

December 10, 2019

Honorable Tyisha Walker-Myers, President
Members of the Legislative Committee
Board of Alders of the City of New Haven
165 Church Street
New Haven, CT 06510

Re: Grand Avenue Commercial Gateway District – Neighborhood Request for Delay

Dear President Walker-Meyers and Members of the Legislative Committee:

We are writing to request that consideration of the portion of the proposed zoning ordinance amendments related to establishing the Grand Avenue Commercial Gateway District be delayed for not more than three months to allow time for neighborhood concerns to be heard and addressed. We are seeking this delay only for the proposed Grand Avenue Gateway District.

Grand Avenue has different conditions than Dixwell and Whalley Avenues so it is appropriate to consider this proposed corridor separately. The proposed district is only three blocks long, and the combined street and sidewalk width of Grand Avenue is at least 24 feet less than that of the narrowest portion of Whalley Avenue. In addition, buildings in the proposed Grand Avenue Commercial Gateway District will abut streets lined with two- and three-story houses. We share the city's interest in improving this section of Grand Avenue. We are only asking for a three month delay so the concerns of the more than 400 residents who will be affected be adequately heard and addressed. We have outlined some initial concerns and proposed solutions below.

Neighborhood Concerns

Proposed Solutions

Allowing **six-story high buildings** on Grand Avenue is problematic for the following reasons:

- There is no designated height limit, just a story limit so height is essentially limitless
- Six-story buildings will tower over the rear yards of 2 – 3 story residences on Lyon and St. John Streets, blocking sunlight and potentially trapping exhaust fumes from the nearby interstates
- Six-story buildings are inconsistent with the existing urban fabric on Grand Avenue. Buildings 100 years old and older are 3-4 stories, with newer buildings typically 1-2 stories
- This section of Grand Avenue is only 3 lanes wide, with five-foot wide sidewalks. Six-story buildings on each side will create a shaded, windy canyon hostile to pedestrians.

(continued on next page)

- Reduce the allowable building height to 4 stories and 45 feet on Grand Avenue between Olive and Jefferson Streets. This is the block that backs 2 and 3 story dwellings on adjacent streets
- If the lot depth on Grand Avenue is less than 120 feet, then increase the minimum rear yard to 25 feet
- Conduct solar, wind, air quality, and acoustical studies to determine the impact of higher structures.

Neighborhood Concerns

Proposed Solutions

(continued from previous page)

- Six-story buildings are out of scale for the neighborhood, especially between Olive and Jefferson Streets
- Grand Avenue divides residences on Lyon and Williams Streets from the rest of the Wooster Square neighborhood; increasing the height of Grand Avenue buildings to six stories will increase this division rather than knit together the urban fabric.
- Limiting **parking** in new developments on Grand Avenue to a maximum of 1 space per unit (minimum of no parking provided) will result in Grand Avenue residents parking on adjacent streets, where parking is in high demand by current residents—many homes don't have driveways because they predate cars
- Create a unique residential parking zone on Grand Avenue so residents of new developments cannot legally park on adjacent streets
- Extend Zone 5 residential parking limitations to be in force 24 hours/day, 7 days/week.
- Businesses might use rear yards and rooftops for **noisy assembly** uses like bars and restaurants, interfering with nearby residences' sleep and quality of life
- Limit assembly for the commercial use of rear yards and rooftops to the hours of 8:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m.
- If the purpose of the new zoning is to **connect** the area to downtown, then the properties between State and Olive Streets should be included in the zone
- Include all properties in the wedge between State and Olive Streets on each side of Grand Avenue in the zone.
- Improve infrastructure (lighting, crosswalks, traffic patterns) for pedestrians and vehicles in this connecting zone bounded by State, Olive, and Grand (see Wooster Square study by outside consultant for suggestions).
- Not requiring side yards could limit access to **maintain rear yards** of Grand Avenue properties
- Require that access to rear yards be provided to adequately maintain the property.
- The proposed density and site access limitations could present a **fire-fighting** challenge

Thank you for considering a short delay to allow time to address these and other issues affecting the livability, health, and safety of our neighborhood.

Sincerely,

Concerned Citizens – see the end of this document for pages of petitioners' names, addresses, etc.



