

Norwalk developer wins Zoning approval for apartments next to library

By Nancy Chapman [4 : 40 am EDT April 21 2016](#) [4](#)

[Comments](#)

An artist's rendering of "The Lofts at Mott Avenue."
NORWALK, Conn. — There is now a green light for a controversial apartment building proposed to be built next to the Norwalk Public Library.

"The Lofts at Mott Avenue," a proposal for [a 5-story, 69-apartment building](#) that drew a storm of protest at the Zoning Commission's public hearing in February, on Wednesday was approved by the Commission on a 5 to 1 vote. It had been [turned down in March](#) on a 2 to 2 vote that was later determined to be invalid.



The March approval was vacated when Planning and Zoning realized that a minimum four votes are necessary to approve or deny an application. The meeting had reached a quorum, but the necessary number of yes or no votes were not there.

This negated a possible conflict-of-interest controversy: Jill Jacobsen, whose husband is on the Library Board and a First Taxing District commissioner, had voted against the application instead of recusing herself. The proposed apartment building is opposed by Library advocates, deeply chagrined by the loss of parking in the lot next door. The library will not be able to expand if the apartments are built, Norwalk Public Library Director Christine Bradley said.

Another concern is for the safety of Mott Avenue pedestrians. Some of the residents of The Lotts at Mott Avenue would be parking in a lot on the other side of the street.

Commissioners did not comment Wednesday before voting.

"I said my piece," Doug Stern said.

Stern, the lone "no" vote, had expressed concern for pedestrians and traffic. Jacobsen was absent from the meeting.

Jason Milligan, the developer of The Lotts at Mott Avenue, declined to comment beyond saying "Great news."

Conditions were included in the resolution for approval to include the developer funding the installation of a crosswalk on Mott Avenue, low-level lighting at the off-site parking, and a prohibition against impeding access to 15 Belden Ave.

The plan includes five parking spaces for the library in the apartment building's ground-floor parking garage, available for library visitors only from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Monday through Friday.

The proposal inspired a call to restore the power of eminent domain to the Redevelopment Agency.

Mayor Harry Rilling said in March that he is working to "acquire significant amounts of property in and around the library area," saying he is cautiously optimistic.

"We are in discussions and I am not at liberty to disclose who those discussions are with or what we are looking at," Rilling said. "But we are vigorously and aggressively trying to find a way to acquire property so that we can expand the library and make adequate parking. It's very high on our priority list and we are doing everything we can to move forward."

2 comments

Just another Norwalk Resident [April 21, 2016 at 8:42 am](#)

The only aspect I found "controversial" was Norwalk's shortsightedness in not acquiring the property for parking and the future expansion of the library years ago. It's a shame our "leaders" did not have the vision to see the benefits of owning this property. I'm now glad to read that some of our elected leaders have had an epiphany and are now trying to rectify the situation.

Marcia [April 21, 2016 at 8:57 am](#)

With the crosswalk the public loses another on street parking space. Where are visitors to the apartments going to park? What happens when the lease for the off site parking for this complex expires? Where will the tenants park then?

This is definitely a poor decision. Just shows how our zoning regulations need to be revised.

Kay Anderson [April 21, 2016 at 1:04 pm](#)

Clear cut need to invoke eminent domain.

EveT [April 21, 2016 at 1:25 pm](#)

What can we as citizens do to stop this from being built? Seriously, we need concrete answers.

I for one am really burned up at the zoning board, especially Adam Blank, for saying publicly that Norwalk needs less parking, not more, and that we don't need any changes in zoning regulations. How on earth can you say that? OTOH at least we know where he stands.

sonali [April 21, 2016 at 1:58 pm](#)

commerce St, wall street, why no those options. How can public change this decision?

Lyndsey B [April 21, 2016 at 2:27 pm](#)

I agree with "Just another Norwalk resident". Too little too late by the powers that be to rectify this ongoing parking issue before it came to a head.

I'd also like to add that Hartford has a "too much parking" problem, wherein they are not able to cope with the terrible traffic that this parking brings in, and instead residents are now begging for the elected city officials to fund public transportation. Norwalk would do better to consider this option looking towards the future needs of the city, not whining about how things USED to be done. That is pointless and dogmatic. We need to focus on our city's future needs.

Bryan Meek [April 21, 2016 at 2:35 pm](#)

Right before I finished my five year term on the Parking Authority a few years back, I met with Mayor Rilling who was newly elected and advised as chairman that this lot should be purchased in part by the city for public parking. With electronic banking the need for Peoples to have 120 spaces evaporated long ago.

I estimated with support of commercial realtors that we could have bought what amounted to 30 spaces at a market value of \$750k, which would be paid for by on street parking meters in the district that are sorely needed to ensure turnover of parking spaces to keep patrons flowing in and out of businesses.

I take the Mayor at his word for working on things as he seemed very interested, but this zoning approval has me rethinking the setup itself. Maybe it's time to think about merging both antiquated libraries with scant parking into a new state of the art building like the mall?

At any rate this approval makes one thing certain. To state the obvious our zoning regulations wreck.

Michael McGuire [April 21, 2016 at 3:16 pm](#)

Another epic planning blunder. When will Norwalk Planning ever figure this out. The Redevelopment Authority is not the planning department for the City. The City Planning Department is the planning department for the City.

