



THE RED BANK BUSINESS ALLIANCE

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RBBA Review of White Street Redevelopment Proposals

The Red Bank Business Alliance (RBBA) has encouraged the progress of the White Street Redevelopment Project and associated Request for Proposal (RFP) since its inception in 2016. As an emergent group of local business owners who share a stake in the future of Red Bank, we are pleased to see this unprecedented advance toward a parking solution. For the first time, we have been publicly presented multiple tangible proposals to consider as we envision this future together. We therefore extend our sincere appreciation to the local government representatives and developers who have brought these ideas to life and into the public eye.

In reviewing these proposals, we have seen aspects we believe have both positive and negative influences on the character of our business district, for both the businesses and the collective citizens of Red Bank. It is our belief that this is best explored through open public dialogue about these issues. What has made, and will make Red Bank the best place to live, work, and play – now and in the future? That’s what this development should reflect. Some specific items we have noted:

- The RFP encourages commercial space along the first floor of the White Street parking garage. Some proposals have embraced this, and others have rejected it. Our position is that a proper balance is needed. Activity on White St. is desirable, but as there are recurrent vacancies within the boundaries of the central business district, care is needed. Certain uses, such as a permanent home for a visitor center, public rest rooms, and other amenities can be an attraction without drawing from other tenancies or exacerbating the parking demand. A careful balance is the best result without creating unnecessary bulk just to compensate for the increased parking demand.
- Some of the proposals have diluted the net parking gain in various forms. The RBBA’s position is that the core focus of the Redevelopment Project should be the net gain in parking spaces as outlined in the RFP. The Borough needs to stress this parking gain, otherwise rectifying the century old Red Bank parking problem may be lost. As the Borough’s own prior studies of parking have enumerated, there is a structural deficiency of parking for the amount of development that exists in our central business district. This strain on the upper stories occupancies of buildings throughout the district, also lends to successful tax appeals. In turn, it limits the captive audience for our existing retail and restaurant businesses. Without this parking keeping all our existing stories filled, the tax base is being eroded.
- The RFP requires Open Space and some but not all of the proposals address this adequately. The RBBA would like to see the open space usable by all residents and visitors, preferably in a design that allows for a true public gathering area. At the same time those proposals that accentuate pedestrian activity on both sides of White St. are positive. Open space that encourages a connection from Monmouth St. through to Riverside Gardens Park should be encouraged.
- We have concern that the scale of all the proposals will overwhelm the intimacy of Red Bank’s centuries old town center. We don’t object to, and find some attraction to the idea of an iconic

structure as a focal point for visitors, but all the intensities proposed are too great. Increasing the area under consideration is positive, but it might be best utilized in reducing the apparent density, rather than increasing it. We encourage a modern structure, built with substantial “green” and sustainable features, while better respecting the scale that is central to Red Bank’s appeal. This would necessitate keeping to height requirements set forth in the RFP and a more considered evaluation of the Floor Area Ratio component of the RFP.

- Although nominally touched on in the public presentations, the financing structure of any proposal will be key to its long-term success for Red Bank. This should also be key to evaluation. Are there “PILOT” arrangements, land leases, shared parking revenue, outright property sale?

While not part of the RFP process, we do feel that a garage only structure (commonly known as the “Bowers Proposal”), with no other uses, should be given serious consideration as a solution. Such a proposal is certainly a viable option that we hope will be considered equally by Council as an option, as part of its deliberations. Such a proposal should also address the aesthetic character of the central business district and it’s scale just as the other proposals noted above.

The potential economic growth for Red Bank is unprecedented. The financial gain for our schools and town services has great potential from the increased parking and tax revenue. Commercial and mixed uses provide tax revenue for our school system that nets more dollars per student. We’ve now seen two separate mixed-use developments in the recent years, which provide examples of how parking CAN be provided along with uses that don’t drain our current vacant properties. Both the West Side Loft apartments, and the “Pazzo” building on West Front St, provide uses with their own parking along with some supplementary parking for other off-site uses. Careful examination of the Borough’s Parking regulations could be a precedent for this site and others to come in the future.

The RBBA will continue co-operating with, and encouraging Council members to join us as we host further public dialogues with and without the development teams. Such meetings will allow residents and businesses an opportunity to voice concerns as to architectural style, scale, and mix of uses. Our hope is that eliciting feedback from the community will both identify our shared goals and enhance revisions to these proposals. We now face two options as a community: We can allow fear and mistrust to hamper the best way forward for Red Bank, again, or we can use this historic opportunity to produce the best possible amenity for residents, businesses, and visitors. The latter is the goal of the RBBA membership, and we hope you will join us.

Sincerely,

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