**CITY OF NEW HAVEN
BOARD OF ALDERS**

Brenda Harris
Alder, Ward 8

719 Grand Avenue, Apt. 401
New Haven, CT 06511-5035

Member
Community Development Committee
Education Committee
Legislation Committee
Black and Hispanic Caucus

Telephone: (203)782-0897
E-mail: Ward8@newhavenct.gov

December 8, 2019

Rosa Ferraro Santana, Chair
& Members, Legislation Committee
Board of Alders
City of New Haven

Re: ZONING ORDINANCE TEXT AMENDMENT AND ZONING ORDINANCE MAP AMENDMENT TO
CREATE NEW COMMERCIAL GATEWAY CORRIDORS DISTRICT.

Dear Chair Santana and Legislation Committee Members,

As Alder for the 8th Ward, I respectfully request that the Legislation Committee temporarily exclude the Grand Avenue Commercial Development Corridor from the above mentioned zoning proposal that will be heard at the Legislation Committee meeting on Tuesday, December 10, 2019 at 6 p.m. This request is not intended to hold up forward motion on the Whalley Avenue Corridor.

The neighborhood clearly understands the need for new zoning in this two and a half block corridor. These constituents state that the unique and historical nature of Grand Avenue coupled with its smaller scale, small lot sizes, and direct abutment to the dense residential neighborhood enveloping Grand Avenue create unresolved problems. The conditions on Grand Avenue are different and unrelated to those on Whalley Avenue.

These neighbors do not feel they had adequate input to the revisions of this plan and would be grateful to be awarded the opportunity to work with City Plan and resolve these outstanding issues. These residents have assured me that they will work efficiently and quickly with City Plan so as not to delay the implementation of the rezoning of this corridor.

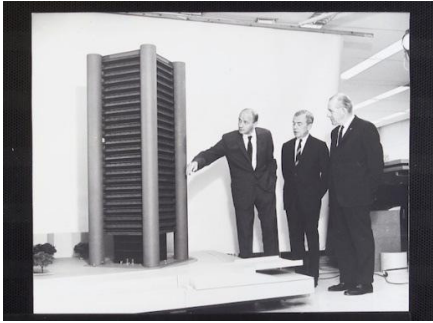
Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely

BRENDA HARRIS
Alder, 8th Ward

cc: Stacey Davis, City Plan Department

July 28, 2016 • [Architecture](#), [Historic Preservation](#), [New Haven](#), [Politics and Government](#)



McDevitt, Kevin Roche and Mayor Lee (center) of New Haven, looking at Knights of Columbus building model, 1965 - [New Haven Museum and Historical Society](#)

Mayor Richard Lee...

From the start of his tenure, Lee focused on improving New Haven through massive urban development initiatives. By the 1950s, New Haven's urban center was largely derelict: slums encompassed entire neighborhoods... Crime was on the rise and poverty proliferated. ... Mayor Dick Lee made it his mission to clean up New Haven. In his years as mayor he ... transform[ed] New Haven from a slum to a "Model City," as part of President Lyndon Johnson's War on Poverty programs.



Night demolition, corner of Church and Crown Streets, New Haven, 1959 – [New Haven Museum and Historical Society](#)

New Haven as a "Model City"

Richard Lee initiated and championed much of New Haven's urban renewal efforts during his eight-term run as the city's mayor (1954–1969). Hiring a crack team of developers and architects, Lee set out to rebuild New Haven. His efforts had both benefits and devastating consequences.



Standard Beef Co., State Street, New Haven, prior to redevelopment, 1964 – [New Haven Museum and Historical Society](#)

... urban redevelopment... aimed to rehabilitate decaying residential areas—of which New Haven had plenty. ... entire neighborhoods were decimated...

... residents displaced, businesses, too, felt the pains of the urban renewal...

The consequences were not all negative, however. In the first years of his tenure, Lee became somewhat of a national celebrity for his dedication to renewal in New Haven. Even HUD's Robert Weaver speculated that "New Haven is coming closest to our dreams of a slumless city," and Labor Secretary Willard Wirtz told a reporter that Lee's New Haven was "the greatest success story in the history of the world."

Reflecting on the Urban Renewal Process

By the early 1960s it was clear that transforming New Haven into a "Model City" was an effort too large for any one man. While urban renewal addressed buildings, it failed to address the people who lived there and the social causes for decline...

A pioneer of urban renewal and thinking about cities in new ways, [Richard Lee] ... reflected on the shortcomings of his efforts, declaring, "For everything we've done, there are five things we haven't done, or five things we've failed at. If New Haven is a model city, then God help urban America."



