pulse of what I see
20 as the largely silent majority out there that has great
21 concerns about this proposal. Make no mistake about
22 it, my client opposes this development proposal in its
23 current form. They believe that it will in fact change

24 the character of the Center and that, in fact, if this
25 succeeds, the only one who benefits truly from it is

Brandon Smith Reporting Service

1003

1 the developer, that the benefits conceivably to the
2 Town are minimal in comparison to the potential risks.

3 In light of the time constraints, I'm
4 only going to be able to make some bulleted points, but
5 I'll try to move quickly. As I have previously
6 expressed before the Council, we have great concern as
7 does the general public about the process here. I've
8 commented in the past that there is a concern that, in
9 fact, both with the Town administration and the
10 Council, that the minds have already been made up so
11 that largely this process is one that will not affect
12 that thinking. That is of great concern because our
13 group believes that the integrity of the process is
14 just as important as the substantive decisions being
15 made, and unfortunately, as I get the feedback from the
16 client, that concern has been heightened, if anything,
17 by the process over the last couple of weeks.

18 There is concerns about the fact that
19 the truly hard questions are not being asked, that to
20 get to the bottom of the risks and the rewards of this
21 proposal would literally take weeks of hearings. I
22 understand these are all volunteer participants here,
23 but the reality is that this is a very complex
24 proposal, and we have only really scratched the surface
25 on finding out, as I said, the benefits and the

1 advantages and disadvantages of it.

2 There is great concern about the fact
3 that even though the Council back in January adopted a
4 resolution that said the Town Manager is directed to
5 retain the services of independent experts to analyze
6 the potential impact of Blue Back Square and other
7 potential development proposals, including but not
8 limited to economic analysis, a traffic analysis, and a
9 parking analysis, that those independent experts have
10 not in fact been retained, and we believe that that is
11 a major impediment to having a good and fair and open
12 process.

13 I do find one bit of information a
14 little troubling. Apparently a fellow, Joseph
15 Springman was retained by the Town. My understanding
16 is he is a real estate development expert, but that his
17 expertise has not in fact been used to any significant
18 degree. Certainly there has been no significant
19 analysis by him that has been produced. I did actually
20 make contact with Mr. Springman, but he advised me that
21 he could not talk about his analysis because of the
22 confidentiality provisions in his contract with the
23 Town. That's the only expert that we know of that has
24 in fact been retained.

25 Let me turn to a couple of the

1 substantive issues. One of the things that is apparent
2 and is of concern both in general terms, but also in
3 legal terms, is the, what we believe is the
4 unprecedented level of municipal support for this
5 individual developer. Obviously towns do engage in
6 economic development, provide directly or indirectly
7 assistance when it is in their own interest. But
8 unfortunately, we believe here that there is an
9 insufficient level of detachment between the Town and
10 this developer, that, in fact, they are fully
11 intertwined, and that that is an inappropriate
12 relationship that has crossed the line. There is clear
13 case law that says when a municipality uses its
14 authority to benefit unduly a private developer, that
15 that is inappropriate and illegal, and we believe that
16 given the involvement here, that that line has been
17 crossed.

18 I coincidentally have been involved in a
19 steering committee to discuss a Special Services
20 District for downtown Hartford, and in talking with
21 people around the state, they were truly stunned at the
22 use and the way that this Special Services District is
23 being used for this particular developer and
24 development, and again, we believe that that is
25 inappropriate under state law. Again, the involvement

Brandon Smith Reporting Service

1 of municipal bonding, the transfer of public land,
2 building garages solely to satisfy a particular
3 developer, that that, in fact, crosses the line, as
4 I've said.

5 There is one issue, and I commented back
6 when you were considering the prospect of having
7 combined hearings, that some issues would get lost in
8 the blur of such a broad discussion, and I think that
9 the zoning issues here have been lost in that
10 discussion. In most development projects like this,
11 there would be very intense discussion. This involves
12 a subdivision approval, it involves zone changes, the
13 development, Special Development District adoption, a
14 whole host of issues that I think are getting lost and
15 deserve much clearer public attention.

16 One of the concerns we have here is
17 about the issue of secondary development. As people
18 who have been involved with real estate development
19 know, if this project is successful, there is going to
20 be additional development in that immediate area. The
21 French cleaners will become some other kind of intense
22 development, and the problem is that that has not been
23 thoroughly analyzed. It is a traffic issue. The
24 traffic studies have not taken into account the true
25 ultimate development here. It's also a question about

Brandon Smith Reporting Service

1007

1 the intensity of this development as a whole.

2 Mr. Mayor, you had indicated that I
Page 46

3 could have a slight additional time.

4 MAYOR HARRIS: I will give you some
5 leeway, sir.

6 MR. O'CONNELL: I won't abuse the
7 privilege. The problem with that issue, about the
8 secondary development, is that this developer is not
9 going to solve that problem; that down the road this
10 whole area, Farmington Avenue, south side of Farmington
11 Avenue, maybe even the northern side of Farmington
12 Avenue in that area extending down toward Raymond --
13 from Raymond Road down toward Trout Brook, that there
14 is going to be additional intense development, and the
15 traffic studies have not truly taken that into account.

16 I guarantee you that if this development
17 is successful, five or six or seven years from now
18 there is going to be an incredible amount of traffic in
19 that area, and unfortunately, it's going to fall upon
20 the Town to both solve the problem and pay for it,
21 because this developer is not going to.

22 Very quickly, make no mistake, this
23 development will not enhance the existing Town Center.
24 It is a different development. It is a destination
25 development. It is more akin to West Farms Mall on a

Brandon Smith Reporting Service

1008

1 small scale, or Buckland Hills, et cetera. Think about
2 it, common sense, two big garages, as Mr. Feldman I
3 believe it was indicated, were necessary. That's not
4 West Hartford Center. That's West Farms Mall. And

5 that is going to not be integrated with the existing
6 Center, it's going to be a completely separate
7 development. And any other perception of that is just,
8 quite frankly, pi in the sky. It will be a competitor.

9 I just want to quickly say -- point to
10 some other examples, city of Hartford where I'm very
11 much involved in. When they built Constitution Plaza,
12 it negatively affected Main Street. When they built
13 the development around the Civic Center, it negatively
14 affected Constitution Plaza. When the bunch of
15 restaurants developed on the south part of Main Street,
16 it negatively affected the south end. When Max on Main
17 moved to the Center of downtown again, it affected
18 the downtown --

19 MAYOR HARRIS: Mr. O'Connell, can you
20 wrap up.

21 MR. O'CONNELL: Okay, I will wrap up.
22 And so make no mistake that there is a distinct risk
23 that this development will negatively affect the
24 existing Center.

25 Traffic obviously is an issue. I think

Brandon Smith Reporting Service

1009

1 there are two incongruous goals being stated here, one
2 to handle this intense additional traffic, the other is
3 to make the area pedestrian friendly. It can't be
4 solved both.

5 I do just want to quickly comment on the
6 residential issue.

7 MAYOR HARRIS: Attorney O'Connell,
8 perhaps you could submit some written testimony, and we
9 could get it that way and make that part of the record.

10 MR. O'CONNELL: Sure, I won't get into
11 the detail of it, but I disagree with the
12 characterization about the residential area. I think
13 that there are not sufficient incentives. I do think
14 that there are alternatives, and I will take the
15 opportunity to flesh out some of these observations in
16 a written submission.

17 And the final comment is that we do
18 believe that ultimately my group takes consolation in
19 the fact there there are two courts that we think will
20 be the final arbiters here, the courts of law, but more
21 importantly the courts of public opinion, who we
22 believe will be ultimately the ones deciding on whether
23 this project moves forward, and I apologize for taking
24 your time.

25 MAYOR HARRIS: Thank you, Attorney

Brandon Smith Reporting Service

1010

1 O'Connell. Joyce Burke, Bob Dunn and then Sheila
2 Amdur.

3 MS. BURKE: Attorney O'Connell, you are
4 a hard act to follow. I'm Joyce Burke. That's spelled
5 B-u-r-k-e. I live at 6 Meadowbrook Road.

6 As I attended Mr. Heapes' presentations
7 during the past year and listened to his description of
8 the proposed Blue Back Square, I thought of the

9 Gershwin song, "It Ain't Necessarily So." Twenty-five
10 years ago when we first came here to West Hartford, the
11 Civic Center was described as a wonderful new facility
12 with shops, restaurants. Now the Civic Center has gone
13 bust, and we are hearing the same rosy descriptions
14 again for Blue Back Square, but there are no guarantees
15 this will be any more successful than that, and the
16 Town will still have to repay the millions it sinks
17 into this development.

18 We are being asked to give up our green
19 space around the Town Hall for a parking garage, a
20 medical facility, and other buildings, none of which we
21 really need. The parking garage we have now gets very
22 little use. If we build this garage, Town workers and
23 seniors who use the Town Hall will have to pay to park
24 there. If they are given free parking vouchers, then
25 where is the revenue to pay for the garage? It's a no

Brandon Smith Reporting Service

1011

1 win situation for the Town.

2 As to the medical building and fitness
3 Center, Hartford Hospital already has two facilities,
4 one in the north and one in the south on New Britain
5 Avenue, both with adequate parking, and UCONN Health
6 Partners have a similar facility on Kane Street, also
7 with pretty good parking, and all of these are only a
8 few minutes from the Center.

9 The Town of West Hartford spent
10 considerable money a few years back to update

11 Cornerstone Pool. As you probably know, it now has
12 four pools, an exercise center, water fitness classes,
13 aqua therapy, as well as swimming instruction for all
14 ages, and it's just maybe three minutes from the
15 Center. So why do we need this medical and fitness
16 building to add to the traffic on Memorial Road? Why
17 are we selling the Board of Ed building? We already
18 have a 20 cinema complex which shows a wide variety of
19 movies with acres of free parking, a short drive from
20 the Center. Again, we are just going to overcrowd the
21 Center. We do not need to spend millions to add to the
22 Town Hall for the Board of Ed building.

23 Please do not vote to trade away our
24 Town property. Once it's gone, it's gone forever.
25 Please vote against Blue Back Square. Go back to the

Brandon Smith Reporting Service

1012

1 drawing boards and find a better type of development
2 for that property. Thank you.

