

Port Chester Forum on Starwood Development Calls on Village Trustees to Ensure It Benefits Community

Forum Participants Agree: Starwood Capital Needs to Provide Funding for Schools, Affordable Housing, Good Jobs

By [Joan Grangenois-Thomas \(Open Post\)](#)

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Dozens of Port Chester residents attended a Town Hall meeting Thursday, September 3, to learn from a panel of local experts how Starwood Capital's proposed development of the United Hospital site could benefit the community if the wealthy developer provides funding for schools and affordable housing, and pays area standard wages for construction and maintenance jobs. They called on Village Trustees to ensure the community gets the best return on its investment in the proposed development by requiring Starwood to do these things. The forum took place at the local Knights of Columbus.

"This meeting is about making sure that this project meets the needs of this community in terms of jobs and housing, and that our

schools, infrastructure, and safety are protected. Dialogue is a healthy thing for a community to engage in. It's not about putting the kibosh on the project, it's about making sure that it fits who we are, meets our needs, and benefits us into the future," said panel moderator Joan Grangenois-Thomas, a Port Chester resident and activist.

Starwood has proposed building a more than 1 million square-foot mixed-use private development at the campus of the former United Hospital at 406 Boston Post Road in Port Chester. The \$300 million proposal includes: 730 residential units, 90,000 square feet of retail space, 217,000 square feet of office space, and a 138 room hotel.

In order to build, the developer needs the approval of Village Trustees to rezone the site to allow for a bigger development than is currently permitted.

The panel included: Rob Reis, Port Chester parent; Gonzalo Cruz, Executive Director, Don Bosco Workers; Blanca Lopez, Director, Neighborhood Preservation Company, Human Development Services of Westchester; and Tom Kennedy, Labor Attorney & Partner at Kennedy, Jennik & Murray P.C.

Starwood has proposed entering into a payment in lieu of taxes (“PILOT”) program that would amount to an annual payment of \$2.975 million, of which \$1.19 million is proposed to go to the Village and \$1.785 million is proposed to go to the Port Chester Rye Union Free School District. Over the 20 year life of the PILOT, Starwood predicts it will save \$58.55 million in taxes. That is approximately \$33.88 million in taxes that will be lost to the School District during this period.

Port Chester parent Robert Reis voiced concern about the effects the proposed PILOT will have on students and taxpayers: “Ourschools are already overcrowded,” he said, “If Starwood gets this deal – which I think is way too generous -- and if the student population does increase, it essentially will cost the rest of us. So Starwood’s tax deal, in some respects will be the fiscal equivalent of a tax increase on the average property owner in Port Chester.”

Given Starwood Capital Group’s recent record in NYC, it is also not a given that the jobs this project would create will be good jobs with fair wages, benefits and vital safety protections. Several construction contractors and subcontractors, or their principals, employed on Starwood Capital projects have a history of irresponsible and unsavory activity. Furthermore, health and safety issues at a number of Starwood Capital projects in NYC underscore concerns about Starwood’s failure to commit to use only responsible contractors on their projects.

“We need to guarantee that Starwood will provide good jobs with good salaries and that they will hire local people from the community. We also need to guarantee that they hire responsible contractors because sometimes they hire irresponsible contractors and the workers don’t receive fair pay and are not treated well,” said Gonzalo Cruz, who represents local day laborers.

Starwood plans to remove tenants from the Mitchell-Lama housing complex at 999 High Street and tear down the building. This would result in the loss of 133 of Port Chester’s approximately 960 affordable housing units. While the developer is helping the current tenants relocate, it has no plan for replacing the 133 affordable homes.

“We have a problem with home overcrowding in the Village,” said housing activist Blanca Lopez, “We need to be addressing the root cause of this problem: there aren’t enough quality affordable homes for Port Chester residents. Housing stock in Village is old, 60% built before 1949. There are more renters than owners in this community, a 60-40% ratio. So why should we open the door for Starwood to permanently destroy the homes that we do have for working families?”

“This open forum allowed the community to discuss their concerns about Starwood’s plans,” said John Coffey, Local 46 Metallic Lathers & Reinforcing Iron Workers Business Agent. “We heard from the panel, and from those in attendance, a number of positive ways their concerns could be addressed. We are confident the Trustees, and the developer are listening and will act in the best interests of Port Chester taxpayers. “

Port Chester Village Trustees will hold the second hearing on the proposed rezoning of the United Hospital site on Tuesday, September 8, at 7:00 pm.

The Sustainable Port Chester Alliance is a growing coalition of faith, housing, and labor groups advocating for responsible development at the United Hospital site, including: J. Bruce Baker, Pastor, All Souls Parish; Port Chester Teachers Association; Don Bosco Workers, Inc.; Local 46 Metallic Lathers & Reinforcing Iron Workers; Communication Workers of America Local 1103; Building and Construction Trades Council of Westchester and Putnam Counties. www.portchesteralliance.org