

Town of Westerly
Rhode Island

DEPARTMENT OF
DEVELOPMENT SERVICES

OFFICE OF PLANNING



Westerly Town Hall
45 Broad Street
Westerly, RI 02891

The vision for the town of Westerly is to preserve Westerly's quality of life for all generations as a safe and friendly community with a distinctive heritage, extraordinary cultural and natural resources, and fiscally-sound government." – 2010 Comprehensive Plan

MEMORANDUM AND STAFF RECOMMENDATION

To: Chairman Hall & Members of the Westerly Planning Board
From: Nancy E. Letendre, AICP - Town Planner/Administrative Officer
Date: July 9, 2020 for meeting on July 21, 2020
Subject: 2020-LMIH-01 – Pre-Application – St. Pius X 25% Moderate Income Housing
(32 Elm Street | Assessor's Map 66, Lot 91)

I. INTRODUCTION

On June 29, 2020, the Office of Planning received a Concept Plan for a Low-Moderate Income Housing (LMIH) development at Elm and School Streets. The review on July 21 requires the following actions regarding this Pre-Application:

- Consideration of information presented,
- Informal discussion with the applicant on the proposed redevelopment,
- Provide the applicant with direction ahead of any formal submission.

II. INTRODUCTION TO DEVELOPMENT PLAN

The project is located on an approximately 2.58-acre (112,385 square feet) property at the northeast corner of the intersection of Elm Street and School Street. The parcel is zoned HDR-6 (High Density Residential). The former location of the St. Pius X Catholic School, the main portion of the building is two story brick construction. Town records indicate it was constructed in 1880. It contains seven classrooms and an administrative office in a converted eighth classroom. Five additional classrooms of one-story brick construction were added in or about 2006 in a structure connected to the main building.

The property is up for sale. Representatives of the St. Pius X Parish Corporation have engaged in substantial dialogue with the Town of Westerly regarding the development and redevelopment of the property over the last year. Several alternative redevelopment schemes have been discussed. The Department of Development Services endorses the current plan

which preserves an iconic building, is appropriately scaled, sensitive to the architecture and land use pattern of the neighborhood and provides a mix of housing opportunities including low- and moderate-income housing.

The proposed project includes rehabilitation and repurposing of the existing school building with a footprint of 12,760-square feet to accommodate multi-family residential development, construction of an additional building with a footprint of 12,180 square feet for additional multi-family housing, paved parking surrounding both buildings, designation of a 6,300-square foot park with frontage to School Street, and a 12,000-square foot single-family residential parcel at 32 Elm Street, on the corner with School Street. Twenty-five percent (25%) of the 42 units on the property would be reserved for low- or moderate-income families, amounting to a total of 11 units that would qualify towards the State's mandated 10% LMIH. For a complete description of work, please see the Project Narrative provided with the application.

II. STAFF RECOMMENDATION AND LEGAL MOTION

St. Pius has the support of the Department of Development Services for this concept plan. Various objectives of the Town's comprehensive plan are served by this proposal. While the Planning Board is not required to officially approve the project at this stage, St. Pius has requested the Board's endorsement of the conceptual plans for this development.

The Planning Board may wish to entertain the following draft motion.

"The Westerly Planning Board hereby provides its endorsement of the concept for Application '2020-LMIH-01 – Pre-Application – St. Pius X 25% Moderate Income Housing (32 School Street | Assessor's Map 66, Lot 91),' in accordance with the application and supporting materials, including the Conceptual Site Plan titled "25% Moderate Income Housing, St. Pius X Catholic School, 32 Elm Street, Plat 66, Lot 91, Westerly, Rhode Island," prepared for St. Pius X Catholic Church, dated June 11, 2020, prepared by Cherenzia & Associates, Ltd. and the design development drawings by JCAD Drafting Service, dated 6/15/2020."

NARRATIVE

Pre-Application/Conceptual Review

PROPERTY OF ST. PIUS X PARISH CORPORATION
ELM and SCHOOL STREETS
WESTERLY, RI
ASSESSOR'S PLAT 66, LOT 91

St. Pius X Parish Corporation is the owner of real property at 44 Elm Street, Assessor's Plat 66, Lot 91. Until last June, the property was used as a pre-K through Grade 8 school. Since, it has been used for religious education and by other entities such as the Westerly Police Department for classes and training.

The main portion of the building is two story brick construction. Town records indicate it was constructed in 1880. It contains seven classrooms and an administrative office in a converted classroom. Five additional classrooms of one-story brick construction were added in or about 2006.

The land area of the property is 2.58 acres.

Representatives of the St. Pius X Parish Corporation have engaged in substantial dialogue with the Town of Westerly with respect to the development and redevelopment of the property over the last year.

Since the property has approximately 100' frontage on Elm Street and 560' frontage on School Street, the first suggestion discussed was to raze the existing building, create a "corner lot" on Elm Street and School Street, additional lots along School Street and two lots with driveway access from School Street under the zoning ordinance's inclusionary zoning provisions.