3 MAYOR HARRIS: Thank you, Ms. Burke.
4 Bob Dunn, Sheila Amdur and then Virginia Vocelli.

5 MR. DUNN: Hello, my name is Bob Dunn,
6 D-u-n-n. I live at 60 Brunswick Avenue. I've lived in
7 West Hartford for eight years, the last two years have
8 been within one block of West Hartford Center. I moved
9 there specifically to be near the Center and share in
10 the excitement of what goes on in the Center, and it
11 has been a truly wonderful experience, the last two
12 years, for me. But I've always been bothered and

13 frankly embarrassed by the condition of the Raymond
14 Road area, and I've waited with anxious anticipation
15 for the plans to develop that area. I am very excited
16 about what is on the table on the Blue Back Square
17 project, and I do support it wholeheartedly.

18 With this development, the Town has the
19 luxury of planning over 20 acres of property adjacent
20 to its Town Center. I would think this is almost
21 unprecedented anywhere in this state, to have this type
22 of an opportunity in the heart of the city, and that's
23 without taking any property by eminent domain, and that
24 was a stated objective of the Town, and it has been
25 met. That is just unthinkable, in my experience, and

Brandon Smith Reporting Service

1013

1 I'm not sure anyone has given a comparable situation,
2 at least brought to my attention.

3 But planning is the key to the success
4 of any development, and it certainly is the key to the
5 success of Blue Back Square. It should not be a
6 question of if the project should go forward, but how,
7 and I applaud the Town and I applaud the developer and
8 all of the other organizations and professionals that
9 have spent so much time and so much effort and energy
10 and expense to plan this project for over three years.
11 I am confident that those professionals and the Town
12 Council and our leaders have studied this project and
13 have adequately planned for such things as financing
14 and traffic management and the other host of issues

15 that have been brought to the table.
16 West Hartford and the surrounding areas
17 around West Hartford will change over time. It is
18 inevitable. We are naive to think that it will not.
19 Planned change is good, but unplanned change can be
20 devastating. Although we can enjoy the beautiful Town
21 Center we currently have, the Town cannot sit idle. It
22 must plan for the future. Other towns will develop
23 their Town Center. The novelty of West Hartford Center
24 will fade. Absent a plan development for this parcel,
25 we will be left with a hodgepodge of development at the

Brandon Smith Reporting Service

1014

1 whim of individual property owners, and I just don't
2 think that's what we want.

3 This is a wonderful opportunity for West
4 Hartford. I personally believe this project will be a
5 phenomenal success and a tremendous asset to both West
6 Hartford and the region. The large majority of people
7 I have spoken with share my optimism and my excitement.
8 I hope you will support making Blue Back Square a
9 reality and I thank you.

10 MAYOR HARRIS: Thank you. Next, Sheila
11 Amdur, Virginia Vocelli and then Cheryl Harrington.

12 MS. AMDUR: Good evening. My name is
13 Sheila Amdur, that's A-m as in Mary, d as in David,
14 u-r. I live at 132 Lawler Road, and thank you for the
15 opportunity to speak with you tonight. I'm a relative
16 newcomer to West Hartford, having lived here since

17 August of 2002. I came here after 32 years in
18 Mansfield, and came here because of the dynamism, the
19 diversity and the social cultural opportunities of this
20 community. Some people I say -- I'm told people retire
21 to Florida; I retired to West Hartford. I was glad to
22 hear about that senior job bank, too, I may need it.

23 While in Mansfield, I served on the Town
24 Council and chaired a task force on housing in the
25 seventies and then in the eighties. Our goal was to

Brandon Smith Reporting Service

1015

1 promote affordable housing so that our community would
2 be a place that our children could come back to live
3 when they grow up, that the people that worked in our
4 Town could live there, and that we would be a community
5 open to people of very different economic and ethnic
6 backgrounds.

7 It was therefore surprising to me when I
8 learned that the Blue Back Square, that when it was
9 discussed that West Hartford, I was told, had no policy
10 regarding affordable housing linked to development, or
11 that the kind of housing to be developed in that was
12 not really part of the discussion. It was just
13 essentially presented in terms of what the developer
14 felt he needed to do economically. But just looking
15 into this a little bit, you do have a Town policy,
16 which I found contained in the Community Development
17 Block Grant, and it's in my written testimony that I've
18 submitted. And it states "West Hartford's housing

19 objective is to support programs and agencies working
20 on sustaining, improving or increasing the supply of
21 decent, safe and affordable housing units available to
22 owners and renters of all household types and sizes."

23 So there does seem to be a basis in your
24 own policies, and in particular what you've submitted
25 to the federal government for the funds that the Town

Brandon Smith Reporting Service

1016

1 receives, to make -- to address affordable housing as
2 part of Blue Back. Others have testified here last
3 night on behalf of the League of Women Voters. I am
4 chairing their committee on affordable housing and the
5 Interfaith Housing Coalition testified.

6 I do believe, and I should state that
7 very clearly, I think this is a very exciting
8 development for the Town. I also think it's going to
9 help shift some of the tax burden away from residential
10 properties and I think, which will be an extraordinary
11 help. Somewhere, however, within the complex financing
12 and benefits both the Town and the developer are
13 receiving, there should be a way to dedicate funds for
14 housing for people at more or less some percentage, 50
15 percent or so of the median income in this community.

16 It is my hope that in the coming months
17 that you will, as part of your efforts here, appoint a
18 task force on affordable housing, and I will help in
19 any way I can with that initiative and actually am
20 very, very happy to be here working on some of these

21 issues. Thank you.

22 MAYOR HARRIS: Thank you, Ms. Amdur.
23 Virginia Vocelli, Cheryl Harrington and then Laura
24 Bolduc.

25 MS. VOCELLI: Hello. My name is

Brandon Smith Reporting Service

1017

1 Virginia Vocelli, That's spelled V as in Victor,
2 o-c-e-l-l-i. I'm a 25-year resident of Bonny View
3 Road, and so that you know where I'm coming from, I've
4 been the director of the Avon Public Library for 16
5 years, and before that I was manager of the Faxton
6 Branch in Elmwood for 6.

7 I'm directing my remarks then to the
8 project's plans for parking and access for the public
9 library. I believe those plans are inadequate. To
10 state that the 65 designated spots in the North Parking
11 Garage are a little more than what they have now makes
12 it appear that we should be grateful for that. The
13 deficiency of adequate, free surface parking in close
14 proximity to the library indicates a lack of
15 understanding of how people use the public library. We
16 need quick access not for just dropping books off at a
17 book drop, but it's necessary for a quick run in to
18 pick up a reserved book, use the copy machine, easy
19 access is needed for people with disabilities, parents
20 with a child in hand or in a stroller.

21 The community of Princeton, New Jersey
22 just opened a brand new three-story public library.

23 They tore down the old library and put up the new one
24 in the same place because they believed it was
25 important to keep the library in the heart of the

Brandon Smith Reporting Service

1018

1 community. Parking is at a premium in Princeton, but
2 working with Town officials in planning a new building,
3 the library can offer 85 free spots for their library
4 customers and a mixed-use parking garage within 400
5 feet of the front door. The new library is 58,000
6 square feet and serves a community of 25,000. That's
7 minus the college students.

8 The expanded West Hartford Public
9 Library will be over 52,000 square feet and with two
10 branches serves a community of 60,000 population. At
11 minimum, there should be 100 spaces for the customers
12 of the public library, and this is using a formula
13 recommended by the Connecticut state library, 100 free
14 spaces with easy access to the new entrance at Blue
15 Back Square.

16 In addition to increasing the number of
17 spaces in the North Parking Garage, I recommend you
18 eliminate the library retail pad and replace it with
19 free surface parking to benefit those parents with
20 small children, the elderly, people with disabilities,
21 and in fact all of us who use the library for projects,
22 big and small, all will benefit from more convenient
23 and free parking.

24 It's true that because of the growth of
Page 57

25 the use of technology in libraries, people are changing

Brandon Smith Reporting Service

1019

1 the way they use it. For one thing, it's allowing a
2 more efficient use of their time. You can check the
3 online catalog from home for a book that you are
4 looking before you make the trip. A vice president of
5 Google recently commented, and this is paraphrasing,
6 that while we are getting the Google search engine
7 better all the time and maybe in 300 years we will be
8 as good as the small reference library.

9 So even with the advance of technology,
10 visits to the West Hartford Public Library have
11 increased in the past three years. Public libraries
12 like West Hartford's will continue to serve as a
13 cultural center and heart of the community, a place to
14 meet, learn, exchange ideas, improve literacy, all made
15 easier because of good planning and much, much better
16 parking than what we have now. Thank you for giving me
17 the opportunity to speak.

18 MAYOR HARRIS: Thank you. Cheryl
19 Harrington, Laura Bolduc.

20 MR. DANIELS: Excuse me, John, is it
21 possible to obtain enough information to get the
22 standards of the library organization in terms of
23 parking? I had not heard any testimony about that, and
24 that seems to be worth having.

25 MAYOR HARRIS: We will ask that of the

1 administration. You've done it right now, and there
2 will also be opportunities for us to follow up on
3 public comment with the administration, too. Thank
4 you, Mr. Daniels.

5 Ms. Harrington.

6 MS. HARRINGTON: Hi. My name is Cheryl
7 Harrington. Last name spelled H-a-r-r-i-n-g-t-o-n. I
8 live on 52 Meadowbrook Road, and I represent the groups
9 of my family, my friends in the neighborhood, the
10 friends and parents of mine, parents of children at
11 Webster Hill School, my parents, my cat and that group.

12 Dear Town Council members, I first want
13 to thank you for your time. It's volunteer public
14 service, I know, you've been here many nights. You've
15 been inundated with papers, and I sincerely thank you,
16 those who are doing their hard work with integrity.

17 I'll give you a little background so you
18 know where I'm coming from. My family, my husband, my
19 children and I moved here eight years ago when Tom took
20 a position at Trinity College, and as we looked around
21 the area, we quickly chose West Hartford for its
22 beauty, the density, its closeness to Hartford and of
23 course the schools. Looking around West Hartford, we
24 chose to buy a home near the Center because of the
25 beauty of the Center itself, and the neighborhood

1 surrounding it and because the Center had an alive
2 community feeling to it. It was neither a dead Center,
3 nor was it a strip mall with lots of parking and an
4 endless stream of strangers going in and out of it.
5 People looked like they might know each other as they
6 walked between these pretty shops and restaurants and
7 that is what we wanted.

