



Town of Ashland

MASSACHUSETTS

Planning Board Meeting Minutes

Remote via Zoom Video Conferencing

January 26, 2023, at 7:15 PM

Approved April 13, 2023

Present: Tricia Kendall, Chair
Anna Tesmenitsky, Vice-Chair
Catherine Jurczyk, Clerk
Marcelo Arjona, Member
Kevin McClean, Associate Member

Absent: Deepa Venkat, Member

Others: Peter Matchak, Town Planner



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Call to Order

Tricia Kendall called the meeting to order at 7:15 pm, mentioned that the session was being recorded and broadcast, and reviewed the meeting agenda.

Clerk's Report

Catherine Jurczyk, the Planning Board Clerk, reported that since January 12, 2023, the board received ten written public comments. Eleven comments received were concerning 399 Union St. to date, twelve were regarding 10 to 60 Main St. to date, and two concerned 9 to 49 Homer Ave. to date.

Public Hearings

399 Union Street Site Plan Review – Continued from Jan 12, 2023

Mr. Matchak reported that since January 12, 2023, the applicant submitted a revised rendering of the building's east elevation, a supplementary memorandum, and a revised Site Plan. He also received comments from Jerry Effren and Ron Mueller regarding the traffic study, and the Ashland Fire Dept provided a review of the bollards and access to the site.

Jerry Effren, the attorney representing the applicant, said that the revised Site Plan dated January 18, 2023, included additional fencing, landscaping, and the moving of the access ladder to the roof. He also offered the east side of the building as a place for a mural painted by an artist selected by the community. Mr. Effren noted that the applicant agreed to Ron Mueller's recommendations in the supplemental report and will implement them into the design. Mr. Effren explained that he filed the supplemental memorandum to address the appropriate Site Plan Review criteria standard, which he believed the applicant satisfied. He mentioned that several written comments were received from the public, including a statement from Economic Development that outlined the project's economic benefits.

Ms. Kendall commented on the supplemental memorandum and stated that although the board always reviews the criteria in Planning Bylaw Chapter 282, Section 9.4.6 - Site Plan Review Criteria and Design Plan Review, the members would also review Sections 9.4.2.1, 9.4.7, and 9.4.11, as those aspects of site plan and design plan review were within their purview.

Scott Rogers, from JK Home Engineering, reviewed the revised landscape plan and pointed out the location of the additional fencing and screen plantings.

Keith Bettencourt, from BKA Architects, reviewed the design element modifications that would improve the aesthetics, including the proposed mural.

Mr. Arjona expressed his support for the proposed changes.

Ms. Jurczyk asked the applicant to consider modifying the three existing curb cuts to improve safety. She questioned whether the blank wall to allow for a mural met Section 9.4.11.2 criteria and if the 6 ft. fence was intended to address the abutter request for an 8 ft. fence. Mr. Matchak said that there was no written agreement with the abutter.

Ms. Tesmenitsky complemented the applicant in proposing the mural. She commented on the sense of panic created concerning the board's opinion of the project, which was unreasonable. Ms.

Tesmenitsky suggested the board follow the Mueller report, ask for the recommended safety elements. The Board discussed hours of operations.

Mr. McClean supported the idea of the proposed mural and the changes that address the traffic and pedestrian safety concerns.

Ms. Kendall deferred to Ron Mueller's expertise and recommendations. She asked whether the existing fence could be repaired or replaced to match the proposed fence and appreciated the ideas for the façade.

Ms. Kendall opened the meeting for public comment.

Mark Dassoni asked about the shape of the building and the greenery depicted in the rendering.

Joan Gonfrade commented on the building's shape and architectural style and asked if a less modern façade was possible.

The board took an informal vote. Mr. Arjona expressed his support. Ms. Tesmenitsky supported the project but raised concerns about the project's lack of community alignment. Ms. Jurczyk expressed concern regarding pedestrian and biking safety. Mr. McClean voiced his support. Ms. Kendall recommended that the members review the draft decision and take a formal vote at the next meeting.

Mr. Matchak noted that the final decision period has expired, and therefore the applicant must agree to a continuance.

Mr. Effren asked the board to close the public hearing this evening, and then review the conditions and vote at the next meeting. The applicant agreed to a continuance to Friday, February 10, one day after the next meeting.

There was a brief discussion concerning the blank wall as what the board would vote on, and completing the mural would be a future consideration and funded by the town.

Mr. Arjona motioned to close the 399 Union St. public hearing. Ms. Tesmenitsky seconded the motion. Tesmenitsky-aye, Jurczyk-aye, Arjona-aye, McClean-aye, and Kendall-aye; vote of 5-0-0.