Town staff reacted negatively with respect to this suggestion. The foremost objection being that the school building should be kept, rehabilitated and repurposed as residences. While the building is not itself recognized on the National Register of Historic Places, it lies in or abuts a neighborhood with that description and includes in its history serving as the town's public high school.

The owner representatives and staff explored the creation of several lots along School Street at the intersection of Elm Street, rehabilitating and repurposing the school building as residences, and erecting townhomes on the west and east of the school building.

Staff challenged the representatives to design a plan preserving a lot on Elm Street, of a size to accommodate the type of home consistent with that street, provide an open space area, rehabilitate and repurpose the school building to residences and create a multi-family structure east of the school building with 25% of the total residences created being restricted to rent or sale prices affordable to moderate income households.

In response, the representatives have heeded this advice. They have developed a conceptual plan which creates a single-family corner lot at the intersection of Elm and School Streets of 12,000 +/- sq. ft. Adjacent to this lot and along School Street, the plan proposes a 6,300 +/- sq. ft. park area. As a tie-back to the use which had existed on the property, the school bell has been preserved and is displayed at a location on the proposed “corner lot”; the conceptual plan relocates the bell to the proposed park area.

The conceptual plan proposes conversion of the existing school building to 13 residences—11 one-bedroom and 2 two-bedroom. The size of the one-bedroom units range from 660 sq. ft. to 1127 sq. ft., with an average size of 926 sq. ft. The sizes of the two-bedroom units are 1146 sq. ft. and 1236 sq. ft., which averages 1191 sq. ft.

The conceptual plan also proposes a new three-story apartment style building with an elevator consisting of 28 residences—8 one-bedroom and 20 two-bedroom. The one-bedroom units range in size from 650 sq. ft. to 692 sq. ft. with an average size of 682 sq. ft. The size of the two-bedroom units range in size from 897 sq. ft. to 1138 sq. ft. with an average size of 1090 sq. ft.

St. Pius X would pursue this option under §260-50.3, Comprehensive Permits. Eleven of such units would be restricted to moderate-income housing.

The Comprehensive Permit provisions require the applicant to: “identify the specific ordinances and regulations from which the applicant is seeking relief. . .together with a specific description of what relief is needed, including the permitted and the proposed housing density”. The following relief is anticipated:

1. Parish seeks relief from the permitted housing density. The area of the site, including the single-family corner lot, is 112,340 sq. ft. The permitted density @ 6,000 sq. ft./unit is 19 units which, with density bonus of 4 units under §260-50.2 would yield a total of 23 units, of which 4 would be restricted to low- and moderate-income housing.

The relief sought is to permit a density of 2,675 sq. ft./unit for a total of 42 units (112,340 ÷ 42) of which 11 (25%) would be restricted to moderate-income housing.

The requested density is in keeping with the area. For example, immediately across School Street is Windsor Condominium. It is comprised of 48 units (6 more than proposed) on 98,273 sq. ft. land area, (14,067 sq. ft. less than this property) for a density of 2,047 sq. ft./unit, compared to the 2,675 sq. ft/unit proposed here.

Similarly, adjacent to the property to the north of the school building and proposed new building is The Elms. Tax records indicate these include 84 Independent and Assisted Living rooms and suites and two Alzheimer and Dementia Care cottages with 30 (thirty) client capacity on 2.65 acres.

22 Elm	66-88	Elm of Westerly, LLC	75 occupancy
29 Chestnut	67-13	GMM Properties, LLC	9 occupancy
25 Chestnut	67-14	Chestnut Cottage LLC	<u>30 occupancy</u>
			<u>114 occupancy</u>

2. Parish also seeks relief from the maximum impervious surface provision of the ordinance for multi-family dwellings from the 40% generally required to 63%. (Note the maximum for a single-family home in this zoning district is 60%).

3. While Section 260-50.3(A)(1) states:

“This procedure is available only for proposals in which at least 25% of the housing will be low-or-moderate income housing”.

The definition of “Affordable Housing” in §260-50.1 states:

“Year-round rental housing must have a rent that is within the means of a low-income household”.

Parish seeks relief from this limitation so that the year-round rental housing must have a rent that is within the means of moderate-income households.

Additionally, town staff has recommended a zoning ordinance Amendment to the parking regulations proposing that in multi-family developments one-bedroom units require one parking space and two (or more) bedroom units require 2 parking spaces. Application of this ratio requires 61 spaces while 70 are provided.

Applicant seeks to utilize this parking ratio either by virtue of the proposed amendment or by modification or variance.

Conceptual site and building plans, including floor plans, are submitted herewith. Applicant has not undertaken nor submitted the items listed in A261 Attachment.

Various objectives of the Town's current and proposed comprehensive plans are served by this proposal. The single house lot on Elm Street preserves its streetscape. A structure of historical significance is preserved and repurposed together with one of its features as a focal point to an open space/park area. Eleven moderate income residences are created. Elevator access apartment style residential units are created responding to the goal of diversity in housing types.

With the support and endorsement of the Director of Development Services, the Town Planner and Town Zoning Official, St. Pius X Parish Corporation requests approval of the conceptual plans as submitted for review.