8 When I heard that there would be a new
9 development behind the library and a
10 pedestrian-friendly mixed-use development at that, I
11 was excited. I assumed the development would further
12 enhance and enliven the existing Center, and since we
13 have good friends who are architects of public spaces,
14 my husband designs urban culture, I have a family
15 member who has done financing of development for years
16 and now is a mixed-use developer himself, we have many
17 a lively discussion around the table about the
18 blossoming of centers and their destruction.

19 So I will start with the ideals that we
20 sometimes discuss and what is hot in the development
21 world right now, and these are the principles of what
22 is known as new urbanism. They are principles that
23 healthy, progressive and intelligent Town governments,
24 such as our own, adhere to in developing their towns,
25 and I quote from Bressy, that the new urbanist

Brandon Smith Reporting Service

1 proposals are based on one simple principle, the
2 community planning and design must assert the
3 importance of the public over the private, and this
4 principle serves as a reference for making the layers
5 of decisions involved in creating new communities in
6 their centers.

7 Another quote, "The neighborhood gives
8 priority to public space and to the appropriate
9 location of civic buildings. Public space and
10 buildings represent community identity and foster civic
11 pride." And these quotes from Simsbury's Guidelines
12 for Community Design, "It is important to attract and
13 expand the base of citizen support and participation.
14 Stopping growth is not an option, but it's possible to
15 manage growth, so it strengthens the community's core
16 values."

17 I am not sure these principles have been
18 upheld during the course of development of this
19 community Center. I've been pretty involved. I
20 followed this since Mr. Van Winkle did the neighborhood
21 meetings as prescribed by law. I went to all of
22 Mr. Heapes' presentations and asked lots of questions.
23 I've been, you know, to the Town Council meetings and
24 all that. I believe this development falls short in
25 reflecting the above criteria and on more concrete

Brandon Smith Reporting Service

1023

1 levels will have a negative impact on this Town. It's
2 funny how different people can look at the same

3 information and think so differently.

4 Blue Back Square is not a strip mall.
5 It's pretty brick buildings, and it's smaller. People
6 say, oh, it's about half the size of the current Town
7 Center, so it seems to be keeping in the scale of the
8 current Town Center. But I think if you thought that
9 or you have this idea in your mind, you would be
10 misled. If you look at the square footage, it's
11 577,000 square feet.

12 MAYOR HARRIS: Ms. Harrington.

13 MS. HARRINGTON: And if you have a hard
14 time picturing that, let me compare some things for
15 you. A typical Wal-Mart consists of about 100,000
16 square feet. West Farms Mall is just over a million
17 square feet. And so this development is about the size
18 of almost six Wal-Marts and over half the size of West
19 Farm or Buckland Malls with all of the parking and the
20 traffic that a commercial development of that size
21 entails. I do not think it is in scale with our
22 current Center, and I do think that the amount of
23 parking and traffic alone that it will bring will
24 destroy the fabric of the community and the residents
25 around it and the residents just on the other side of

Brandon Smith Reporting Service

1024

1 Town all the way up in the north because I'm not
2 worried about --

3 MAYOR HARRIS: Ms. Harrington.

4 MS. HARRINGTON: -- wild traffic. I'm

5 worried about gridlock, and I'm going to hate to go out
6 of my house during the holidays. I can't even imagine
7 it. So much talk about my green porch in the back.

8 MAYOR HARRIS: Ms. Harrington.

9 MS. HARRINGTON: I'll wrap it up. I
10 think that there is a really important point of the
11 process in this, and that is if the Council approves of
12 this plan, Blue Back Square goes through as stated in
13 that 450 page plan, there is no changing it. None of
14 the great ideas that have been brought up, none of the
15 criticisms that have been said will be incorporated
16 into that plan. It will not. It is done. It will go
17 in as planned. I think this is not the end of the Blue
18 Back Square deal; I think it's just the beginning.

19 I'd ask the Town Council to vote no
20 on it, and I would ask them to use all of their
21 precious time and studies and examinations and bring
22 them to the table again --

23 MAYOR HARRIS: Ms. Harrington.

24 MS. HARRINGTON: -- with this developer
25 or another developer who will work reasonably with us

Brandon Smith Reporting Service

1025

1 and get a good development started in this Town.

2 MAYOR HARRIS: Thank you. Next we have
3 Laura Bolduc, and then we will take a break. I just
4 want to remind people we are not cutting people off
5 because we don't want to hear them, it's on both sides,
6 it's not one way or the other. It's because we are

7 trying to make sure that everybody has an opportunity
8 to be heard, and there are a number of people that
9 would like to speak, so Ms. Bolduc is not here, so we
10 will take one more person, Kristen Levesque.

11 MS. LEVESQUE: Hi. My name is Kristen
12 Levesque. I live at 12 Crestwood Road. We recently
13 moved back to Connecticut after almost ten years in the
14 greater Boston area, and we moved back because of the
15 Center, and both my husband and I were very excited to
16 hear about the new development, Blue Back Square, and
17 still excited about the prospect of that being in our
18 neighborhood, so although I've heard very thoughtful
19 testimony on both sides of the issue and maybe there is
20 some minor tweaking that needs to be done, I think it's
21 a fabulous project, and I'm very much in favor of it.
22 Thank you.

23 MAYOR HARRIS: Thank you, Ms. Levesque.
24 We will take a ten-minute break now. Thank you.

25 (Recess taken from 7:57 p.m. until 8:21 p.m.)

Brandon Smith Reporting Service

1026

1 MAYOR HARRIS: We'd like to get started
2 up again, please. Okay. I wanted to also just remind
3 people that we have a sign-up sheet in the corner to my
4 right, and also just to clear up any confusion, I have
5 two pages of sign-up sheet here, so you might go up
6 there, sign up and look at your name on the list and
7 think, wow, I'm number 5. Well, you are number 5 on
8 page 3, but there are people on page 2 that signed up

9 before you, so I just wanted to make sure there was no
10 confusion on that.

11 Our next speakers will be Wayne
12 Armillei, John Lemega and then Michael Aron.

13 MR. ARMILLEI: My name is Wayne
14 Armillei, spelled A-r-m-i-l-l-e-i. Good evening. I
15 live at 55 Wardwell Road. My family and I have lived
16 in West Hartford for six years. Both my wife and I
17 oppose Blue Back Square project as it has been
18 presented by the developers. We live approximately one
19 mile from Town Hall. We are not against some
20 development of the proposed site; however, this project
21 is too big for the neighborhood, and we are concerned
22 about that. I also believe that any resident who lives
23 within a one-mile radius of the project site should
24 have serious concerns as well.

25 We also watched several nights of the

Brandon Smith Reporting Service

1027

1 televised hearings. On June 10th, Mr. Heapes said, and
2 I quote, "One of the things we want to do is compete
3 with Hartford." I ask the question: Why do we have to
4 compete with Hartford? What are we competing for?
5 Mr. Heapes also said, and I quote, "Celebrate West
6 Hartford can be three times the size," and I ask: Is
7 this really necessary? I don't want Celebrate West
8 Hartford to be three times the size of what it is now.
9 It is a children's carnival for heaven's sake.

10 On June 17th, the traffic engineer, and

11 forgive me for forgetting his name said, and I quote,
12 "Traffic will be significantly better after Blue Back
13 than it will be today." And I won't be hoodwinked into
14 believing that and neither should anyone else. People
15 will come here from several towns away and our roads
16 are not equipped to handle this volume of traffic. The
17 suggestions that the developers made for traffic
18 improvements I believe will prove ineffective. If the
19 project is approved, Mr. Heapes said it will take two
20 years to complete with ground breaking next fall and
21 completed by the fall of 2006.

22 I ask this question, and I don't believe
23 it was raised during the hearings: How many trucks
24 carrying tons of gravel, sand, rock and soil will pass
25 to and from the construction site each hour? This will

Brandon Smith Reporting Service

1028

1 cause, you know, additional soot and exhaust and smoke,
2 and it will just affect the area so negatively, the
3 people living there.

4 Also, will there be blasting on the
5 building site? If ground has to be broken during
6 wintertime, how is the ground penetrated? Will there
7 be blasting on the site? If so, when and how often?
8 The vibration of the trucks and blasting will cause the
9 walls and ceilings of nearby homes to crack. If you
10 don't believe me, ask residents that live on Goodman
11 Park Road in Wethersfield who are dealing right now
12 with the noise of rerouted Connecticut transit busses.

13 At one point last fall there were 24 busses travelling
14 down small neighborhood roads. It's been reduced to 9
15 because of the neighborhood effort, but there are still
16 problems. At the completion of the -- also at the
17 completion of the project, there will be other vehicles
18 to contend with that will add congestion, pollution, et
19 cetera, to our air and problems to the road.

20 One other point I'd like to make, I
21 understand Mr. Heapes said there were six dumpster
22 bays. How many trucks are needed for garbage removal?
23 At what hour of the day will the garbage be removed?
24 How many days per week will garbage removal be
25 scheduled? And how about hazardous waste materials

Brandon Smith Reporting Service

1029

1 from the Hartford Hospital project?

2 In closing I'd like to say, I believe
3 it's important that we don't give up any more of what
4 little open space we have left and to let the Town
5 green go, so there is also another point I'd like to
6 make about the movie theaters and the time of the last
7 showing. So for instance, here I have a copy of the
8 movie complex off of New Park Avenue, and their last
9 show begins anywhere from 9:30, 10:10, 10:50, I believe
10 10:50. And if that's the case, when will the last
11 movie end in the neighborhood of the proposed theater?
12 Thank you for listening.

13 MAYOR HARRIS: Mr. Armillei.

14 MR. ARMILLEI: Thank you for listening.

15 MAYOR HARRIS: Thank you. John Lemega,
16 Michael Aron and then Carol Storey.

17 MR. LEMEGA: My name is John Lemega,
18 L-e-m-e-g-a. I live at 17 Linwold Drive in West
19 Hartford.

20 Mr. Mayor, Madam Chairperson, members of
21 the Town Council and Planning and Zoning Commission. I
22 am here tonight representing the Noah Webster House and
23 the West Hartford Historical Society. Others have
24 spoken to the issues of land use, tax impact, intensity
25 of development, parking and traffic. The Noah Webster

Brandon Smith Reporting Service

1030

1 House and the West Hartford Historical Society have a
2 focus which is slightly different. We have seen a
3 private developer make extraordinary efforts to
4 incorporate Blue Back Square into the economic fiber of
5 West Hartford Center, and we have seen that same
6 developer strive mightily to incorporate essential
7 aspects of West Hartford history into Blue Back Square.