9-49 Homer Avenue Site Plan and Special Permit- Continued from Jan 12, 2023

Mr. Matchak noted that the applicant must file for demolition permits, and he invited the applicant to tour the downtown to observe the streetscape and redevelopment efforts.

Terry Morris, the attorney representing the applicant, WJK Homer LLC, addressed comments from the board regarding economic viability and said preliminary indications are that there is great demand for small businesses in this location. He said participating in the downtown site walk helped to understand the importance of aligning the site with the downtown revitalization and ensuring public connectivity to the train station and downtown businesses.

Ron Bourque, the project architect from Bourque Design, reviewed the site's aerial view and renderings and identified the single entry and exit location and the design elements to support connectivity and cohesiveness between the site and the surrounding districts.

Ms. Tesmenitsky asked, and the applicant responded that they had considered opening the first-floor green space for the community. However, they opted to install a pocket park for public access. She also asked the applicant to address the Upper Charles Trails request for bicycle access and to consider developing the old train station for commercial use.

Mr. Arjona supported maintaining the private open space for the residents. He asked for more information about the retail and commercial opportunities.

Ms. Jurczyk asked if there was an opportunity to save and integrate the historic buildings to enhance village design and walkability. Mr. Morris said they had not planned to save those buildings, as they were deemed unsalvageable, but they were open to reconsidering.

Mr. McClean noted that the Upper Charles Trail would temporarily run down to Homer Ave. and asked the applicant to consider integrating the trail into the sidewalk. He also wondered if the old train station could be tied into the site.

Ms. Kendall opened the meeting for public comment.

Mark Dassoni asked about the construction plan, the building's footprint, and the mix-use elements on the first floor.

Joan Gonfrade commented on the public space on the ground floor and the onsite parking.

Joe Magnani asked for clarification concerning the parking, environmental testing, and affordability. Ms. Kendall explained that the parking would be under the building below grade. Mr. Morris responded that the environmental testing was clean, and the development will have 29 residential units and approximately 10% affordable.

The members expressed the need to continue the discussion of environmental, fire, traffic, safety, and affordability concerns and document specific points for the Design Review Committee's (DRC) review.

Mr. Matchak said he would work with the applicant to schedule a technical review around the second week of February. The members asked for a memo that outlines the technical review results.

Ms. Jurczyk motioned to continue the 9-49 Homer St. Special Permit and Site Plan until February 23, 2023, at 7:15 pm. Ms. Tesmenitsky seconded the motion. Tesmenitsky-aye, Jurczyk-aye, Arjona-aye, McClean-aye, and Kendall-aye; vote of 5-0-0.

Scenic Road Public Hearing: 34 High Street Stonewall Opening- Continued from Jan 12, 2023

Ms. Kendall summarized that the board's decision would be in two parts. The first concerned the general agreement that it would be acceptable to open the stone wall to allow for the driveway. The second part involved the remaining stones and how they should be used.

The board reviewed an email from the Town Council that addressed Ms. Jurczyk's question concerning the bylaw and confirmed the Planning Board's authority to approve the wall reconstruction in an alternate location.

Matthew LeBrie, representing the applicants, reviewed photographs of the site and pointed out a location to re-establish the stone wall at the point where it would connect an existing inner stone wall.

Ms. Jurczyk motioned to accept the scenic road application to remove at most 20 ft. of stone at 34 High St. and attach the stone to the other wall near the property. Mr. Arjona seconded the motion. Tesmenitsky-aye, Jurczyk-aye, Arjona-aye, McClean-aye, and Kendall-aye; vote of 5-0-0.

10-60 Main Street Special Permit and Site Plan Review- Continued from Dec 15, 2022

Mr. Matchak readvertised the public hearing because Ms. Venkat missed two meetings. Therefore, the public hearing would continue, with Mr. McClean as the fifth voting member.

Ms. Kendall felt all regulations would be met throughout the process, but more questions may arise. Concerning the timing of going before the Conservation Commission (ConCom), George Connors said the application would be filed next week. The ecological review was completed, and it included the floodplain and the river zone. Mr. Connors reviewed the Site Plan and showed where the river zone ends at the existing wall. He said that because the site is a historic mill complex under the Dept. of Environmental Protection (DEP) 310 CMR 1058, it is exempt from the River Protection Act as an active historic mill site. However, ConCom would have jurisdiction over the stormwater and drainage

work and the Notice of Intent that the river is not impacted. Mr. Connors said the stormwater would be pumped into a formalized, updated drainage system with an emergency generator. Waivers would be requested for cleansing the stormwater since it will not be recharged into the ground.