Demolition Day, corner of Church and Chapel Streets,
New Haven – [New Haven Museum and Historical Society](https://connecticuthistory.org/richard-lees-urban-renewal-in-new-haven/)
<https://connecticuthistory.org/richard-lees-urban-renewal-in-new-haven/>

Top 50: 75 years later, New Haven still reshaping ‘urban renewal’

By Mark Zaretsky

Updated 7:09 pm EDT, Saturday, October 6, 2018

Editor’s note: This is the 47th story in the Register’s Top 50 series.

NEW HAVEN — If you just moved to [New Haven](#) during the past few years, you may not think what went on during the “urban renewal” years that began in the late ’40s and continued for a half century or so has anything to do with you.

But it does — whether you know it or not.

New Haven was shaped and changed — some would say improved, many would say scarred — by the sweeping redevelopment that took place as part of efforts to “save” a city seen as being in decline.

For decades, New Haven was a laboratory and proving ground for ambitious urban planning ideas, many spawned at [Yale University](#), which subsequently were put to use in the nation’s largest cities.

The city was described in some texts as “a national leader ... for its efforts in pioneering urban renewal” — although not by the people who were pushed out of their homes or businesses.

Like giants bowling down whole neighborhoods in the name of “slum clearance,” the city officials of the time remade New Haven.

Some of those demolished neighborhoods never were replaced.

Most notably, the late Democratic [Mayor Richard C. Lee](#) led the charge. Lee, New Haven’s 44th mayor, served for a then-record eight terms, from 1954 to 1969, the Register has previously reported.

Displaced

Lee, who took office on New Year’s Day 1954 as the youngest mayor in the city’s history, recast New Haven in broad strokes in the 1950s and 1960s — for better and, in the minds of many present and former New Haveners, for worse.

Under Lee, [New Haven became a blueprint upon which much of the national war on poverty was modeled.](#)

New Haven received more federal money per capita than any other city in the country during the presidencies of John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson, when \$180 million was sent to the Elm City, the Register reported.

Lee and his administration, led early on by Development Administrator Edward Logue, were responsible for huge chunks of the city’s modern landscape: the Chapel Square Mall, the Veterans Memorial Coliseum and the Knights of Columbus building, Dixwell Plaza and the Dixwell Community “Q” House, schools, fire houses, a revived Wooster Square and the Long Wharf commercial strip.

But redevelopment, including much of the early planning, began under Lee’s predecessor, the late Mayor William C. Celentano, a Republican who served four terms from 1945 to 1953 — and the seeds were planted well before Lee was elected in late 1953, said Matthew Nemerson, the city’s economic development administrator.

Enabled by the expertise of Yale urban planners such as Maurice Rotival and vast amounts of federal money funneled to the city, those in power did things here that in some cases had never been tried.

While they were heralded at the time, those dramatic solutions didn't always work.

Even the one ones that worked didn't always last.

Some of the biggest initially successful projects ran out of steam over time and, like the Chapel Square Mall and the Macy's and Malley's department store buildings that once stood where Gateway Community College stands now, became problems that had to be replaced.

In the case of the Oak Street and Legion Avenue neighborhoods, the city cleared block after block of coldwater flats and other substandard housing — described as the worst slums in the city at that time — for a Route 34 highway extension that ultimately never happened, the Register reported.

More than 600 families and businesses were displaced.

Business decisions

Only now — more than half a century later — is the city finally building things along the area between Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard/North Frontage Road and South Frontage Road/Legion Avenue that once was a vibrant, if decayed, neighborhood.

The land between the two Route 34 frontage roads sat for decades before it was put back into use for biotech space and other amenities for Yale and Yale New Haven Hospital's vast medical complex.

What we now know as downtown New Haven is vastly different from what was here in the late 1940s — and even from what was here in the 1980s, when the Edw. Malley Co. and later Macy's department stores closed and were demolished between Church and Temple streets.

The former Chapel Square Mall, which faced the New Haven Green, held on for a few years, but closed, as well, only to be carved into apartments, with some first-floor stores facing the street, years later.

But New Haven ultimately began pursuing different, more modest forms of redevelopment — with an emphasis on historic preservation and blending the new with the best parts of what already was there — as times and urban planning styles changed.