8 At the outset, the selection of Blue
9 Back Square as the name for this mixed-use development
10 recognizes the important contribution that West
11 Hartford-born Noah Webster made in his Blue Back
12 Speller. The developers of Blue Back Square, however,
13 have gone far beyond merely choosing Blue Back Square
14 as a cute name. Street-Works has proposed
15 acknowledging Noah Webster's contributions to our
16 nation and to our Town by installing timelines and wall

17 panels that trace his accomplishments as patriot,
18 lexicographer and abolitionist. As a symbol of his
19 time, the telling of Noah Webster's story helps our
20 community understand many of the social and political
21 changes that developed in West Hartford and the country
22 as a whole during the 18th and early 19th centuries.

23 We are pleased that Street-Works'
24 proposal seamlessly incorporates West Hartford's
25 history into its design and affirmatively seeks to

Brandon Smith Reporting Service

1031

1 cultivate an interest in local history. The picnic
2 area centering around a ten-by-ten foot bronze map will
3 be a fine way to highlight key historical locations
4 within the Town and to create a visual understanding of
5 how the Center has changed over time. Another positive
6 proposal is a large window exhibit to explore local
7 history in the Center of Blue Back Square, which
8 Street-Works has asked the Noah Webster House and the
9 West Hartford Historical Society to manage.

10 Finally, we are impressed with
11 Street-Works' whimsical approach to connecting to
12 Webster's Blue Back Speller through a human-size
13 crossword puzzle in the Center of the complex.
14 Street-Works was under no obligation to expand beyond
15 the -- to expand upon the connection between Blue Back
16 Square and Noah Webster, as well as the history of West
17 Hartford. That it has done so, that it has
18 incorporated into its scheme of development historic

19 themes and educational opportunities which would allow
20 the public rich, meaningful experiences with the past
21 is, in our view, a tribute to Street-Works' commitment
22 to West Hartford. Street-Works and Mr. Heapes should
23 be applauded for their willingness to celebrate Noah
24 Webster's life and West Hartford's history in this
25 momentous development.

Brandon Smith Reporting Service

1032

1 On a more personal note, I would suggest
2 that at least one test of the viability of this project
3 is the candor and integrity of the two individuals who
4 will manage this unique and complicated Town and
5 developer relationship, they are Barry Feldman and
6 Richard Heapes. While there have been citizens who
7 have come before you during these hearings who have
8 suggested that there is some sort of an overweening
9 conspiracy between the developer and Town employees,
10 those comments, in my judgment, constitute an insult to
11 the integrity of our Town Manager. That Barry Feldman
12 feels strongly that Blue Back Square is crucial to the
13 future development of West Hartford Center should be an
14 important factor in your deliberations.

15 We have also seen Mr. Heapes make a
16 wonderful persuasive presentation of Blue Back Square
17 to this combined body. More importantly, we have
18 watched him react with candor to the probing questions
19 which you have posed to him. Mr. Heapes comes to West
20 Hartford having established a superlative record as a

21 devel oper. Anyone who has vi si ted and walked through
22 Mizner Park in Boca Raton can vouch for that. He has
23 only bui lt upon that credi bi li ty with hi s vi sion for
24 Blue Back Square and West Hartford Center.

25 Blue Back Square wi ll usher i nto West

Brandon Smi th Reporti ng Servi ce

1033

1 Hartford Center a new and exci ti ng ti me. I urge you to
2 approve i t. Thank you for your consi derati on.

3 MAYOR HARRI S: Thank you, Mr. Lemega.

4 Michael Aron, Carol Storey and Bob Neems.

5 MR. ARON: Mayor Harris, Ms. Meck,
6 members of the Town Council and Town Pl anni ng and
7 Zoni ng, my name i s Michael Aron, A-r-o-n. I live at 40
8 North Quaker Lane, and I've been a resi dent of West
9 Hartford for 23 years. There i s an old proverb that
10 says be careful what you wi sh for, you mi ght ju st get
11 i t. I believe thi s appli es to the Blue Back Square
12 Devel opment. The devel oper cl ai ms that the new stores
13 and restaurants wi ll not compete with the existi ng
14 establi shments i n the Center. If you add fi ve or seven
15 more restaurants to the West Hartford Center area, as
16 i t's proposed for the new devel opment, I can't see how
17 they woul dn' t compete. Peopl e don' t eat two dinners.
18 They have to choose one restaurant or the other. If
19 the same number of peopl e that eat and shop at the
20 Center today wi ll be usi ng the Blue Back Square
21 establi shments, you may end up wi th no competi ti on
22 because the existi ng establi shments l i ke Bri cco' s,

23 Bookworm, Fowls and others will be driven out of
24 business, then the developer will have been right,
25 there will be no competition.

Brandon Smith Reporting Service

1034

1 If, on the other hand, all the
2 establishments are to keep the same level of business
3 that they now enjoy, that means bringing a lot more
4 people into West Hartford Center. I know this is the
5 plan because otherwise we wouldn't need two new huge
6 parking garages. With so many people coming into Town
7 comes additional traffic, congestion and crime. I've
8 already attended Town meetings in the past where
9 residents have complained about people loitering and
10 hanging around the Brace Road parking lot late at
11 night. I believe this kind of activity is just going
12 to increase in Town. I believe this development is way
13 too big for this Town.

14 I'm reminded of the movie, "It's A
15 Wonderful Life" where the hero lives in Bedford Falls,
16 a small Town very similar to West Hartford with
17 affordable housing and a certain charm. When the hero
18 sees how things would be if he was never born, the Town
19 has completely changed because the greedy rich man in
20 Town, Mr. Potter, has totally commercialized the Town
21 without thought to the residents. Even the name has
22 been changed to Pottersville.

23 Members of the Town Council, Town
24 Planning and Zoning Commission, I urge you to vote

25 against this project as proposed, and make the

Brandon Smith Reporting Service

1035

1 developer go back to the drawing board. Please don't
2 let West Hartford turn into Heapesville. Thank you.

3 MAYOR HARRIS: Thank you, Mr. Aron.
4 Carol Storey, Bob Neems and then Kim Roth.

5 MS. STOREY: Carol Storey, S-t-o-r-e-y,
6 53 Loomis Drive. I had great plans for what I was
7 going to say to you tonight. I thought I would fill
8 you with more data to process, but none of us are
9 computers. I thought I could tell you of my own
10 personal experience as a leasing rep in Westchester and
11 Fairfield Counties and in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
12 for some very well-known developers. But that was
13 then, and this is now. I considered regaling you with
14 horrific development tales of White Plains, New York,
15 where Street-Works is located and essentially where I
16 grew up. I was raised there and lived there before
17 moving to Connecticut almost 20 years ago. But you
18 know what? That is there, this is here.

19 As I said at my opening, I had great
20 intentions; however, none of my thoughts and good
21 intentions are more important than what I will say to
22 you now. On June 8th, I stood before Council
23 addressing a same, though different issue regarding
24 this development. At that time I asked that you
25 consider those people who put you into office. You

1 were not elected to speak only for yourselves or Town
2 administration. You were elected by the people of West
3 Hartford and for the people of this great Town. You
4 were not elected to insure your own legacies or your
5 personal goals, but to define West Hartford. Please be
6 clear, this is not an indictment of any of you. This,
7 however, is a plea. I ask that you please, please,
8 hear the voice of the people. Let us have a vote to
9 decide the future of our Town, all of us.

10 As I said to you at that meeting on June
11 8th, the buildings will be here long after we are gone.
12 Thank you.

13 MAYOR HARRIS: Thank you, Ms. Storey.
14 Bob Neems, Kim Roth and then Ronald Mancuso.

15 MR. NEEMS: Good evening. My name is
16 Bob Neems. I live at 6 -- last name is spelled
17 N-e-e-m-s, and I live at 60 Webster Hill Boulevard.
18 Sitting through a few hearings lately, one good thing
19 that's come out of this whose proposal is I think I've
20 gained a little bit greater appreciation of people in
21 Town government, so even though I don't like the
22 direction, the way this whole thing seems to be moving,
23 I want to thank all of you for putting all this time
24 in. This has been just remarkable to have some
25 beginning understanding of the amount of time you folks

Brandon Smith Reporting Service

1 put in. I've got to say that even if we doubled all
2 your salaries, you'd still be all underpaid.

3 My concerns though are a little bit
4 different. Even though I appreciate the effort and the
5 time and the insight all you folks have put into this,
6 it feels like myself as a citizen of the Town, who
7 tries to pay attention, has arrived at the game a
8 little bit late. I feel like the goose is in the oven,
9 and it's been on 350 for quite awhile, and I just found
10 out this thing was going on.

11 I think I pay more attention and read a
12 lot more newspapers than most citizens, so I was kind
13 of alarmed to come to the presentation down here in the
14 late winter and see that not only was this very, very
15 large development under way, but that the Town was
16 apparently actively facilitating this development. The
17 whole idea of selling Town property to me constitutes
18 facilitating a development that apparently many people
19 are opposed to, so I was a little bit alarmed to
20 discover that, you know, that was apparently under way.
21 So I guess I thank you all for the time that you put
22 in, but I'm a little puzzled why this thing would have
23 gone so far down the road towards a decision that seems
24 mostly baked already without involving the community
25 and a decision about whether it wants to change itself

Brandon Smith Reporting Service

1038

1 in such a fundamental way.

2 I think it's obvious that some
3 development will happen on that property, and that
4 there are a lot of good elements in that property.
5 There are a lot of good elements in the proposal. I've
6 taken some time to wander around and talk to my
7 neighborhood, and I've been surprised how many people
8 like different aspects of the proposal. When you hear,
9 you know, more businesses, more offices, West Hartford,
10 Hartford Hospital moving offices to Town, all those are
11 things that everyone would like.

12 To me the problem is that this proposal
13 has merits compared to what? It's not being compared
14 to anything. Myself, I would far prefer that we
15 preserve the very, very little bit of green space that
16 we have left in Town. It is part of what gives our
17 Town character. It is part of what makes us a Town
18 instead of a city. And it bothers me that the Town has
19 been so willing to sell off the little, little bit of
20 open space that's left in the middle of Town to help
21 this development happen. It seems to me that what we
22 need to do is engage in a process that's a little
23 different than the one that's going on.

