

Town of Litchfield  
Planning & Zoning Commission  
Town Hall Annex  
80 Doyle Road  
Bantam, CT 06750

Via email to: [zoningadmin@townoflitchfield.org](mailto:zoningadmin@townoflitchfield.org)

April 26, 2021

RE: 31 North Street, aka "Rose Haven" – Adaptive Reuse

Dear Chair Bramley, Members of the Board and Dr. Tobin, Land Use Administrator:

I am contacting you on behalf of a group of local investors who have entered into a contract to purchase Rose Haven at 31 North Street. Our transaction is contingent upon receiving permission from the Litchfield Planning and Zoning Commission to adapt the property from its most recent use as a retirement home and rehabilitation facility to a New England-style inn/bed and breakfast. We respectfully request the opportunity to consult with your commission at your next meeting to discuss our conceptual vision for the property and, receive guidance as how we can best proceed in revising the entitlements associated with this unique property.

**WHO WE ARE**

My name is Anthony Champalimaud. I reside at 115 North Street along with my wife Charlie and our two young children. Charlie serves on the board of the Housatonic Valley Association and I serve on the board of the Ripley Waterfowl Conservancy. I am the managing partner and operator of Troutbeck ([www.troutbeck.com](http://www.troutbeck.com)), an award winning, historic estate hotel in Amenia, New York. My professional background is in hospitality-focused real estate investment, management and design with a bias for the adaptive reuse of historic buildings.

I am joined in leading this effort by Armand Della Monica, who has resided at 113 South Street with his wife Lauren since 2009. Armand is a trustee and board member of the White Memorial Foundation and Conservation Center. Lauren is a member of Litchfield's Traffic Safety Community Action Group, and they are both actively involved in several of the Town's cultural and charitable organizations. They are deeply committed to the preservation of the Town's historic character and New England charm, while at the same time supportive of sensible economic development to ensure the continued vitality of the town and its institutions.

Our design partner is Champalimaud Design ([www.champalimaud.design](http://www.champalimaud.design)), a world-renowned hospitality-focused interior design firm founded by my mother Alexandra Champalimaud. Alexandra and her husband Bruce Schnitzer reside at 89 South Street and are themselves committed to become members of our local investor group. Moreover, they bring to this project a successful track record of restoration and redevelopment projects in Litchfield.

For example, in the late 1990s, Bruce and Alexandra (joined by our attorney, Michael P. Keilty) undertook the adaptive reuse of the historic Switzer's Lumber Yard on West Street. Switzer's was constructed in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and operated as a lumber yard until the 1990's. Their sensitive rehabilitation of the complex was adapted and restored as "West Street Yard", reopening in 1998 for mixed commercial and retail use (excluding any residential or restaurant operations).

Switzer's had served a commercial purpose for well over a century but given a residential zoning designation when the Town's zoning regulations were first promulgated. In order to achieve the outcome that has endured until today, the project was approved by Litchfield's Planning & Zoning Commission as an adaptation of a pre-existing non-conforming use. West Street Yard received the Litchfield Preservation Trust's Award of Distinction in 1999.

In the early 1980s, Bruce was an active member of the group of concerned residents who structured a transaction that allowed the Litchfield Post Office to remain in the center of Town and be rehabilitated and expanded to meet the needs of the community and postal staff. The resulting partnership has proved to be successful for those who provided the investment funds to save the post office and has created an endowment for the then newly formed Greater Litchfield Preservation Trust.

We are deeply appreciative of the long-standing efforts of our commissioners and planners whose work has ensured the enduring character North and South Streets, the historic integrity of our Central Business District, and the quality of life within the Borough of Litchfield. As residents, we feel compelled to shape a successful outcome for Rose Haven, a property that has long been a fixture in the center of town and which today faces an unnervingly uncertain future.

### **What We Propose**

We believe that our lodging proposal for Rose Haven would be consistent with the fundamental underlying aspects of its current pre-existing non-conforming use. For more than 70 years, Rose Haven has provided accommodations and food and beverage services to a residential community of approximately 40 people. The facility, today, includes a commercial kitchen, staff apartment, municipal water and sewerage and parking capacity adequate to support its current use. Once we receive your direction on how best to proceed with our application, we fully expect to deliver a site plan which specifically addresses the needs of our contemplated use.