The water would connect from the street with a parallel loop for each building's domestic and fire protection services. Mr. Connors said that in February 2020, he requested information from the town concerning the water main, which has yet to be provided. However, he was confident the pipe had adequate capacity for the site. He noted that the water line is not in the Nyanza plume or contaminated soil.

Ms. Kendall asked if the catch basin layout and water supplies are flexible and could change as the building design potentially changed due to the design meeting in November 2022. Mr. Connors responded that the water line would connect to the building, whatever its size. However, the water system is based on the current plan and could move slightly, but the hydraulic analysis would have to change.

Regarding water treatment, Mr. Connors said there is no formal treatment system to remove the sodium chloride. However, a certain percentage of total suspended solid at the bottom of the catch basin would be captured, and hoods on the gas traps would remove oil sheens from what is discharged into the river.

Rich Gordon said that despite the in-person design discussion in November, the conclusion was that only a few changes could be made due to the constraints.

Scott Richardson, the project architect and designer, reviewed a summary of the discussion. It included creating a central building with a courtyard and relocating the entrance. He said the setback for building 50 would be increased to allow for the front patio area along Main St. Regarding redeveloping building 34; he said that its shape, 50 ft. by 104 ft., does not lend itself to being renovated for apartment use, and it has no useful features for being renovated. More commercial space would be planned for buildings 10 and 20 lower levels. Developing the riverwalk, coordinating with Mill Pond Park, and adding additional green space would be considered. They will look closer at the elevations to add more variety, and stone tower elements will be added to the Myrtle St. and the building 50 entrance. Mr. Richardson said that the basic massing and configuration of the buildings would remain as designed, incorporating the 200 units and approximately 30,000 sq. ft. of commercial space.

The members expressed their disappointment that no design changes were made and suggested tapping into other resources to obtain different options. They also discussed that the timing might not be right for the project and voting, given that there had been no progress. In addition, they discussed the potential of seeking relief on the building height to eliminate one of the major constraints.

The applicant said that based on the member's comments, they would take another look at the constraints and the design; and, therefore, asked for a continuance.

Ms. Kendall motioned to continue the 10-60 Main St. Site Plan Review public hearing until February 23, 2023. Ms. Tesmenitsky seconded the motion. Tesmenitsky-aye, Jurczyk-aye, Arjona-aye, McClean-aye, and Kendall-aye, with a vote of 5-0-0.

"Village of Americas" Phase VIII Preliminary Subdivision

Mr. Matchak reported that the applicant requested a continuance until February 9, 2023.

Ms. Kendall motioned to continue the Village of Americas Phase VIII Preliminary Subdivision public hearing until February 9, 2023. Ms. Tesmenitsky seconded the motion. Tesmenitsky-aye, Jurczyk-aye, Arjona-aye, McClean-aye, and Kendall-aye, with a vote of 5-0-0.

Review of Decisions for the following cases:

Mr. Matchak reported that the members must sign the decisions for the “Village at Clocktown” Preliminary Subdivision – 58 Exchange Ashland, and 34 Albert Ray Drive, T-Mobile equipment update.

Planning Topics

Scenic Roads Outreach

No discussion.

MBTA Communities

No discussion.

Economic Impact Tool

No discussion.

Reports from Board Members and Town Planner

Sustainability Committee

Regarding the resources to develop the Sustainability Checklist, Ms. Kendall reported that Matt Marshquist from the Sustainability Committee and Cathy Rooney, and Ujwala Pawnarkar from the Design Review Committee would participate. Ms. Tesmenitsky and Mr. Arjona would represent the Planning Board, and Ms. Kendall would be their backup.

Design Review Committee (DRC)

No discussion.

Comprehensive Plan

Ms. Tesmenitsky reported that the leadership committee has begun recruiting for the Steering Committee, and the draft request for a proposal for a consultant is underway.

Inclusionary Zoning

No discussion.

Community Preservation Committee (CPC)

No discussion.

Other

None.

Administrative Matters: future meetings, public hearings

Applications Received

No update.

Meeting Schedule

No update.

Topics for Future Meetings

No update.

Minutes Review

None.

Adjournment

Ms. Kendall motioned to adjourn the meeting at 11:30 pm. Ms. Tesmenitsky seconded the motion; Venkat-aye, Tesmenitsky-aye, Arjona-aye, Jurczyk-aye, McClean-aye, and Kendall-aye, with a vote of 5-0-0.