24 I think what we need to do is to step
25 back and talk about this proposal is so great compared

Brandon Smith Reporting Service

1039

1 to what? So this one will generate 2 million dollars
2 of tax revenue. A smaller proposal would generate lots
3 of tax revenue, too.

4 I think there is a piece missing in this
5 whole process that I think we need to step back and
6 look at a way to do this in a smaller, more manageable
7 way, with some of the excellent elements that are
8 currently incorporated in the current proposal, but in
9 a way that doesn't so adversely dramatically change the
10 character of the Town and have such dramatic adverse
11 impact on the property owners who are nearby. Thank
12 you.

13 MAYOR HARRIS: Thank you, Mr. Neems.
14 Kim Roth, Ronald Mancuso and then Joe Sposi to.

15 MS. ROTH: Hi. My name is Kim Roth,
16 R-o-t-h. I reside at 60 Brightview Drive, West
17 Hartford, which is actually Bishop's Corner area. I'm
18 not right here in the Center of Town. I have lived in
19 West Hartford for over 30 years. I've seen over the
20 years and learned from the Town history that typically
21 we sell public buildings such as Bridal Path, Talcott
22 the plant schools only to regret it later when there is
23 a need to use those buildings.

24 I agree that there is a need to develop
25 the former car dealerships; however, I disagree with

Brandon Smith Reporting Service

1040

1 trading public property to a private-for-profit
2 developer. I don't want to see our Town make a
3 permanent mistake again. I understand that you are
4 elected officials; however, I cannot understand how you
5 have the power to make a decision that affects our Town

6 forever.

7 We have had two movie theaters in the
8 Town in the past, Central and Elm. I've been to both
9 of them when I was little, the Central Theater right
10 here in the Center of Town. Do we really need a movie
11 theater and two parking garages? The first time my
12 husband and I saw this model of the Blue Back Square
13 presented by the developer over the winter, I asked my
14 husband, does this remind you of somewhere? He said,
15 yes, Reston Center. Reston Center is nice as a suburb
16 of Washington, D.C., but West Hartford is not
17 Washington, D.C. and neither is Hartford.

18 This is New England. West Hartford is
19 unique with its 150 years of history. Do you really
20 want to be -- have West Hartford become a carbon copy
21 of a community down south? This property is prime real
22 estate. There have to be other options besides the
23 Blue Back Square in which the Town gives up public
24 property. You should not be the only ones making this
25 decision. You are supposed to be representatives of

Brandon Smith Reporting Service

1041

1 all the taxpayers of West Hartford, not people who live
2 in Bloomfield, Avon or Glastonbury, as we've heard
3 people speak in the last couple of days.

4 Please allow the taxpayers to vote on
5 this. Once the property has changed hands, it is gone
6 forever. Thank you.

7 MAYOR HARRIS: Thank you, Ms. Roth.
Page 78

8 Ronald Mancuso, Joe Sposito and then Tom Faenza.

9 MR. MANCUSO: My name is Ronald Mancuso,
10 M-a-n-c-u-s-o. I live at 342 North Quaker Lane. My
11 wife and I and our two children have resided in West
12 Hartford. My wife and I for 24 years, our children
13 have been educated by the school system here and are
14 now off in college. I personally have had a 33-year
15 career in the commercial real estate finance and
16 development area, and I also have formal education in
17 both the law and in business.

18 I had a unique opportunity to be present
19 at a number of meetings that took place here in Town
20 Hall that were attended by business people from the
21 Town as well as members of the Town administration and
22 the development team. I must say that when those
23 meetings began, I was very skeptical about this
24 project. I thought that there were unequal negotiating
25 skills, that the developer had really overwhelmed the

Brandon Smith Reporting Service

1042

1 Town and the Town administrative staff. However, I can
2 definitely say to you that after spending over
3 two-and-a-half months fielding many detailed and
4 specific questions by the group of businessmen and
5 receiving candid answers and detailed answers to all of
6 those questions, that I have become a convert.

7 I am a supporter of the Blue Back Square
8 Development, and I am a supporter of the development as
9 it has emerged as a result of two years of intense

10 negoti ations.

11 My conclusi on is that the Blue Back
12 Square Development that is before you today is one that
13 developed through honest, equal, fair negoti ations with
14 an objective and principles that have been set forth by
15 the Town administrators during their presentations and
16 a level of commitment to having those principles
17 incorporated into this plan.

18 I want to give you some of my
19 observations from having attended those meetings. I
20 believe that you as a Town Council have provided to we
21 residents of this Town an incredibly competent Town
22 Manager, an incredibly capable administrative staff
23 heads. This administration, in my opinion, is
24 sensitive to the objectives and principles that have
25 been set forth over a long period of time in this Town.

Brandon Smith Reporting Service

1043

1 I think that those objectives and principles have been
2 incorporated into this development plan.

3 The other side of the equation is the
4 developer-investor. I believe that he is highly
5 experienced, and he has a high level of integrity, and
6 that he has shown that integrity by the full and
7 complete candor and openness and details to every
8 question that has been presented to him. Without the
9 highly-skilled Town administrative staff that you have
10 put in place, this project never could have been
11 negotiated to the extent that it has with so many

12 benefits to the Town and protections for the Town.

13 A project like this where the Town is an
14 active participant in both design and financing enables
15 an orderly and comprehensive development at a net cost
16 to the Town that is far less than trying to accomplish
17 the same objectives with the same type of project with
18 separate owners of each different use. The project
19 enables the Town to oversee and positively influence
20 the development of a major portion of the east side of
21 the Center, so that we wind up with one Center that is
22 architecturally and economically coordinated with the
23 existing Center.

24 I am impressed with the level of detail
25 that has been worked out between the Town and the

Brandon Smith Reporting Service

1044

1 developer as set forth in this proposal. An
2 opportunity for the Town to partner with an
3 investor-developer of this caliber in my opinion is a
4 tribute and a reward for all the right things that this
5 Town has done over the past decade or two. This
6 project is an extension of what has been created
7 already in West Hartford and will help us maintain what
8 we have come to covet about our Town.

9 Because of the investment of time and
10 resources by the Town to shape the project over the
11 past two years into what you now have before you, I
12 urge you to support your Town administration and
13 approve the project as submitted. Thank you very much.

14 MAYOR HARRIS: Thank you, Mr. Mancuso.
15 Joe Sposito, Tom Faenza, sorry, and then Melissa Rosen.

16 MR. SPOSITO: Good evening. My name is
17 Joe Sposito, S-p-o-s-i-t-o. I live at 359 Fern Street,
18 on the corner of Fern Street and Ardmore Road by the
19 Morley School with my beautiful wife and three young
20 children. And I also work in an office suite on
21 LaSalle Road in the heart of West Hartford Center.

22 I support Blue Back Square and the Blue
23 Back Square Development 100 percent and wholeheartedly,
24 and I commend the Town administration for negotiating a
25 very well thought out and comprehensive development

Brandon Smith Reporting Service

1045

1 plan to redevelop what I consider an eyesore on the
2 east side of our Town Center.

3 I urge you to have faith and trust in
4 our Town employees who have worked hard and listened to
5 proposals from approximately 30 different developers
6 that were looking to build strip centers and big box
7 retail, all with tax abatement components before
8 choosing Street-Works and Blue Back Square. I believe
9 this developer and the Town have created a very
10 balanced and attractive project, and I fear that if we
11 do not approve this plan, I am certain we will end up
12 with an inferior project or worse, we may have to look
13 at a boarded car dealership for another five or ten
14 years.

15 Please seize this opportunity and

16 support this plan to significantly improve our Town
17 Center and thank you for listening to my opinion.

18 MAYOR HARRIS: Thank you, Mr. Sposi to.
19 Tom Faenza, Melissa Rosen and then Douglas Christie.

20 MR. FAENZA: I'd like to start by
21 thanking the Town Council and Planning and Zoning
22 Committee for their extraordinary commitment over the
23 last few weeks including the tax issues that have
24 carried on for what seems like several months
25 concluding Thursday night at about midnight.

Brandon Smith Reporting Service

1046

1 Good evening. I was born and raised in
2 West Hartford along with three siblings and a pretty
3 large family here. I've heard over and over about West
4 Hartford being a charming New England Town, but I think
5 we've got to step back and stop and be realistic. We
6 are really an older suburb with older homes in small
7 lots. Despite the attraction of newer suburbs which
8 offer new homes, big lots, more square footage, I chose
9 to raise my family in West Hartford for two compelling
10 reasons: One we have a wonderful school system, and
11 two, we have a thriving Center. The fact that our
12 Center is unique doesn't guarantee us that it will stay
13 thriving. One thing that we do know is that changes
14 are constant.

15 I urge you to support this proposal for
16 four primary reasons: Number 1, we have an opportunity
17 to rehabilitate an area that's been underutilized for

18 years while complementing and strengthening our
19 existing center; number 2, we have an existing
20 opportunity here to accomplish long-outstanding goals
21 by leveraging private investment with the Town's
22 interests in mind; number 3, over the last few months
23 we've gone through a long and painful budget process
24 culminating in late hours Tuesday night. You've heard
25 from Mr. Feldman and from the Board of Education that

Brandon Smith Reporting Service

1047

1 we are not operating with fat in our budget. One way
2 to relieve the high property tax burden on homeowners
3 is to grow our commercial base; finally, number 4, I've
4 heard a few folks over the the last few nights giving
5 testimony on the risks associated with this project.
6 I've heard much less about the opportunity cost of not
7 doing this project. Make no mistake, the property on
8 Raymond Road will ultimately be developed regardless of
9 the outcome of this proposal. Consider the idea of a
10 Walgreen's and a Taco Bell surrounded by gravel lots as
11 an alternative.

12 This proposal will provide, you, our
13 Town leaders, the opportunity to control the
14 development in the east side of the Center with a
15 well-designed, coordinated plan. Without Blue Back
16 Square, this change may be out of your control and
17 detrimental to the existing Center and the character of
18 our community. Thank you for listening.

19 MAYOR HARRIS: Mr. Faenza, Tom, I don't
Page 84

20 know if you stated your name and address for the
21 record. I don't think you did.