Wonder where Mike Greene was on all this.....

haley [April 21, 2016 at 3:20 pm](#)

Have the people who voted ever tried to use the library? Somehow I doubt it.

Yes, an epic planning blunder.

jlightfield [April 21, 2016 at 3:30 pm](#)

How is this zoning's fault? The future does indeed lie in needing less onsite parking. The zoning for this area has been in place for many, many years. The zoning commission actually funded a parking plan, which sadly fell to Redevelopment to execute long after the funds were secured. If you want to know why that happened, look no farther than a contentious zoning commission who couldn't agree to work together. But the real lack of planning falls squarely on the library board, for decades since there is no strategic plan that was ever presented to the city for library expansion.

Ironic that it was the idea of having a library facility in the mall that spurred some action by the Mayor, Frank Zullo and Stan Siegel to do something. In the end, as I think Einstein used to say, you can't expect to solve problems with the same people who created them. Mayor Rilling just reappointed Stan Siegel back to the library board. Redevelopment is still staffing the planning committee of the common council, and the Common Council just gave \$600k to the Redevelopment Agency out of CDBG funds to do "planning."

The status quo of Norwalk remains while new ideas about how to address them are ignored.

Lisa Thomson [April 21, 2016 at 4:42 pm](#)

Folks this isn't about parking or even the library. It's about having a 'vision' and strategy for the town and our elected officials have NONE. Do not reward them with their charter revision requests.

Steve Rudolf [April 21, 2016 at 9:54 pm](#)

69 Apartments with 2 driving adults per unit calls for 138 ON SITE parking places at a minimum. If the developer can't work that out on HIS OWN PLOT, make him redesign and re-submit. Oh, I'm sorry, am I using common sense???

Disappointed [April 22, 2016 at 10:11 am](#)

Kudos to the optimistic thinking that created the green "garden area" on the east side of the artist's rendering above. Once the tall building blocks the sun, nothing will be growing in the 3 feet of space between the library's parking lot and Mr. Milligan's monstrosity.

EveT [April 22, 2016 at 9:17 pm](#)

To those who insist we need less parking: do you really think you'll encourage people to walk and use public transportation by squeezing parking? Do you really think the tenants in the now-approved apartment building are going to live without a car? Have you tried using the Burnell Blvd buses to get to work, grocery shopping, etc.?

Norwalk has a long, long way to go to become a walkable, public transport-friendly city. Making it impossible to park is not going to help matters in the meantime.

Jlightfield [April 22, 2016 at 9:37 pm](#)

@EveT allow me to introduce you to Washington Street where onsite parking is nonexistent for most of the apartments. Then there's Wall Street itself, where there are few onsite parking spaces for not just the residential but the commercial tenants. For those who prefer living in an urban downtown, and own a car, the solution is to park offsite. Amazingly this is something people do daily in cities all over the world and even in Norwalk. For those people who insist on having a dedicated space there are many apartments that provide that amenity, and offering a diverse range of housing means you get a diverse range of people. Some people even choose to live without a car. Imagine that in 2016!

Joanna Cooper [April 24, 2016 at 11:59 am](#)

This is a disaster in the making. I'm disgusted as once again city officials and the planning and zoning department are not listening to the citizens of this city but rather selling us out to developers.

Rilling said. "But we are vigorously and aggressively trying to find a way to acquire property so that we can expand the library and make adequate parking. It's very high on our priority list and we are doing everything we can." What a joke. If this apartment complex goes up in that spot there will never be a chance to expand that library. Using the library will become a miserable experience because of parking. It's already a big challenge. There will be NO room for any expansion!

Lisa Thompson is right...there is no planning. There is chaos and greed. "The March approval was vacated when Planning and Zoning realized that a minimum four votes are necessary to approve or deny an application. The meeting had reached a quorum, but the necessary number of yes or no votes were not there." Oops we are going to vote again because we didn't follow meeting rules? Or did somebody get paid off? What are the rules? They keep changing. This is insane. The 69 unit complex planned for that spot is a monstrosity even if there wasn't a library there. It's too damn big for that small street.

Clearly, the mayor has no intention of supporting the library not if this is what's planned. He did not show much support for the library in his budget either. Our library system needs major updating NOW. It's been ignored for too long. Updating the library system and planning for that should take priority over yet another massive ugly over built apartment building. A state of the art library would improve the quality of life in our city tenfold. Ugh! What a tragic shame!

EveT [April 24, 2016 at 1:50 pm](#)

@Joanne, thanks for the reminder about the city budget. What was it, \$1.1 million for BMHS ball fields? Money that could have gone for library parking.

The library is for everyone. How many people are served by a plastic turf ball field, for petes sake?

Joanna Cooper [April 24, 2016 at 10:49 pm](#)

This type of over development, development that is unfitting for the site, inadequate parking, traffic problems and many other problematic issues can be avoided if we had a highly qualified town planner and more thoughtful zoning laws. The public has been crying out for the city to hire one. I hope that happens soon. It's too late for this project. To try and stop it would create another lawsuit. We have had too many of those. We will stop or at least curb that trend when we hire an expert and create a plan and zoning laws that reflect a cohesive vision for Norwalk.