

**PLAN COMMISSION**  
**City of Hartford**  
**January 13, 2020**

PRESENT: Chairperson Timothy C. Michalak, Vice-Chairperson Dennis Regan, Members Tom Stapleton, Tony Anderek, Scott Henke and Ralph Kuepper; Alderperson Liaison Barry Wintringer

ALSO PRESENT: City Planner Justin Drew

**Call to Order** - Chairperson Michalak called the meeting to order at 5:30 p.m. in the Common Council Chambers of Hartford City Hall, 109 N. Main Street.

**Minutes** - Chairperson Michalak requested review of the minutes of December 9, 2019. Motion by Regan, second by Kuepper to approve minutes of December 9. Motion carried.

**Appearances** - Chairperson Michalak invited appearances. There were no appearances.

**Discussion and Consideration of Proposed Wall Signs in the Business Improvement District, WI Wear and Diamond Printing & Tees, 75 North Main Street**

**Executive Summary Review:**

Timothy Neitzel submitted an application for wall signage for his businesses, WI Wear and Diamond Printing & Tees, located at 75 North Main Street. Mr. Neitzel intends to place signage on frontage facing North Main Street. The previous business, Lotus Be Well, had signage approved for the front of the building on October 12, 2015. Mr. Neitzel plans on placing the new signs in the same 'signable area' above the storefront. The other storefront in the building has a 60 square foot wall sign for Carpenter Technology, approved in September of 2016. The signs represent the two businesses Mr. Neitzel operates out of the space, and are the same size: 3' x 7.5', for a total of 45 square feet. One sign will be placed above each store window. The building measures 60 feet long, and is therefore allowed 180 square feet of wall signage. All signage for the front of this building totals 105 square feet. The signs are composed of aluminum with printed graphics and lamination. The WI Wear sign is white and black lettering on a blue background, with white lettering along a black stripe, and a cow logo. The Diamond Printing sign is white and green lettering on a black background with a divided green stripe, and a diamond logo. As presented, the signage for WI Wear and Diamond Printing does not fit well within the guidelines for the HAPEO (Historic Architecture Preservation and Enhancement Overlay) District. Chapter 14 of the Municipal Code, Historic Preservation, notes: 'Signs convey necessary information, and, if harmonious, add to the visual character of place. They should be easy to read and unobtrusive. Signs should not obscure architectural details of a building. Each sign should be integrated with the building's facade, and requires individual attention to design. Multiple signs intended for the same structure should be designed as a unified scheme.' In the past, City Staff have worked with business owners and sign companies to modify signs submitted for review, to more appropriately blend in with the Downtown Historic District (for instance, requesting a color change to remove a neon shade). In the case of these

two signs, they are the established visual representation of the businesses, and Staff believes that this should be taken into consideration in this review. Taken together, the fonts, colors and logos do not present a cohesive, or unobtrusive, appearance. They do, however, appropriately represent the two businesses in the space. In addition, the basic design of each sign (line and printing along the lower portion of the sign with printing and logo above) is similar. Staff recommended approval.

Plan Commission Discussion, Wall Signs, WI Wear and Diamond Printing & Tees:

Mr. Drew reviewed the executive summary, noting that at some future point Plan Commission should discuss where they would like to go with signage requirements in the BID/Historic District. Chairperson Michalak requested comments. There were no comments. Motion by Henke, second by Wintringer to approved wall signs. Motion carried.

**Discussion and Consideration of Face-Change Sign Replacements and a Wall Sign Replacement, 116 W. Sumner Street**

Executive Summary Review:

Forte Bank (previously First National Bank) submitted an application for face-change sign replacements and a wall sign replacement at 116 W. Sumner Street, due to a business name change.