Our conceptual studies suggest that the Beldon house would offer a gracious reception, sitting rooms and provide up to nine en-suite guestrooms (including one ADA accessible guestroom). We intend to restore the original footprint of the house by removing the 1.5 story addition (of unknown vintage) unsympathetically attached at the rear. Separately, the 1959 addition, set apart from the Beldon House, would be reconfigured to 21 guestrooms within the existing footprint. We anticipate the addition of a residential scaled, seasonal swimming pool as an attractive amenity for our in-house guests. An appropriately scaled kitchen would be located in either the Beldon House or the annex. The kitchen would serve breakfast to overnight guests and provide light fare thereafter consistent with an in-room dining menu.

Our proposal will eliminate activities that are inconsistent with the character and quality of its surroundings and restore the architectural integrity of the Beldon House. The prospect of ambulance/emergency services traffic would be eliminated. Staffing headcounts would be sized to meet

the relatively modest needs of a bed and breakfast with many administrative functions handled remotely by its sister property, Troutbeck. A landscaping plan consistent with a premium lodging experience would benefit the surrounding view shed for both directly adjacent neighbors and as glimpsed from West Street and Rt. 202. The prospect of the significant multi-story expansion - already approved - would be eliminated decisively.

Lodging at Rose Haven is likely to benefit the boutique hotel proposed for the Superior Court House by adding to its immediately proximate available bed base. The same can be said for the restaurants and retail businesses in the HTC that will provide our guests with lunch, dinner and shopping experiences only steps away. These synergies are essential and like precedent examples elsewhere, will make the successor to Rose Haven an attractive destination for our guests.

#### **SUPPORT FROM NEIGHBORS; CONSENSUS ON LODGING**

From discussions with residential and commercial neighbors directly adjacent and closely proximate to 31 North Street, we believe a broad consensus exists in support of adapting Rose Haven to a more appropriate use than its present entitlement as a medically-related residential facility. We have been encouraged to believe that our plans to adapt the property into low-intensity lodging, appropriately scaled, sensitively designed and properly operated, would represent a broadly satisfying outcome.

We believe our aims are consistent with the principles of historic preservation and conservation enshrined in Litchfield's planning code and reaffirmed in the 2017 Plan of Conservation & Development. We also believe lodging of this type - once prevalent but long been absent from the economic and social fabric of our town center - will prove to be broadly accretive to Litchfield's long-term vitality.

Unlike other New England towns of similar stature, comparable commercial activity and diversity of cultural and recreational amenities, Litchfield is critically starved of lodging capacity for visitors to our town center. We understand the Greater Litchfield Preservation Trust is presently working toward the adaptive reuse of the Superior Courthouse as a lodging establishment. This is an entirely unaffiliated effort to our own, but one that we very much support.

#### **PLANNING & ZONING**

As we understand it, the current zoning code does not allow a lodging (or similar) designation to any property within or directly abutting the HTC. Given the clear need for lodging, it would seem that the existing code would either support a modification to and continuation of 31 North Street's current non-conforming use or, benefit from a nuanced revision to permit a modest amount of lodging as is contemplated by our plans for Rose Haven and what we understand to be the re-development plan for the Court House. We have intimate understanding of the lodging needs of Litchfield and our region and believe that the number of rooms proposed within these two properties would be well-scaled to the need and would be highly complementary of each other.

Alternatively, we understand 31 North Street could operate under the creation of an entirely new zoning designation for the property as a "transition zone/transitional use" between the HTC and RR zones. Or, as yet another and separate alternative, the property could be incorporated into the HTC while adopting a newly drafted lodging definition to amend the permitted uses within the HTC district. We would be open to these alternatives if preferred by your Commission.

However, as we have consulted with knowledgeable advisors and thought deeply on these alternatives, we fear that despite the best of intentions to bring 31 North into conformance, the incorporation of Rose Haven into the HTC might lead to unintended and less than desirable consequences. If included in the HTC, the property could be eligible for an expansion to other commercial uses not contemplated in our proposal. Our aim is to stabilize this property in a well-defined, limited and needed use for which it is uniquely suited - and maintain that use for the long term. We are concerned that in applying to Rose Haven the broad range of permissible commercial uses available within the HTC may create risk that a greater number of properties could become similarly eligible - a result that would likely be considered undesirable and inappropriate by local residents and businesses (ourselves included).

