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NEWPORT

Forty 1^o North to add hotel?

The owners of the former Christie's restaurant will need a zoning variance to proceed with their plan.

By Sean Flynn
Daily News staff

NEWPORT — The owners of Forty 1^o North want to convert the top two floors of the former Christie's restaurant at 351 Thames St. into a 24-room hotel.

The owners, who include Campbell's Soup heiress Dorrance "Dodo" H. Hamilton, real estate attorney George Moore and construction contractor Peter Borden, are planning a complex at the site that will include two restaurants, a marina, a spa and a shop—in addition to the hotel.

Their firm, 802 Partners LLC, bought the former restaurant on June 21, 2006, and the abutting site and building of the former Cheeky Monkey restaurant at 14-20 Perry Mill Wharf on Feb. 15. The city's Planning Board last week approved the request by the owners to merge the two lots.

Before the proposal can proceed, though, the city's Zoning Board of Review must approve a special-use permit for the hotel and a variance because the number of parking spaces will not meet the requirements of the zoning code.

"The historic use of (the former) Christie's restaurant will be dramatically reduced," according to the application of 802 Partners. "The mix of high-caliber restaurant, marina and transient guest facility with a vacation/family fare restaurant and retail space will complement the predominately pedestrian activity in the Thames Street-Memorial Boulevard area."

Any hotel, motel or guesthouse with more than 10 units is referred to as a "transient guest facility" by the city's zoning code. Attorney Turner C. Scott is

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Hotel

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representing the owners before the city boards. The Zoning Board of Review has not scheduled a hearing on the matter.

The "high-caliber restaurant" referred to in the application is The Grill at Forty 1^o North and is on the first floor and outdoor space of the former Christie's restaurant. It is open to marina guests and members only.

The "vacation/family fare restaurant" is where the Cheeky Monkey used to be, and now is called Christie's Restaurant. The entrance to the restaurant is from Perry Mill Wharf, but the rear of the site abuts the Forty 1^o North site.

The Forty 1^o North marina has 25 slips.

French & Crane Architects and Planners of Ardmore, Pa., are designing the new developments at the complex. The firm has submitted plans to the zoning board that show 12 hotel rooms and suites on the second floor and 12 on the third floor of the former Christie's building.

There now are four residential units in the former Cheeky Monkey building. Two of those also would be converted to hotel units and two would be converted to an almost 2,000-square-foot spa. The two hotel rooms would be operated with the 24 units in the former Christie's. An elevator tower and exterior stairwell would be added to the Cheeky Monkey building so that it conforms to fire-code requirements.

The new complex would have 47 off-street parking spaces, an increase from the approximately 40 spaces now there, according to the application. Under the city's zoning ordinances, 192 parking spaces would be required.

The breakdown:

- ◆ The combined square footage of the two restaurants would be 14,173 square feet. At the required one space per 150 square feet, there would be 95 parking spaces required for the restaurants.

- ◆ Twenty-six parking spaces would be required for the hotel guests, according to the code.

- ◆ The code mandates one parking space for every three employees. With 60 employees at the hotel-restaurant complex, that would require an additional 20 spaces.

- ◆ One parking space would be required for each of the 25 boat slips, plus an additional three spaces for the marina employees, for a total of 28.

- ◆ An additional 20 spaces would be needed for the spa and three more spaces for the retail employees at the on-site store.

However, space is tight in downtown Newport and the developers want a variance on these requirements. The developers believe valet parking, and coordination between the marina, hotel and restaurants, will ensure sufficient parking for guests who drive to the complex.

"The majority of the patrons will be participating in other downtown activities, with this development being one of a number of pleasurable stops in their itinerary," according to the application.

Zoning Officer Guy Weston is concerned about the developers' plan to create a new separate entrance to a newly configured parking lot for Forty 1^o North. The entrance to Christie's Landing would remain, which brings people to the shops and businesses on the southern side of the property. The new entrance would be just to the north of the existing Christie's Landing entrance. Just to the north of the new entrance, separated only by Salas Restaurant at 343 Thames St., is the entrance to Perry Mill Wharf.

"Of biggest concern about this proposal, is traffic circulation," Weston wrote in his comments on the proposal. "You would have two-way traffic at Christie's Landing, the proposed entrance, and at Perry Mill Wharf. This side of Thames Street (the west side) is heavily populated with pedestrian traffic. Vehicular traffic is impacted now by existing conditions. This may be exasperated by the addition of a new driveway."

Weston said the plans also do not include any mitigation of the stormwater runoff from the asphalt parking areas.

"Public access is another issue," he said.

The city has a long-term goal of creating public access to the waterfront from King Park in the south to Perrotti Park in the north. Some waterfront parcels have public access, while others do not. Weston said the best time to create public access is when major development is being proposed.