22 MR. FAENZA: Tom Faenza, 116 Tunxis
23 Road, F-a-e-n-z-a.

24 MAYOR HARRIS: Thank you. Melissa
25 Rosen, Douglas Christie and Raymond Shea.

Brandon Smith Reporting Service

1048

1 MS. ROSEN: Good evening. My name is
2 Melissa Rosen, R-o-s-e-n. I live at 202 Four Mile
3 Road. I've been a resident of West Hartford for the
4 past two years. I'm a native of White Plains, New
5 York, the home of Street-Works, where a 150-year-old
6 courthouse was demolished for a mall.

7 I also happen to be a certified project
8 manager, which means that these types of large-scale
9 projects are my bread and butter. The in-depth risk
10 analyses done for these projects are something I do
11 every day, and my questions are based on my
12 professional expertise in the area of project risk
13 management.

14 In March, I sent a letter detailing my
15 concerns about the Blue Back Square proposal. As of
16 this date, I have still not received questions --
17 sorry, answers to my questions. As of tonight, I still
18 do not know what capacity in the north and south
19 parking lots must be attained to achieve revenues of
20 1.9 million dollars per year. What happens if the
21 developer goes bankrupt in the middle of construction?

22 As there is no bidding process for the construction of
23 the parking lots, what happens if they require
24 extensive repairs once they are turned over to the
25 Town? What happens to our taxes if the developer is

Brandon Smith Reporting Service

1049

1 unable to pay back the 48 million dollars in the period
2 allotted? 48 million dollars is 800 dollars for every
3 man, woman and child in this Town.

4 What happens if the movie theater closes
5 after a year or two? Will we then be left with another
6 brown field area? Why the developer is so unwilling to
7 develop in the footprint currently available without
8 using Town land, he was very clear about that at the
9 hearings last Thursday.

10 Question 7, what happens if the EPA
11 refuses to allow this development so near the Trout
12 Brook or disallows the park adjacent to it? Will we
13 lose green space entirely? Is it true the developer
14 predicts 1200 cars per hour? If so, think of the
15 opening to the Jets in West Side Story. (Snapping
16 fingers.) That is about one car every three seconds
17 down Raymond Road.

18 What if the developer pleads their
19 taxes? What will that cost the Town in legal fees as
20 was done with the Pyramid Mall in West Nyack, New York.
21 It cost them thousands of dollars. Is it true that the
22 Master Agreement says the developer doesn't have to
23 build what is proposed? For example, that he doesn't

24 have to make those high-rise buildings into condos; he
25 can make them into whatever he wants. Why was the

Brandon Smith Reporting Service

1050

1 developer permitted to use our tax-funded website to
2 publicize this project before it was even submitted to
3 the Council formally? Why hasn't the Town sent out --
4 why hasn't the Town sent out any information of its
5 own, something perhaps a bit less one-sided, and why
6 are people who are not residents here and do not pay
7 taxes here, why are they allowed to have a say at these
8 meetings? Am I suddenly going to be allowed to vote in
9 France? Will I be allowed to go to Avon and speak to
10 their zoning meetings? Probably not.

11 I am in the end forced to make my
12 decision based on what I know of this type of
13 development, the one question that no one has yet
14 asked: Does this type of development work? And
15 unfortunately, as the White Plains residents will tell
16 you, it does not. The fine point mixed-use development
17 our Town Council is seeking, is looking for, is better
18 described in the book "Suburban Nation," but a true
19 fine-point mixed-use development doesn't automatically
20 mean high density, and we must keep the two issues
21 separate.

22 As so many of my questions remained
23 unanswered, I cannot cast my vote as anything but no.
24 But wait. I don't get a vote. Unlike every other
25 community, to undertake a multimillion dollar project

Brandon Smith Reporting Service

1051

1 that involves tax dollars and public land, West
2 Hartford residents have only these few hearings to have
3 their say, not an officially-counted vote. And if
4 there is something like a school graduation and no one
5 shows up that day, the Council can terminate the
6 hearings for lack of interest.

7 Mr. O'Brien is right in his
8 interpretations, the law is hard, but I believe his
9 interpretation only considers the letter of the law and
10 not the spirit. Taxation without representation was
11 the galvanizing issue behind the founding of our
12 country. Why has our Town Council forgotten that?
13 Their unwillingness to hold a referendum does not
14 reflect well on their intentions. Their unwillingness
15 to answer my questions or to truly examine the pros and
16 especially the cons of this development does not speak
17 well for their intentions.

18 MAYOR HARRIS: Ms. Rosen, if you could
19 please wrap up.

20 MS. ROSEN: Their unwillingness to hear
21 those of us who do not support this development does
22 not bode well for our future.

23 I'd like to thank the lady stenographer
24 who has been typing away like mad for the last several
25 days. Thank you.

Brandon Smith Reporting Service

1 MAYOR HARRIS: Thank you. Douglas
2 Christie, Raymond Shea and Elaine Shapiro.

3 MR. CHRISTIE: I'm Douglas Christie. I
4 live at 11 Colton Road. I've been in Town for well
5 over 20 years. I followed this project with interest,
6 knowing that something was going to happen and change
7 is inevitable, and hoping that that change will be a
8 positive one.

9 I had reservations at the beginning, but
10 the one thing I found was that people would listen, and
11 the concerns I had I raised personally. I was
12 answered, I was always received courteously. Changes
13 were made, developments begun, new ideas came in, they
14 were fed in, developed and incorporated to the point
15 where I felt much better and much more supportive.

16 I have to admit personally as a person
17 who grew up in Vermont, my own choice would be to move
18 all the buildings and plant trees, but I'm afraid that
19 isn't the way the world is going to be in West Hartford
20 or in this area.

21 I don't usually speak at these meetings.
22 I've attended and listened to lots of viewpoints, and
23 there were certainly some excellent comments made
24 tonight, much more erudite than mine. But I was
25 compelled to come here I guess because listening to the

Brandon Smith Reporting Service

1 radio this morning, there was a speaker who represented
2 the opposition to the plan here in West Hartford, and a
3 couple of things that he said roused me up to the point
4 of speaking. Number 1, he said there hadn't been
5 opportunities for the people to know what is going on
6 or to express their views, and certainly for two years
7 now the door has been open on a one-to-one basis at
8 meetings, with the contractors and with others, and all
9 the hearings that have been held, I think it's
10 admirable in terms of the amount of time and energy
11 that's gone into listening to what people have to say
12 and a lot of that has been incorporated.

13 The other thing that was mentioned here
14 that disturbed me was reference to that there are lots
15 of other builders out there, and we should go out and
16 be bringing in other people. And from my
17 understanding, the builder we have now, I can't think
18 of many who would expose themselves and open themselves
19 and be as candid as this person has been. And I know
20 he was picked, picked as a person that could be
21 dependable with an excellent reputation, and a quality
22 performance.

23 The other part of it that is part of
24 that is, part of the criticisms I know have been that
25 the Town is working with the builder. I think this has

Brandon Smith Reporting Service

1054

1 to be this way. As it's been said by others, the Town

2 could not do this alone without the cooperation of the
3 builder, and the builder cannot do it without the
4 cooperation of the Town, and they found a marriage
5 between these two. I think in this case it's been
6 open, and it's been very productive and very
7 worthwhile.

8 So I guess I came up here also that I
9 hope people will support the plan. It's never going to
10 be perfect, but I tremble to think what it might have
11 been or what it might come out to be, and I think we
12 are in the right direction, and I personally support
13 it, and I want to come up here to thank those who have
14 contributed constructively in terms of the improvements
15 in the plan, to the Town and to the contractor for
16 their consideration. Thank you.

17 MAYOR HARRIS: Thank you, Mr. Christie.
18 Ray Shea, Elaine Shapiro and Mark Gassner.

19 MR. SHEA: Thank you, Mr. Chairman and
20 members of the committee. You ought, each and every
21 one of you ought to be commended for the amount of time
22 that you've all spent here, and I'm sure it's not part
23 of the dollars that we are talking about that will be
24 bonded; you are here for nothing. And I perhaps for
25 all of the people in the Town of West Hartford commend

Brandon Smith Reporting Service

1055

1 and thank you for all your time and efforts in trying
2 to come to a resolution here.

3 My name is Raymond D. Shea, S-h-e-a, and

4 I'm not related to anyone associated with Shea Stadium.
5 I'm a former member of the West Hartford Fire
6 Department and was an employee for 25 plus two years.
7 I've been a resident of this Town for 49. My parents
8 moved here when I was in the Korean war, and in 1950, I
9 became a member of this Town.

10 I've been watching. I didn't really
11 intend on testifying at any of these hearings, but as
12 diligently as I could I watched as many of the things
13 that were going on and the speakers who also ought to
14 be commended pro or con, and I decided tonight as I was
15 sitting in my comfortable chair. I don't normally come
16 dressed like this, I have a shirt and tie most often,
17 but I was sitting in my chair, and I said to my wife,
18 Louise, I've got to go up there and maybe take action
19 on some of the things that I've heard, both from the
20 committee and a couple from the developers.

21 I was pleased to hear that the questions
22 that were being asked of the developers pretty much
23 turned my mind from a situation that I didn't know
24 where I was coming from. I took just a couple of notes
25 and the developers who come in here are not coming in

Brandon Smith Reporting Service

1056

1 here free of charge the way you people are sitting here
2 listening to us, and they are going to go away from
3 here and say, hey, look it what we did in West
4 Hartford. Come on. I've been in this Town for 49
5 years. I've served as a public servant. I've had an

6 opportunity to help people on a number of occasions
7 over those 27 years, and I am here to help them again
8 and to perhaps help you.

9 People are going to be walking out of
10 here with their pockets full, and they were in West
11 Hartford, and they are going to go into the next Town
12 and then the next Town and then the next Town trying to
13 do the same thing there as they are trying to do here.
14 I was taken aback pretty much by the -- one of the --
15 one of you people asked the question about how we would
16 integrate Blue Back Square with West Hartford Center,
17 and his response was we are going to build a -- for all
18 intents and purposes, we are going to build a walkway.
19 The walkway would go from Raymond Road to somewhere in
20 the West Hartford Center.

21 Do these people realize that at least 30
22 percent of the people in this Town are currently under
23 Social Security? Perhaps I'm minimizing the 30
24 percent. I happen to be one of them. In any event,
25 you can't expect those people who would like to come to

Brandon Smith Reporting Service

1057

1 the part that's being proposed and walk up to West
2 Hartford Center. That's ludicrous.