"On balance, I think urban renewal was disastrous for New Haven," said former Mayor John DeStefano Jr., who finally broke Lee's record for longevity decades later, serving 10 terms from 1994 to 2013.

"I think it's fair to say it was admirable in its ambition — and it did have its successes," he said. "But overall, I think it undermined the city," as an estimated 25 percent of the city's residents and many of its businesses were relocated.

Among other things, urban renewal "just tore the guts out of the business district," said DeStefano, who chose to make his administration's lasting mark with a huge \$1.6 billion project — still underway — to rebuild the city's schools.

"The fallacy was that if you got rid of low-quality housing full of poor people, something good would happen in its place ..." said Yale University political scientist Doug Rae, who was the city's chief administrative officer in 1990 and 1991, during the administration of DeStefano's predecessor, the late Mayor John Daniels Jr.

"But that whole thing was a fiasco — for the poor people who were displaced and for hundreds, maybe thousands of small retailers," said Rae, the Richard Ely professor of political science and management at Yale.

"And the tragedy of the small retailers was this: They were predominantly renters and they had been there for quite a while — and the rules for condemnation were that the government owes the property owner for his losses," Rae said.

"But the big loser is the retailer who loses his place of businesses but also loses the good grace of his clientele," said Rae, author of ["City: Urbanism and its End,"](#) a 2003 book critical of the changes urban renewal brought to New Haven.

"I think" urban renewal "was a mixed bag, in all honesty," said Mayor Toni N. Harp, who has been in office since 2014.

"For at least 20 or 30 years, 40 years even, we experienced neighborhoods cut off from the city, and nobody can think that was a good thing," Harp said.

“I think that one of the things that I can see in my administration is ... a number of parking lots have been there for a generation — and have been used as parking lots — and they were once places where people lived,” she said.

But, there are upsides to that.

“They are now being rebuilt for a new population of millennials who want to live downtown, who appreciate having a cityscape where people live and work and play, ...” she said.

“The fact that we now have space for them ... has made all the difference in the world for us, in terms of attracting developers,” Harp said. “So the fact that we have the land resources ... to accommodate that need is positive and has been helpful.”

One thing Harp has learned as mayor is that “it takes a long time to get things done,” she said. “Some of the things that John DeStefano started got done during my tenure. Some of the things that started during my tenure will get done during my successor’s tenure. ...”

“We’ve got to give ourselves room to do great things ... and if we’re going to fail, fail fast — and fix it,” she said.

Yale’s Rae said under urban renewal, which grew out of the U.S. Housing Act of 1949, “The big idea was, you’re in the suburbs where you can buy a cornfield for very little and start fresh, doing malls” and new schools.

“Well, the Housing Act of 1949 says, ‘Cities can play that game,’” he said.

Using redevelopment laws, cities like New Haven would identify “a few hundred small properties and combine them into large parcels,” and developers would then come and build on the much larger sites that would result, Rae said.

Meanwhile, “These places, the places we’re condemning, are inhabited by poor people and often poor people of color ... and they’re getting poorer ... because the factories” they used to work at had closed, he said.

But as it turned out, “Where you rolled up the fabric of small properties, you got dead space,” Rae said, “and that was happening everywhere, but nowhere more than New Haven.”

“If there was a lesson from urban renewal in New Haven, it’s that that strategy was a colossally bad idea,” he said.

Lee “really did think he was going to make the city better,” Rae said. “He was mistaken.”

But even one of the most vociferous critics of the changes brought to New Haven during the Lee years, the late Vincent J. Scully Jr., an internationally respected architectural historian, didn’t blame Lee directly for that.

“He followed the very best advice that he could get from the very best architects and planners of the time,” Scully told the New Haven Register in 1998. “They were the ones who were wrong.”

The centerpiece of Lee's redevelopment effort, a gargantuan, \$80 million Church Street project that knocked down dozens of businesses to build the Chapel Square Mall, Macy's, Malley's and what was then the Park Plaza Hotel (now the Omni) "failed," DeStefano said.

Well, that wasn't immediately true.

"It succeeded for 20 years," and then, "it took 10 years of dealing with it," DeStefano said.

One big widely acknowledged problem today was the way in which the Church Street project was configured, with the mall up front facing the Green, Macy's behind it, with a pedestrian bridge connecting across Crown Street, and Malley's one huge block further.

So, anyone wanting to shop at Malley's had to go all the way through Macy's to get to it.