The changes requested are for the following locations:

- Ground sign, southeast
- Wall sign, southwest
- Logo and lettering, north entrance
- Directional signage

The ground sign was originally approved by variance in 1981. The variance allowed a larger sign with the agreement that less wall sign square footage be used, and that the sign concentrate on public service and time/temp messaging. In 1993, with Plan Commission approval, the sign was removed and reinstalled as part of an expansion. The conditions attached to the 1993 approval included: the sign was to be no less than 13 feet above the sidewalk and no more than 35 feet in height from grade; the bank accepts responsibility to pay for removal of the sign in the event of construction on West Sumner Street; and the bank assumes liability for damages which may occur as a result of the location of the sign. In 2015, a replacement of the block (non-post) portion of the sign was approved with the condition that the new changeable copy area conform to code requirements prohibiting flashing, etc. The current request is for a face change only. Approval of this most recent request should be based on adherence to all previous approvals and conditions. The southwest wall sign was approved as part of a site plan review in 2004. The current proposal is for a face change only and does not affect square footage. In the City's planning files, the logo and lettering at the north entrance appear in renderings of the building as far back as 2003. An actual approval was not located in the planning file, although it should be noted that there is a history on the part of bank officials of careful compliance with City codes. The submitted rendering shows a logo/channel letter sign measuring just over 42 square feet, smaller than the sign it is replacing. The minimal square footage devoted to wall signs on this building indicates continued adherence to the variance requirement for less wall sign square footage than normally allowed. The directional signage was approved during the summer of 2018 during the bank's parking lot reconfiguration, which was approved as a site plan in April of 2018. The current proposal is for a face change only and does not affect square footage. Logos and colors are consistent throughout the proposal, with a combination of

white and plum for background and lettering, and a logo consisting of a square made of triangles in plum, blue, green and gray. Panels are composed of lexan (polycarbonate resin) with vinyl graphics. There is no change requested for the changeable-copy sign located in the drive-through teller area. This sign, approved in 2014, has had occasional issues with non-compliance regarding graphics and movement. As the bank transitions to new signage, a reminder to adhere to code requirements for both changeable copy signs is in order as part of this review. Planning Staff recommended approval, subject to terms of the variance approved in 1981, the review of 1993, and adherence to restrictions of the changeable copy portion of the code.

Plan Commission Discussion, Face-Change Sign Replacement and Wall Sign Replacement, 116 W. Sumner Street:

Mr. Drew reviewed the Executive Summary. Chairperson Michalak requested comments. Member Anderek recused himself due to professional connections with the business. Chairperson Michalak noted that the name change is due to the bank going from a federal to a state charter. Motion by Kuepper, second by Stapleton to approved the signs with conditions as noted. Motion carried.

**Discussion and Consideration: Mixed-Use Redevelopment Opportunity, Hartford Plaza, 1201 - 1275 Bell Avenue**

Mr. Drew reviewed the redevelopment plan and recent history - private and public funds are allowing the City in conjunction with the owner (Equitable Bank) to pursue a vision for a robust development at this site, which has sat mostly empty for several years. The City hired Vandewalle & Associates to do a demographic and market study; a housing and retail mixed use, similar to recent developments in other area communities, appears to be the most marketable idea. A second idea for a sports complex is part of the proposal but appears to have less financial value. Mr. Drew discussed some of the potential ideas for housing (including the possibility of senior housing), commercial offices and retail. Ultimately the development could change but the vision drawings and compiled demographic and marketing statistics allow Mr. Drew and Tom Hostad to meet with potential developers with drawings and information about the City. Mr. Drew stressed that he was requesting an endorsement from the Plan Commission in favor of the redevelopment proposals only - the drawings and examples are indicators of what could be done. Chairperson Michalak emphasized Mr. Drew's comment and noted that the approval does not lock in the Plan Commission to anything. Member Kuepper noted that the project needs to start somewhere and moved for approval of the concept. Member Anderek asked if the owner/bank was involved in this. Mr. Drew affirmed, and Chairperson Michalak noted that the owner contributed funding as well. Alderperson Liaison Wintringer noted that the plan came before the Common Council in December and all members were very much in favor. Member Henke seconded the motion, and asked about joining/splitting the parcels involved. Mr. Drew explained that the Plan Commission and Common Council could split or reconfigure the parcels as necessary, depending on plans and developers' wishes. Mr. Drew noted that the plans are beginning to be shared with the community. Member Kuepper asked if this is all one parcel; Mr. Drew affirmed. Member Regan stated that this is a good place to start. Motion carried.

Meeting adjourned by call of Chair at 5:44 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

City of Hartford Plan Commission, January 13, 2020

Justin Drew, City Planner

Compiled by Char Smelter, Planning Secretary