

Minutes of the West Norwalk Association
Dolce Special Meeting
June 5, 2017

Board Members Present: Anthony Carrano, Ken D'Arinzo, Brian Forschino, Ted Stepanoff, Isabelle Hargrove. Kristin Clemens was not in attendance.

The meeting began at 7:45pm.

Dolce has reintroduced the idea to rent rooms to the general public.

David Leftwich - Dolce General Manager (Not in attendance)

Rick Richardson - Director of Operations

Gregory Zapp - Director of Engineering

Rich Constable - Wyndham Hotel Group, purchased Dolce in 2015 including the management contract.

Dolce sold property to Broadreach Capital Partners in 2006 but retained its management contract.

Currently rooms must be tied to a group room block and for a current corporate events. Creates 100% risk as Dolce cannot fill rooms to the extent a corporate event is cancelled.

Concerns - Property security, lighting, noise are co-concerns of the West Norwalk residents and Dolce. Lighting from post lamps and the parking lot. Vehicle lights. Shrubs were put in the upper parking light about 8 years ago to address vehicle lights in the parking lot. Lights in parking lights need to be upgraded (to LED) but the height will not be changed. Installation of dog stations - 2 new stations have been installed and a third is on order. Security Cameras - Looking at new systems to upgrade the current system outside the building. A new gate was put up on the rear entrance on Little Fox Lane (locked when functions end and reopens around 3am for kitchen deliveries). Lighting from vehicles entering and leaving the facility. Lighting on the entrance sign updated to LED lighting. Maintenance of and signage on walking/jogging trails. Superstorm Sandy caused significant damage to some of the wooded areas. Upgrading the paths by adding new stone in certain areas. Paths used to have pathway lighting but they have fallen into disrepair. Dolce has been working to repair the system. This represents a large budget item.

Preference would be to not have people use the walking paths after dusk.

Stairway by the cemetery need to be repairs. There are 42 steps and there is no railing. Repair would be extremely costly so currently the stairs are closed. Neighbors would like the stairway to be kept to the current look but the conflict is keeping it to code. A significant number of neighbors use the stairway.

Structure is 34 years old, steel construction, brick faced & slate room. Total land is 66 acres. Hotel section has 120 rooms. Current zoning would allow for an expansion of 90 additional rooms. The conference center, restaurant & ballroom. Health Fitness Center - Pool, basketball court and fitness equipment. Two outdoor tennis courts.

Residents closest to the building are those on Huckleberry Drive.

Dolce currently has to report to the City regarding the number of social events.

Neighborhood concern with buses and trucks entering through the main entrance on Weed Avenue. Recently a sign has been added sending all trucks and buses to the rear entrance at 22 Little Fox Lane. Navigation systems link Dolce to 32 Weed Avenue.

Also an issue with buses and limo buses not being able to make it under the conference center overpass.

Neighbor raised the point that it is on us as neighbors to help keep Dolce viable. It would be a shame to see the property sold and turned into condos.

Agreement with the City of Norwalk - Cap to number of social events with more than 90 people. Dolce has never come anywhere near the cap. Before the agreement Dolce would remain empty on weekends. Cutoff for outside amplified music at 9pm.

The facility is currently for sale. There are property easements on certain areas of the property but other areas are unrestricted. Open the property to transient customers would help with going concern viability.

Currently limitation against transient use unless tied to a corporate or social event.

Transient rooms would be part of the Wyndham Rewards Program. Discussions of offering a West Norwalk Association rate. Current plan would be to allow transient rooms to be available 7 days a week. Dolce believes they could increase occupancy by 10%. Current occupancy rates are 52% to 54% annually. Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday are the busiest days. Largest marketing would be towards weekend usage.

Currently the property is AAA zoned (1+ acre). Need to decide how commercial West Norwalk residents would like to see the property become. Residents are concerned that home values will suffer if the zoning is changed from AAA.

Ernie DeRoche indicated that he would like to see a traffic study done for the surrounding roads. Dolce believes that there has been a significant reduction in vehicular traffic due to additional buses. Dolce believes that any increase in vehicular traffic would not increase it to more than it was 3 or 4 years ago.

The property is for sale as a single property, not part of a portfolio. A sister property in Montvale, NJ was sold last week. Questions were raised that the goal is to increase the marketing position for selling the property. The property will be sold regardless of whether the transient use is approved.

Wyndham Dolce currently does not own the property and has no stake in the sale. They are currently paid only to manage the property. There is no guarantee that the new owner won't look to change management companies. The management agreement is 25 years but is not transferrable.

Any restrictions put on the property with respect to transient use would (should) be binding on the purchaser.

Neighbors feel there is no trust. Things have happened without full disclosure. The YMCA pool was closed and swimming lessons were moved to the Dolce pool.

To approve transient use, the Planning and Zoning commission would need to approve a special zoning variance and can take into account the thoughts of the neighbors.

The current proposal is not to build any additional structures on the property. There is no guarantee that future building will not occur.

Spot zoning is not legal in order to protect abutting home values. The proposal would adjust the special exception that is currently in place.

If the property is not maintained as a conference center, a contractor could build a significant number of houses on the property.

Neighbors asked about increasing the amount of conservation land to limit the possibility of future construction. Could look to cap the number of transient rooms, could look to limit to weekends, could look for other agreed concessions.

Currently Dolce sends overflow to DoubleTree but given the current restrictions it is not reciprocal.

Residents have concern with the Zoning Commission's focus on certain recent issues.

Wyndham Dolce is presenting the proposal. Basic ask is to completely lift the limitation on transient use. West Norwalk residents should look put limitations on the usage, timing, pricing, etc.

General problems with hotels - Underage drinking, drugs, prostitution, etc.

Intention would be to allow transient customers to use the restaurant. Transient rooms would create additional traffic as customers would be in and out as opposed to corporate events which keep people on the property.

Hotel rooms and many common areas need to be updated.

Can we circulate the current special exception? It can be found on the City of Norwalk Zoning website.

Isabelle asked if we could see a financial analysis to show profitability. Could an analysis be done that would show how many more rooms would be needed to present a profitable position?

Currently there are 24,000 room nights. Would need 29,000 to be profitable.

Dolce asked the West Norwalk Association to provide a list of concerns and issues, as well as, proposed limitations as soon as possible.

The meeting was closed at 9:15pm.