

CASE STUDY

FLB Law Represents Developers in One of the Most Significant Projects in Over a Decade



SITUATION

Roan Development Ventures, a local Westport-based development company led by residents of the area, sought to transform the Westport train station area along the Saugatuck River from a dated section of the town to a vibrant year-round destination. The goal was to create a place to connect, dine, shop, work, stay, live, relax and play: The Hamlet at Saugatuck. The Hamlet has been lauded as one of the most significant projects in the area in more than a decade.

The area to be redeveloped is unattractive and underutilized. There are a couple of nondescript buildings, a boat storage facility that blocks all views of the river, a private parking lot with no cars post-COVID, a dry cleaner, a car repair shop, and an unattractive office building.

As members of the community, the team at ROAN Development Ventures feels connected to and invested in The Hamlet. In partnership with local investors, world-renowned visionaries, and experts in the hospitality and real estate development



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space, ROAN has the unique opportunity to showcase one of the community's most beloved and cherished assets – the Connecticut coastline and the village of Saugatuck.

Riverfront access for everyone would be one of the priorities and an environmental cleanup far beyond what the state would require for former industrial, automotive and dry cleaner parcels.

But accomplishing a project of this magnitude requires real estate counsel who deeply knows Westport, the community and the Planning & Zoning Commission. Eric Bernheim and FLB Law checked all the boxes.

CHALLENGES

This project sparked debate from various entities, including the P&Z Commission, Representative Town Meeting (RTM) members, the Sensible Saugatuck Zoning Committee, and concerned residents. There were also more than 300 signatures of support for the project.

Numerous meetings went into all hours of the night. It was a challenging journey, but ROAN Development Ventures and FLB Law were committed to presenting their plan and coming up with amendable solutions.

The first order of business was to obtain approval from the Westport P&Z Commission for a text and map amendment to create a new zone, which encompassed 4.9 acres and 11 parcels of land.

During the numerous public hearings, they would have to address concerns about traffic, density, parking, building heights, and a lack of required setbacks that could create a "canyon effect." Also of concern was the plan for affordable housing units.

In November 2022, FLB Law received approval for a text and map amendment necessary to move the project forward from the P&Z Commission. Following that, the 11-member Sensible Saugatuck Zoning Committee used a provision in the town charter to petition the amendments, setting into motion a 30-day review process by RTM members that involved all-night meetings and passionate discourse. The result was an overwhelming vote to uphold the P&Z Commission's approval of the text and map amendment.

SOLUTION

The final plan was slightly scaled down from the original proposal to include about 10 buildings ranging from 40 feet to about 65 feet, shorter than the original maximum building height of 75 feet.

ROAN Development also agreed to build affordable housing in about 25 percent of the housing units within a quarter mile of the train station, closer than the half mile initially proposed.

They also received approval to reduce the minimum parking requirement to one parking spot for every 1,300 square feet of floor area since the development is expected to be busiest at night when the adjacent commuter parking lots are mostly vacant.

In partnership with FLB Law, ROAN Development is still working out additional solutions to address traffic concerns, including syncing uncoordinated lights, building below-grade parking to limit drive-around traffic, and working with the state to add lanes.

While highly complex, the project will transform acres of asphalt into an inviting, green waterfront neighborhood, providing public access to and from the river and expansive outdoor space open to the public. It will breathe life into an area in desperate need of revitalization!