For those reasons and on the basis of our experience in the successful rehabilitation and adaptive re-use of West Street Yard, we favor a plan that we believe can garner wide-spread support and would follow the provisions of Litchfield's code and state law which support a site plan approval as a non-conforming use consistent with the pre-existing pattern of use for the property. In effect, a modification or continuation of a long-existing non-conforming use.

Similar to West Street Yard, a narrowly defined approval of our specific site plan would provide all stakeholders with long-term comfort that once adapted to lodging of an appropriate scale and scope of operations, the property would not evolve into a more intensive use over time. And, similar to West Street Yard, Rose Haven's current non-conformance is technical, resulting from a zoning designation inconsistent with its historic pattern of use which is, once distilled, in keeping with our lodging proposal.

A brief review of the history of 31 North Street will, perhaps, be of value to your Commission and to the public who have an interest in the future of the property. According to records available from the Litchfield Historical Society, the Charles Beldon House (c.1888) was then owned by a doctor who began to operate it as a rest home in 1945. The single-story structures behind the Beldon House were added in 1959. As configured and operated, Rose Haven housed 15 "aged residents" in the Beldon House, alongside capacity for a further 25 resident patients in the 1959 addition. This use of the property pre-dates existing zoning regulations, which later designated Rose Haven as HR-30.

In December 2002, the current owner was granted approval for a Special Exception – Expansion of the non-conforming use as a convalescent home. That approval, on file in the town records, allowed for approximately 12,000+ sq ft of additional new construction for use as a Nursing Home (following the demolition of the then blighted Deming Cottage in the early 2000's). In this expanded facility, the Beldon House would have continued as a residence for 15 people and accommodated up to an additional 43 resident patients in the remodeled rear extension. This approved expansion required the addition of 17 parking spaces. The overall built area was permitted to expand to ~38,000 sq ft.

Rose Haven initially listed for sale on February 8<sup>th</sup> 2019 for \$1,400,000. It has been on the market for more than two years. Over that time the asking price was reduced by approximately 50% to its current list price of \$699,000. During this unprecedented period of record residential sales volume, low housing inventory and rising prices, Rose Haven has proven to be unattractive to single family home buyers. Even at a deeply discounted price for a residence of this scale and location, no buyers have emerged. The investment required to restore 31 North Street to single family use is simply not economical.

If left vacant and allowed to deteriorate further, one should anticipate that, eventually, an opportunistic buyer will see enormous value in the structure, location and precedent entitlements as a medical

residential housing facility. While we could expect that a renewed and possibly expanded use for medical, rehabilitation and assisted living purposes will encounter substantial local resistance, such a plan will be difficult to stop in the face of a persistent and well capitalized prospective developer/operator.

We believe that we offer a financially viable alternative which will:

- Adapt and modify the property's current non-conforming use to fulfill present needs of our community, providing much needed lodging in the center of town.
- Restore the architectural integrity of the original house.
- Eliminate the risk of a significant and undesirable expansion.
- Represent a contextually appropriate "transitional" use between the HTC and the residential character of North Street.
- Be executed by well-qualified local residents whose interests are aligned with those of our neighbors and the town at large.

We aim to be efficient in our efforts as time is of the essence. We are grateful for the opportunity to consult with you so that we can chart our course in a collaborative manner. Our goal is to deliver a thoroughly satisfactory outcome for all constituencies for this highly visible property and, we believe we offer a construct that can receive broad support from its immediately adjacent neighbors and the community. Our aim is to immediately address our growing concern for a property we view as at risk for expanded use inconsistent with its surroundings. We are ambitious on behalf of this effort, eager to see it succeed and believe without reservation that our proposed construct will serve our community well.

We thank you in advance for your time and consideration. We look forward to working with you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'A. Champalimaud', written over a horizontal line.

Anthony Champalimaud

CC: Armand and Lauren Della Monica  
Bruce Schnitzer and Alexandra Champalimaud  
Mr. Teno West  
Mr. & Mrs. Eliot A. Wadsworth