"I think it's ... interesting that having put together this mall with one of the most amazing parking garages in the country" in the Temple Street Garage, "that they couldn't do it in such a way" that it would be successful, said Nemerson, the economic development administrator.

Nemerson, who was president of the Greater New Haven Chamber of Commerce in the 1990s, said he finds the urban renewal years interesting in that "there's a whole alternative history.

"At a local and national level, it was engineered by Yale for the purpose of cleaning up New Haven for their campus," he said.

Born "out of the master planning that was done by Maurice Rotival ... his plans for the early '40s were the blueprints," Nemerson said.

He said it was "not surprising Yale ended up being one of the leading beneficiaries in the whole country" of the results of urban renewal.

Two goals were "to build a city that could compete with the suburbs and to build a city that could compete with Harvard and MIT" and the areas around them, Nemerson said.

Not that improvement wasn't needed, he said.

"At the time, Oak Street was a complete mess," Nemerson said.

Lee's giant remaking of the city, coupled with the work that followed, did have some positive effects, he said.

"New Haven was maybe more successful than other cities for 10 or 20 years ...," Nemerson said. "It was not like Boston. But it wasn't Elizabeth," N.J. "It wasn't Patterson."

Identity

As a result of urban renewal, “walls of concrete highways separated neighborhoods, disrupted communities” and the large-scale projects that replaced them followed “built space that was thoughtless and largely unconnected to how people lived their lives, at work, in their homes and in their neighborhoods,” DeStefano said.

DeStefano, who came up as a staffer for the now late Mayor Biagio “Ben” DiLieto, one of Lee’s successors, said not all of New Haven’s problems were the result of bad housing.

“I think there were lots of other things going on in the ‘60s that affected the city,” including “school desegregation, fleeing for the suburbs” and “people aware of social injustice,” DeStefano said. “So a transition was going to occur in New Haven. ...”

But while “I think (redevelopment) had some success in some neighborhoods ... I think one of the most vibrant neighborhoods in the city is Grand Avenue,” DeStefano said, “and one of the reasons why I would argue” that’s the case “is because it was largely unscathed by urban renewal.

“To me, it was, ‘What does it mean when you destroy the social capital of a place?’” DeStefano said. “When people don’t feel ownership of a place, bad things happen” and there is a “loss of a cohesive identity.”

In DeStefano’s estimation, good things that came out of urban renewal were some of the “human renewal” programs, such as Head Start. *“But fundamentally, this idea that you can rewrite people’s lives solely by investment in the built space” is just wrong, he said.*

While it was clear the city had big problems that needed to be dealt with, “I just think ... that the cure made the patient sicker,” he said.

The best approach “was more gardening ... pulling some weeds and putting in new plants ... where you retain some strong sense of ownership of the neighborhood,” DeStefano said.

In that regard, the redevelopment strategy in Wooster Square — *where, in large part as a result of the strong efforts of residents,* the city took a different, less overwhelming approach and chose to operate with a “scalpel” instead of a hammer, worked better, he said.

Despite the failures of urban renewal, former state Treasurer Henry E. “Hank” Parker, who came to New Haven from Poughkeepsie, N.Y., in 1957 to be program director for Winchester Community School as part one of Lee’s “human renewal” programs, has called Lee “a great mayor.”

During the Lee years, New Haven was one of six cities to initiate “human renewal” programs using Ford Foundation grants that fostered programs that were precursors to the national “Model Cities” legislation.

Parker, a longtime resident of that Wooster Square neighborhood who has been in poor health, was unavailable to speak for this story. But he told the New Haven Register in a story that ran on

Feb. 3, 2003, after Lee's death, that Lee "opened the door to a city that needed the urban renewal that he indeed pioneered.

"Without that, we would have been even further behind," said Parker, who became the first president of the New Haven Black Coalition in 1968 and ran for mayor in 1969, the year Lee bowed out.

Lee managed the tumultuous changes New Haven and all cities were going through in that era "better than anyone else of his time," said Parker, who made history of his own when he became the first black state treasurer in 1974.

Lee used his Community Progress Inc. and other programs to **blend urban and human renewal** "like nobody else," Parker said.

Many years before his death, Lee came to terms with the fact that some of his grandest plans either didn't work or had faded.

"Well, we still have the hotel," he said with a laugh, throwing up his arms in a shrug as he referred to the Omni New Haven Hotel at Yale when asked about the state of downtown in 1998.

