

MEDCRAFT HEALTHCARE REAL ESTATE LLC
February 12, 2021

NARRATIVE OF EXISTING AND PROPOSED USES
AND COMPLIANCE WITH SPECIAL EXCEPTION CRITERIA

Narrative of Proposal:

Applicant MedCraft Healthcare Real Estate LLC (“MedCraft”), as contract purchaser, seeks approval to redevelop the former Macy’s department store located at 460 Lewis Avenue (“Property”) for health care services use pursuant to §§ 213-25.B(2)(r) of the Meriden Zoning Regulations (“Regulations”). MedCraft seeks special exception approval and modification of the approved site plan for this use.

The Property is located within the C-2 / General Commercial zone and is approximately 14 acres. The Property is one of several parcels that comprise the Meriden Mall, defined by the Regulations as a “regional shopping mall” (“Mall Site”). Health care services are allowed in the C-2 zone by special exception pursuant to § 213-25.B(2)(r) of the Regulations. The existing building consists of approximately 180,000 square feet, all of which will be converted to health care services. Included in the submission materials are preliminary floor plans for the building; final layouts will be determined at the time end users are confirmed. The building will retain connectivity with the remainder of the mall building.

In addition to the change of use, MedCraft proposes a significant upgrade to the building exterior. The existing entrances on each of the three elevations will be maintained and enhanced, including the installation of new canopies providing screening from weather elements for a better patient experience. As depicted in the accompanying elevations, the building façade will be upgraded with new finishes including metal panel and cultured stone. Windows will be added across all elevations to bring light into the space and add architectural interest to the existing blank walls. The former Macy’s wall signs will be replaced in kind with updated signage when tenancies are finalized; illustrative samples are depicted in the building elevations.

MedCraft also proposes modest site work designed to enhance the Property. Most notably, MedCraft seeks to modify the parking field to create drop-off lanes at each of the three entrances, as well as new accessible parking spaces directly adjacent to the east and south entrances. As a result of these modifications, alterations will be made to the existing drive aisles and landscaped islands to accommodate these changes, while also ensuring access for other vehicles accessing the Mall Site.¹ Emergency generators will be installed along the west building elevation and suitably screened from public view.

With respect to parking and traffic issues, the Property is well-positioned to accommodate the health care service use. Even after the proposed site modifications, the

¹ Minor work on certain landscape islands and drive aisles will occur on the adjacent property at 450 Lewis Avenue, which is the primary Mall Site parcel and owned by Namdar Realty Group.

Property and the Mall Site maintain the required 4.5 spaces per 1000SF parking ratio established by § 213-55.K(1) with 4,032 combined parking spaces. Traffic volumes for the health care use are easily accommodated by the existing road network as detailed in the submitted traffic study. The weekday morning peak hour volumes increase with the expected patients during that window – previously a time with little volume because Macy’s was not open to the public. Therefore, because the change to health care use increases cars generated by more than 25% in the morning peak hour, MedCraft seeks approval for modification of the existing site plan pursuant to § 213-72.A(b). Similar site traffic is expected during the weekday afternoon peak hour and a reduction is expected during the Saturday midday peak hour.

Compliance with Special Exception Criteria:

Any application for special exception must satisfy the criteria set forth in § 213-73.B of the Regulations. MedCraft’s proposal is fully compliant with these criteria for the reasons described below (responses to each subsection noted in italics):

1) The site plan submitted as part of the application shall satisfy the requirements for site development plan approval as detailed in § 213-72 of this chapter.

The technical materials submitted with the application address the myriad requirements for site plan approval. These include adequate provision of utilities, parking, landscaping, erosion control and lighting, as well as accessibility for fire and police protection.

2) The location and size of the proposed use and the nature and intensity of use in relation to the size of the lot will be in harmony with the orderly development of the area, compatible with other existing uses, and, if applicable, further the goals and objectives of the Plan of Conservation and Development (“POCD”).

