

Short History of 750 Walnut

Beginning in 1960, the J. B. Williams Co. / Beecham put Cranford on the map as a laboratory and production center for famous brands like Geritol, Sominex, Aqua Velva, Williams Mug Shaving Soap and other pharmaceuticals and men's toiletries. It closed the site in 1987.

Hartz Mountain Industries bought the land in 1988 and attempted to open a 10-theatre multiplex and shopping mall on the site. The town's government and a local residents' group, Residents Against the Mall, eventually defeated these retail plans and the complex continued as office space.



Residents question developer's credibility about center

By MIKE VALKYS
 Members of Residents Against the Mall, the group opposing Hartz Mountain Industries Inc.'s plans for a shopping center on Walnut Ave. at the Beecham site, raised concerns over the developer's credibility in the wake of contradictory remarks from representatives of the firm over the past months.

RAM spokesman Debbie Magargal questioned the developer's integrity after a meeting between RAM members and Hartz vice president of property development Walter M. Smith Jr. to review plans for the site last week. Magargal questioned why Hartz had done an about-face from a statement one of their representatives made after the sale of the property last year that the developer would not re-zone the area for retail use. "How can you believe their credibility after that," asked Magargal.

Hartz Mountain purchased the 30-acre property last year for \$14.3 million according to township assessor John Duryee. Johnson & Johnson had acquired the originally 80,000-square-foot plot in 1977. It was later sold to the J.B. Williams Co., that subsequently enlarged the property to its current size in the late 1960s. Williams, a pharmaceutical manufacturer, subsequently was purchased by the National Biscuit Co., which allowed Williams to continue operations at the site. J.B. Williams later was sold to Beecham Products and a number of jobs were terminated after divisions were moved elsewhere. Hartz purchased the site last year.

Hartz senior vice president of law and public affairs Mort Goldfein and assistant vice president of property development Dan DeTrollio paid a courtesy call to the Township Committee last year after the sale was announced at a meeting attended by a number of residents from the Sunny Acres area. At that meeting last August, Goldfein told the governing body Hartz would "use the property as it is zoned." Goldfein also denied Hartz had any interest in the adjacent 85-acre Hyatt Clark site which many residents fear is the next step in a plan by Hartz to build a regional mall in the area.

Smith last week "categorically" denied Hartz had any interest in the Hyatt site, now owned by General Motors. "This is not the first step in some Machiavellian scheme," Smith said of the Hyatt site. "We don't ever expect to own it." He said he did not recall the meeting between Goldfein and the Township Committee, adding Goldfein was not part of the property development division of the firm.

Hartz contributed \$300 to the campaign to elect Vince DiIlla, the local

representative at the meeting by Sunny Acres member Loretta Smith because he knew DeTrollio. The law firm of which Capece is a partner shares offices with Hartz in Secaucus.

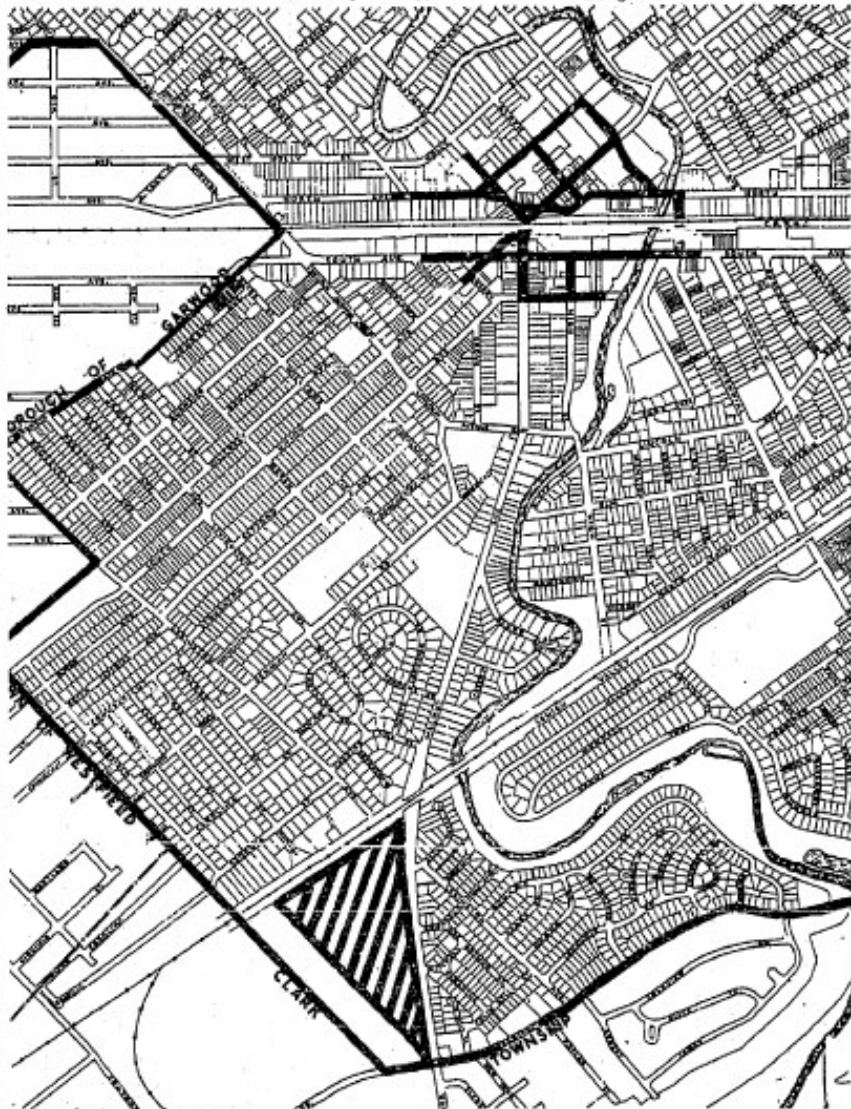
"I was asked for six months by residents to attend a meeting," Capece said. "I have had nothing whatsoever to do with the plan. I was not an in-

termediary." Smith said Friday Capece has "no function in Cranford for us at all."

When asked if Hartz would take the township to court if the application to re-zone is denied, Smith said he did not expect the application would reach that point. Hartz could sue the township if the application is denied,

according to Cranford Planning Board attorney James Keefe. He said the developer could file suit to overturn a denial if evidence existed that the decision was in some way "unreasonable."

The Planning Board will review the re-zoning plan June 21. The Township Committee must approve any zoning change.



SITE COMPARISON: Map from the engineering department outlines the location of the Beecham site on Walnut Ave. In comparison with the central business district, Hartz representatives