Lee outlived some of the huge public works projects intended to be his memorials: The Richard C. Lee High School closed in 1986. The Oak Street/Route 34 connector, which later was named for him, was never finished.

At the 1994 dedication of the four-block connector, one of his greatest disappointments, as the "Richard C. Lee Highway," he joked privately, "Let's just say it's an awfully short highway."

In 1998, the federal government renamed the federal courthouse on Church Street after Lee — a memorial likely to remain standing for some time. Appropriately, it was a building he once sought to knock down.

Lee recognized the contradictions of his legacy long ago and commented on it in a speech in 1980, when the U.S. Conference of Mayors gave him a public service award.

"We would dream, and we did; we would try, and we did," he said. "When we failed, we failed magnificently, and, when we succeeded, we succeeded sometime beyond our fondest expectations, and, after all, what's wrong with a record like that?"

He recognized monumental plans have a limited shelf life.

"You know, we were swimming against the tide," Lee once said, referring to the social and economic forces, led by the federal highway system, that literally took people and commerce to the suburbs in the second half of the 20th century.

*One lesson New Haven and many other cities have learned from urban renewal is to no longer seek to implement **the kind of sweeping changes that urban renewal brought without bringing the community on board**, Nemerson said.*

“There are so many checks and balances now, that we’re all humbled ... and I think that **what we’re working for now**” is to **build broad-based relationships with the community “so that you don’t move forward in a way that’s going to fail,”** Nemerson said.

That means *moving forward “with more voices,”* he said.

“I think it’s made things more complicated,” Nemerson said, but it has “built that most amazing infrastructure *to avoid the problems that we had in the ’50s and ’60s.*”

Grand/ Whalley Comparisons

Length (approx.)

Grand	1,210' long to I-91+ 438' (one side only W I-91 to Hamilton)
Whalley	6,175' long

Depth (approx.)

Grand	103-120 (NW Grand, N side), NE Grand to max 133', S side Grand
Whalley	Wide range from similar to Grand up to over 200'

Sidewalk to sidewalk (approx.)

Grand	45 ft
Whalley	116 ft

Lanes with Parking (as stands)