3 I listened tonight to one of the
4 presenters, namely Attorney Michael O'Connell, and I
5 would embrace his presentation to you verbatim.

6 MAYOR HARRIS: Mr. Shea, if you could
7 please wrap up.

8 MR. SHEA: I'd be happy to. Thank you,
9 sir.

10 MAYOR HARRIS: Thank you, sir. You look
11 good not in your tie, too. I'm used to seeing you in
12 your tie.

13 MR. SHEA: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, I
14 appreciate the time. I never did get to look at my
15 notes, but thank you for the opportunity.

16 MAYOR HARRIS: You are always good off
17 the cuff, Mr. Shea.

18 MR. SHEA: Just one question. I would
19 like to know the answers to the questions of risks that
20 were in the folder that I was looking through in the
21 back of the room. There is several questions, but I
22 haven't found the page that has the answers. Perhaps
23 someone can get them for me. Thank you very much. And
24 good luck to all of you.

25 MAYOR HARRIS: Thank you, Mr. Shea.

Brandon Smith Reporting Service

1058

1 Next we have Elaine Shapiro and Mark Gassner.

2 MS. SHAPIRO: My name is Elaine Shapiro.
3 I live at 220 Ballard Drive. I realize something has
4 to be done in the Center, and I think there is some
5 good parts to this plan, but overall I think it's too
6 much, it's too big. I'm afraid about the traffic. I
7 sit in traffic a lot in this Town already. I think of
8 Celebrate West Hartford when I had to park blocks and
9 blocks from the Center to go to the craft show, and I

10 just think of more and more development in there. It's
11 going to be harder to park. I don't want to park in a
12 parking garage just to go to the library. I wonder how
13 much I would use the Center if this happens. I think
14 we need more affordable stores. I think we need a
15 place for teenagers to hang out. I think open space is
16 really valuable. I know that real estate property is
17 valuable, and it's all about tax money and, you know,
18 stores and selling things and generating more taxes,
19 but I think we lose sight of the value of open land, of
20 bike trails which we don't have in West Hartford. We
21 had this one little piece of a bike trail, and then it
22 got cut in half by the new road from the Center out to
23 Trout Brook.

24 I think the link to Noah Webster and
25 history is a good one, but I think overall it's just

Brandon Smith Reporting Service

1059

1 too much. I think that the Town really should have
2 done a better job of asking people what they wanted
3 before going this far, and I know people have said, oh,
4 it's been really easy to get information, but I don't
5 think so. I think that you really have to hunt and dig
6 to find out what's going on.

7 And I'm also concerned about the
8 regional impact. You know, there is big development
9 going on in Hartford. I'd like to see Hartford thrive.
10 There are shops being built out in Canton, Avon, and
11 Manchester. If we really think that we are going to

12 draw enough people to shop at all these stores, you
13 know, I think we just have to ask what if it doesn't
14 work? What if the stores go empty? What if they
15 close? What if not enough people come, not enough
16 businesses move in, and what if we want the land and
17 the property back if it doesn't work? Thank you.

18 MAYOR HARRIS: Thank you, Ms. Shapiro.
19 Mark Gassner.

20 MR. GASSNER: Mr. Mayor, Chairwoman
21 Meck, and Ladies and Gentlemen of the Council and
22 Commission, my name is Mark Gassner. I reside at 26
23 Shipston Drive. I don't have a tie tonight either.
24 That's because I was at the Red Sox game this
25 afternoon. Unfortunately, they lost 4 to 3 --

Brandon Smith Reporting Service

1060

1 MAYOR HARRIS: Could you spell your name
2 for the record, too, please.

3 MR. GASSNER: G-a-s-s-n-e-r. 4 to 3 in
4 10 innings, Nomar making a two-base error. I'm
5 associated with Simon's Real Estate Group, and I appear
6 tonight on behalf of an affiliate Town Center West
7 Associates, the owner of the office retail building and
8 parking garage known as Town Center, 29 South Main
9 Street, kitty or catty-corner across the street from
10 this building.

11 When Town Center acquired -- was
12 acquired in 1992, the owner inherited a unique but
13 challenging situation, the off-street metered parking

14 lot located in front of Town Center building, but
15 separated from South Main Street by an island. The
16 Town collects the revenue generated by the meters and
17 maintains the parking lot. Entering into the parking
18 lot is from South Main Street onto a one-way southbound
19 drive, behind the angle parking spaces. Vehicles exit
20 the parking lot by attempting to enter the drive
21 leading from the parking garage to South Main Street.

22 Most, if not every one of you, have
23 attempted to exit from this parking lot having
24 experienced the great difficulty in turning left into
25 the parking garage drive to enter Main Street, either

Brandon Smith Reporting Service

1061

1 to turn left or to enter the queue waiting for the
2 stoplight to change. Now comes Blue Back Square, which
3 proposes to extend Goodman Green south and widen South
4 Main Street all directly in front of this parking lot
5 for the purpose of adding a third southbound lane as an
6 exclusive left-turn lane into Memorial Road. Exclusive
7 left-turn lanes are desirable, but the safety of our
8 citizens is even more important. The widening of South
9 Main Street in front of the parking lot will reduce the
10 existing island from 18 feet to 8 feet. The resultant
11 8-foot separation of South Main Street from the parking
12 lot will exacerbate the already difficult conditions.

13 Now the Town-operated parking lot at
14 Town Center will have the following safety concerns:
15 One, drivers exiting the Town Center parking lot will

16 not be able to safely access South Main Street or be
17 able to physically enter the queue of waiting vehicles.
18 Now the parking lot drive will only be eight feet from
19 South Main Street and will operate as a de facto leg of
20 the intersection without the benefit of a traffic
21 signal to allow safe egress. Pedestrians crossing
22 South Main Street will have a longer crossing after the
23 road widening and the reduction of the island will
24 reduce the safe landing and separation from traffic in
25 the metered parking lot. I don't know how much time I

Brandon Smith Reporting Service

1062

1 have left, Mr. Mayor.

2 A VOICE: Forty-eight seconds.

3 MR. GASSNER: Forty-eight seconds. I
4 ain't going to finish.

5 A VOICE: Twenty-eight.

6 MR. GASSNER: There is a solution to the
7 problem, and if I have more time, I would like to
8 discuss that solution, but I don't know how much time I
9 have. I'm the last speaker, can I get a few more
10 minutes?

11 MAYOR HARRIS: Mr. Gassner, you can keep
12 going. You are the last.

13 MR. GASSNER: Thank you, miracles of
14 miracles, there is a simple solution to the problem.
15 The off-street metered parking should be relocated as
16 angle parking on the widened South Main Street. Angle
17 parking has existed on South Main Street between

18 Farmington Avenue and Memorial Road for many years.
19 This relocation will permit the creation of a beautiful
20 and pedestrian-friendly plaza between the building and
21 the street. The dreary blacktop of the parking lot
22 would be transformed into a space for an appropriate
23 pedestrian quarter, plantings and streetscape amenities
24 to encourage shopping, consistent with the goals of
25 Blue Back Square.

Brandon Smith Reporting Service

1063

1 More importantly, the provision for
2 on-street parking would improve traffic safety and
3 operations of the congested intersection of South Main
4 Street and Memorial Road. Town Manager Feldman is
5 quoted saying last Thursday that we have one Center.
6 It is not a Center in Blue Back Square. The Center is
7 pulled together by South Main Street. To paraphrase
8 Richard Heapes, the integration of Blue Back Square
9 should be accomplished by physical connections like
10 walkways and common marketing, but it must also be
11 accomplished by getting the details right such as using
12 the same kinds of sidewalks and streetlights familiar
13 to people who visit the Center. We agree and we say
14 let's make the front of Town Center look like the rest
15 of South Main Street. Let's have a seamless transition
16 from the existing West Hartford Center to the expanded
17 West Hartford Center and make both sides of South Main
18 Street pedestrian and car friendly.

19 I know I've used more time than I've

20 been allocated, so I'll just simply say in closing, we
21 have for many months worked with the Town and Blue Back
22 Square. Many concept plans have been drawn, and
23 finally one was produced on Monday by Langan
24 Engineering, which is acceptable both to Blue Back
25 Square and to Town Center, and we hope when it is

Brandon Smith Reporting Service

1064

1 submitted to the Town, they will also be in favor of
2 it.

3 If changes are made in the Special
4 Development District application to reflect the plan
5 that was produced on Monday, we will support Blue Back
6 Square. We think it's good for the Town. We think
7 it's good for our office building.

8 What we've said tonight is not simply
9 the opinion of an interested owner, we have hired Fuss
10 & O'Neill as traffic engineers, and many of the things
11 that I've said tonight are reflected in their report,
12 which I would like to file with the Town Clerk. Thank
13 you very much for giving me some extra time.

14 MAYOR HARRIS: Thank you, Mr. Gassner.
15 The sign-up sheet has been concluded. Are there any
16 other members of the public that haven't spoken that
17 would wish to do so at this point?

18 Mrs. Wenograd. Again, if you can state
19 your name and address for the record and spell your
20 last name for the stenographer.

21 MS. WENOGRAD: Marleen Wenograd,

22 W-e-n-o-g-r-a-d, 23 Four Mile Road. I'll be very brief
23 to make up for those who took so much extra time. I
24 just want to say that I've been living in Town on Four
25 Mile Road since 1965. I live close to the Center and

Brandon Smith Reporting Service

1065

1 I'm delighted with the plans. I am a strong supporter
2 of Blue Back Square, or whatever else it ends up being
3 called. When I first came to Town, I used to walk to
4 the Center theater, at least twice a week, sometimes
5 three. In fact, I once won a prize. They were giving
6 something away. I am delighted that we might have a
7 theater in the Center again. I look forward to it.
8 I'll be first in line every time the film changes.

9 When I first came to Town, people told
10 me that I had missed a rather interesting episode in
11 West Hartford history. Apparently West Hartford turned
12 down a Frank Lloyd Wright theater that was going to be
13 built on Sedgwick Road, and for years people talked
14 about it. Somebody brought it up the other day in
15 commenting to me, I hope we are not going to turn this
16 down like we turned down the Frank Lloyd Wright
17 theater. This is too good an opportunity to turn down.