Given the adaptive reuse of the existing building on the Property, MedCraft’s proposal is consistent with the surrounding development and compatible with the adjacent uses. Notably, the POCD specifically addresses the need for the City to assist with the transformation of the Mall Site in light of the changing retail economy. On pages 52 & 84, the POCD notes that similar mall properties have been reconfigured to allow for diverse uses such as “residential, healthcare, academic, and other institutions.” It further notes that “Meriden can help to ensure that the mall is in a good position to adapt to future change by creating a flexible regulatory environment with zoning that will not present a barrier to ongoing success.” POCD p. 52.

3) The design, size, mass, scale, height, and location of the structure and the nature and extent of landscaping on the lot are appropriate for the use and will not hinder or discourage the appropriate use of adjoining property or diminish the value thereof.

The existing building is appropriately sized and scaled to the surrounding buildings on the Mall Site and for the proposed health care services use. The significant improvements envisioned for the Property will enhance the adjoining properties by converting an outdated and vacant use into an active and vibrant facility that will draw visitors to the area.

4) The design elements of the proposed development are suitable in relation to the site characteristics and style of other buildings in the immediate area. The Commission may request advice and recommendations from the Design Review Board for issues related to the exterior of structures only.

As depicted in the accompanying elevations, MedCraft's design is a notable improvement from existing conditions. The proposal adds architectural interest to a stark building with large blank walls and little visual interest. Its height and scale remain consistent with the surrounding structures.

5) The intensity of the proposed use will not alter the essential characteristics of the area or adversely affect property values in the neighborhood.

The proposed conversion to health care services will not alter the essential characteristics or property values in the surrounding area, but rather will stabilize the area by transforming a notable vacancy into a productive use. The overall intensity of the use is consistent with the historical usage of the Property.

6) The parking and loading facilities are adequate and properly located, and the entrance and exit driveways are laid out to achieve reasonable safety.

The existing entrance and exit driveways to the Property are unchanged by MedCraft's proposal. Satisfactory parking and loading are provided on the Property and Mall Site, with modifications that will enhance accessibility for patients, caregivers and employees utilizing the Property.

7) Streets providing access to the proposed use are adequate in width, grade, alignment, and visibility, and have adequate capacity for the additional traffic generated by the proposed use, and the proposed use will not create a traffic hazard and will not block or hamper the City circulation pattern.

The application materials include a Traffic Study prepared by Tighe and Bond that analyzes the traffic generation associated with the change from retail to health care services. The study concludes that there will be no adverse impact to the existing road network as a result of this use.

8) The proposed use or site shall have proper accessibility for fire apparatus and police protection and is laid out and equipped to further the provision of emergency services.

Given the developed nature of the Property, emergency services, including accessibility for fire and police apparatus, have been resolved in prior approvals. None of the proposed site modifications negatively alter fire and police response abilities. In the event ambulance service becomes necessary for a patient of the facility, a designated ambulance parking area is located in the south lot directly adjacent to that entrance and shielded by a canopy.

9) The water supply, the sewage disposal, and the storm water drainage shall conform with accepted engineering criteria, comply with all standards of the appropriate regulatory authority, and that such utilities have, or can be improved by the developer to have, adequate capacity for the proposed use.

Water, sewage and stormwater drainage all conform with current engineering practices and governing regulations. A report prepared by Tighe and Bond addresses these issues in greater detail.

10) The proposed plans have provided for the reasonable conservation of natural features to include the active preservation of specimen trees of 36 inch diameter or greater as measured 4.5 feet above ground and the utilization of best management practices to minimize degradation of storm water run-off, and the utilization of landscape and/ or buffer areas to protect environmentally sensitive portions of the site.

Sodom Brook and an area of inland wetlands associated with the brook are located along the eastern boundary of the Property. As depicted in the accompanying engineering plans, all appropriate measures will be taken to ensure that there is no adverse impact to this sensitive area. An administrative application for minor maintenance work within the upland review area has been submitted simultaneously with this application.