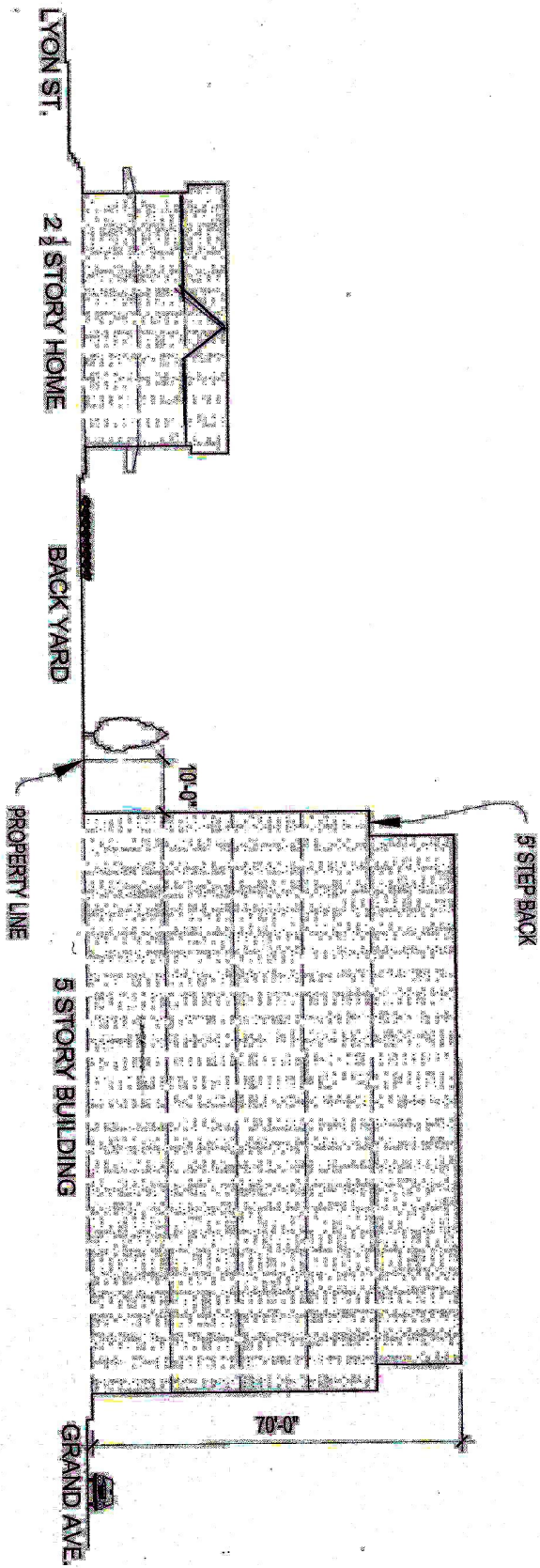
Grand	3
Whalley	6+

Properties in new CGD zone

Grand	29 total (13 each side to I-91 + 3 S Side I-91-Hamilton)
Whalley	100+

immediately adjacent residences

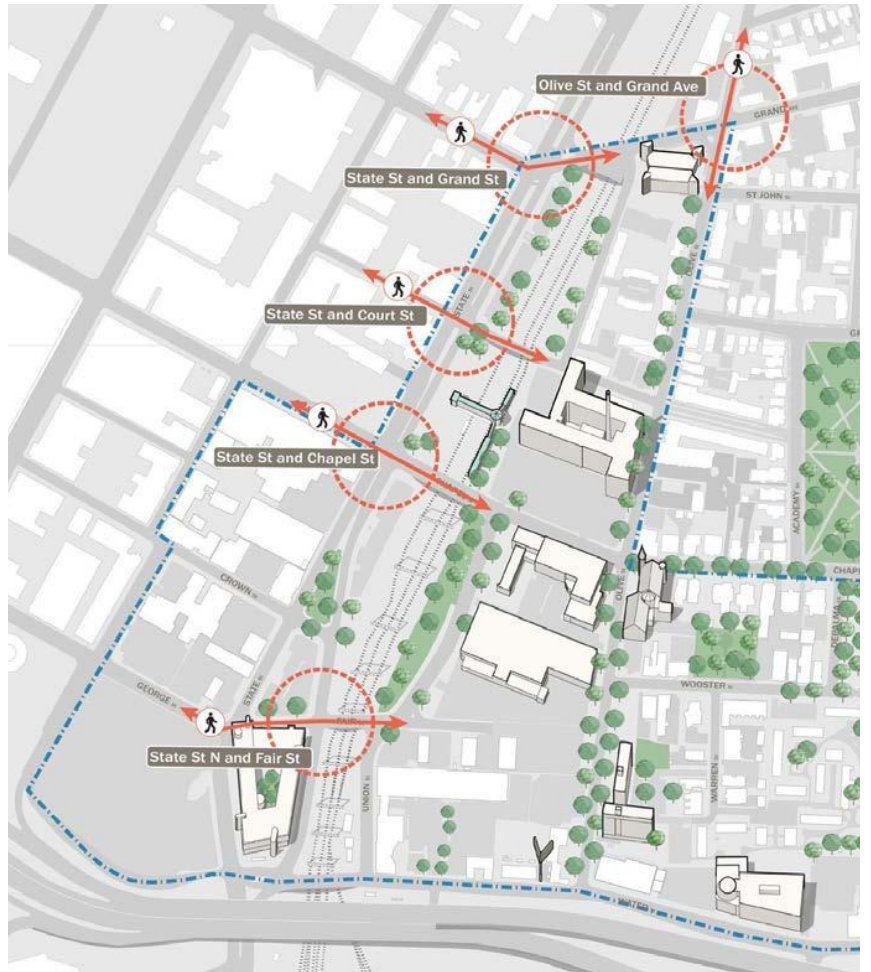
Grand	almost all abut residential properties, most 2 family
Whalley	many, but not all abut residential properties, not determined # families



SECTION DIAGRAM AT 1/32" = 1'-0"



State Street connections between Downtown and the neighborhood were a primary focus of the planning assignment. Mitigating the actual and perceived distance between these areas was achieved through new infill development, safer street crossings and suggested enhancements to the bridges.





Grand Avenue Commercial Corridor Meeting

DATE: Friday, October 11, 2019

TIME: 5:30 – 7:00 p.m.

LOCATION: City Hall

165 Church Street

2nd floor, Meeting Room 2



**Please come to this very
important meeting. We want to
hear your thoughts, ideas and
concerns regarding the
proposed zoning changes to
the Grand Avenue
Commercial Corridor.**