18 And to Town Council people, I just want
19 to say regardless of what some of the people have been
20 saying, you are the elected officials. It is your
21 responsibility to make decisions. That's why you were
22 elected. You've been given lots of information. The
23 public has had every opportunity. If they show up for

24 the next four days, it will be practically everybody in
25 Town saying something. But you are the ones who make

Brandon Smith Reporting Service

1066

1 the decisions around here. Thank you.

2 MAYOR HARRIS: Thank you, Ms. Wenograd.
3 Any other members of the public that haven't spoken
4 that would wish to speak? If you could -- anyone else
5 that would like to, if you'd like to just kind of line
6 up behind the podium back against that wall, and then
7 I'll know if other people would like to do so.

8 Again, name and address and spell your
9 name, please. Good evening.

10 MR. DIGEL: How are you? My name is
11 Jeff Digel. That's spelled D-i-g-e-l. I live at 24
12 Van Buren Avenue. I've been a resident of the Town for
13 14 years, raising our two sons here.

14 I'm going to be very brief because
15 everybody said everything already. What I do want to
16 say is I totally commend the balance, what I perceive
17 to be a very balanced negotiation between our Town
18 officials and the developer-investor team. I totally
19 embrace an expanded and more diverse Center, which is
20 one of the key reasons that Jane and I moved to Town in
21 1990 to raise our family.

22 As a professional real estate investor
23 with no interest in this project, other than as a
24 neighbor of it, I totally believe in the fact that it
25 will be, or my expectation that it will be a total

1 success. I strongly encourage the Council to support
2 it. Thank you.

3 MAYOR HARRIS: Thank you. Alan.

4 MR. ELSTEIN: I'm Alan Elstein. That's
5 E-l-s-t-e-i-n. I live at 109 South Main Street. I do
6 a lot of walking in the Center. There is an awful lot
7 of traffic here. I don't care what the traffic
8 controls are, added cars in the speeds that they go and
9 the people that are there are going to cause problems.

10 My work is statistical in nature. I do
11 a lot of things in queuing theory, and I also have an
12 MBA in finance, and I've been in other parts of the
13 country.

14 This project is very, very dense. The
15 buildings are high. I'm a little bit concerned on some
16 of the arguments that because Mrs. Grody got such a
17 high price, therefore you need to build more there.
18 Basically I remember the Center. I've lived off and on
19 in this Town, more off than on in recent years, but
20 somewhat here. When I came back to Town, there was
21 Quaker Hardware. There was a local pharmacy. There
22 were two small Shoe Stop stores. There was Top Notch
23 Deli. All of these stores, as the Town has become
24 affluent with these more affluent restaurants, we've
25 seen the diversity of small businesses go down and the

1 rents go up, and we've seen places like Bishop's
2 Corner, which is somewhat vacant. The Elm Theater is
3 vacant. Local business is not thriving when you
4 upscale an area like this, and I don't think it's going
5 to add to West Hartford.

6 As a non sequitur, as a walker here,
7 there are a lot of people that do hang-time in West
8 Hartford Center now. In walking once already, there
9 has been an attempting mugging of me. Unless you are
10 going to have a lot more policemen, you are going to
11 get things there. When theaters get out, I can tell
12 you from other parts of the country, the traffic
13 patterns are all there once. This is too much. It's
14 the wrong type of thing for the Center.

15 We have an elderly population. I think
16 that's been mentioned. There is a need for senior
17 housing. That doesn't seem to be part of this of a
18 nonaffluent nature. They don't have children, it would
19 add to the diversity. I'm not sure that this has been
20 very well thought-out, and at least I've come each day
21 to these hearings, and it's more -- it seems to be more
22 about the money of it and the fact that perhaps there
23 was a quid pro quo where somebody said something to
24 somebody and this land was perhaps optioned or sold for
25 more than it is and we need more density.

Brandon Smith Reporting Service

1 If any of you want to see what happens
2 when real-time meets things, you ought to go down to
3 Trumbull Street in Hartford where they said this new
4 thing where Geno Auriemma's Restaurant will be will not
5 be too dense and it won't take some land. Look at how
6 it's going up. The assurance there was that it would
7 fit right in with Bushnell Park and there would be
8 plenty of land and it wouldn't look big. Take a look
9 at it. Take a look at these diagrams, and I would say
10 think very carefully.

11 I'm not sure we need this kind of large
12 nationwide store with some small stores, commercial
13 development. I think there are better uses for it. If
14 indeed these developers walk away and it lies fallow,
15 I'd rather have that than an overly dense thing where
16 pedestrians are just not very much valued as cars are
17 all over the place. And local businesses, we've
18 already lost our hardware stores, our shoe stores and
19 everything else. As rents go up, we are going to see
20 more national businesses.

21 This is at a time where Bishop's Corner
22 could very easily use the development. The Elm Theater
23 is there and needs to be saved. West Farms Mall is
24 there. As was pointed out, we are getting Adrienne's
25 Landing, stores in Canton. This is a very small area

Brandon Smith Reporting Service

1070

1 which is very dense with sidewalks, and I think you are
2 going to ruin the pedestrian nature of West Hartford if

3 you do this. Thank you very much.

4 MAYOR HARRIS: Thank you, Mr. Elstein.

5 MS. THOMAS: I did not come with any
6 prepared comments. I didn't have a tie. I'm wearing
7 shorts, but I'm here. My name is Diane Thomas,
8 T-h-o-m-a-s. I live at 22 Sunset Terrace. I just came
9 to hear what was going on with Blue Back Square. I've
10 read a little bit about it, not as much as most of you
11 people here, but I have learned quite a lot from
12 listening to both sides.

13 I have to say that I'm missing a key
14 component though in the proposed financial plan, and
15 that is the revenue coming from the parking garages. I
16 personally hate parking garages, and I don't know if
17 many people who enjoy parking in them, and as I recall,
18 there was a lot of discussion about the
19 underutilization right now of the current parking
20 garage in Town, and I know that to be the case. I know
21 that personally. I've probably parked there once in 14
22 years of living in West Hartford Center.

23 Recently I was in Town running an errand
24 in the middle of the day, and it was around lunchtime,
25 and I couldn't find a parking spot, and I drove around

Brandon Smith Reporting Service

1071

1 and drove around and drove around, because I didn't
2 want to park in the parking garage. And I think if
3 people are like me, they will be driving around in
4 circles creating more traffic congestion in the Center,

5 and we won't get the revenue from the proposed parking
6 garages. I also think it's going to lead to parking in
7 residential areas that most residents in the Center
8 won't be excited about. And that's it. Thank you.

9 MAYOR HARRIS: Thank you, Ms. Thomas.
10 That is --

11 MR. FRED A: Good evening. My name is
12 Jerry Freda. I live at 12 Westphal Street. I went
13 through this awhile back when Home Depot and BJ's
14 opened. At that time, we were scared. We weren't
15 going to be able to get out of our street. We weren't
16 going to be able to do anything. You know, to this day
17 we can get out of our street and everything is fine
18 down there, so I think this is a lot of for nothing.
19 Thank you.

20 MAYOR HARRIS: Thank you, Mr. Freda.
21 Last call, for speaking of course. Who knows what we
22 will need after this. Okay. With that, let's just
23 remind people where we are, both those at home and
24 those here. We are on the public comment portion. We
25 have scheduled right now, as has been posted for weeks

Brandon Smith Reporting Service

1072

1 now, five more days. We have seven total, over 30
2 hours that are scheduled. We are, as you can see by
3 the time, it's now 9:30, ending a little bit early
4 tonight, and there has been potentially fewer people
5 coming to testify, and we urge more and more to come
6 out, of course.

7 What that means is the following: This
8 weekend we will have hearings 9:00 to 12:00 on
9 Saturday, this coming Saturday. That would be the
10 26th, I believe. Check with my calendar. The 26th.
11 And then this coming Sunday we will have hearings 12:00
12 to 4:00. But again, given the burdens placed on these
13 bodies right now, we really would ask people if they
14 want to testify those days to come early, because once
15 we get through that sheet and take anybody else that's
16 there from the audience, as we have tonight, we won't
17 hang out for the remainder of the time if people are
18 not there. So in fairness to these volunteers, I would
19 appreciate that.

20 Secondly, it looks as though the way the
21 testimony is going that we may not need Tuesday and
22 Wednesday night, and we had said that at the beginning,
23 if we need more time, we would extend the hearing. If
24 we needed less time, we would cut back, so I would urge
25 people to show up this weekend and Monday night,

Brandon Smith Reporting Service

1073

1 because if we don't have a full night on Monday night,
2 the bodies might be inclined at that point to move into
3 the response from the applicant and of course continued
4 questioning by both bodies, especially in light of some
5 of the questions raised by the public and based on, of
6 course, comments from the public, that we are going to
7 want to pick up on and press a little bit on.

8 So with that being said -- the other
Page 108

9 thing that I want to just tell people, just in advance,
10 because of family schedules and other pressures, there
11 may not be everybody here. We've had now for, I don't
12 know how many hours, I can't even count them, I'm a
13 little bit fried at this point, but 20 plus hours
14 everybody for all intents and purposes has been here.
15 On the weekend, you might have fewer people here.
16 However, as is typical in the zoning process, all of
17 the members of both bodies before rendering a decision
18 are required to, will in fact and do in fact read the
19 transcripts. So your comments will be picked up by
20 those people at that time, so don't worry if you see
21 some empty spaces at the table.

22 Again, thank you for your participation
23 and for your comments. Thank you to Channel 5 for
24 covering it, and we will see you on Saturday morning at
25 9:00 a.m. You can wake up, if you want at home, and

Brandon Smith Reporting Service

1074

1 watch some hearings with your breakfast.

2 (Hearing adjourned at 9:33 p.m.)

3

4

5

6

7

8

9

10

11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25

Brandon Smith Reporting Service

1075

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12

CERTIFICATE

I hereby certify that the foregoing 117 pages are a complete and accurate computer-aided transcription of my original stenotype notes taken of the Joint Hearing between West Hartford Town Council and West Hartford Town Plan and Zoning Commission, which was held at West Hartford Town Hall Auditorium, 50 South Main Street, West Hartford, Connecticut, on June 24, 2004.

Sandra V. Semevolos RMR, CRR
Page 110

04-06-24f

13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25

LSR # 00074

Certi fied Court Reporter

Brandon Smi th Reporting Servi ce