



Town of Ashland

MASSACHUSETTS

Planning Board Meeting Minutes

Remote via Zoom Video Conferencing

February 23, 2023, at 7:15 PM

Approved April 27, 2023

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

Others: Peter Matchak, Town Planner

Call to Order

Tricia Kendall called the meeting to order at 7:16 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 February 9, 2023, the board had received two correspondences; however, none were concerning items on the agenda.

Ashland Fire Department Discussion

Ms. Kendall explained that the board invited the Fire Dept to tonight's meeting to learn more about their application evaluation process and what the Planning Board should understand about its interests.

Lyn Moraghan, Ashland Fire Dept. Deputy Chief addressed a question from the board concerning the use of bollards and crash-rated planter boxes. She said there are multiple bollard-type designs. However, bollards in front of buildings and walkways fall under the Building Code, and the Fire Dept. only codes bollards for oil and propane tanks and solar energy walls placed in garages. Ms. Moraghan said that during the technical review for new commercial and multi-family residential developments, the Fire Dept considers bollard options for life safety, including the appropriate sizing. She also said the evaluation of a new building includes whether a sprinkler system is appropriate, a standpipe system in the stairwells, fire alarms, access in and out of the building, and the swift path analysis that confirms the turning ratios at the egress and perimeter of the property.

Regarding electric vehicle storage and roof-mounted solar panels, Ms. Moraghan said the codes are evolving. She further explained that storing an electric vehicle in an underground garage creates a challenging hazard for firefighting a car battery fire, as the battery is housed in a very secure waterproof compartment. Therefore, the best practice is to charge electric vehicles outside.

Concerning roof-mounted solar panels, Ms. Moraghan explained that the potential challenge for firefighting depends on the number of panels and whether they are mounted on one or multiple sides of the roof, as the latter is more challenging to tackle. Also, solar systems remain energized after being turned off, limiting firefighters' maneuverability. Ms. Moraghan said energy storage walls have increased in popularity and are safer if they are located outside.

Ms. Moraghan said she supported sharing the Fire Dept's application review findings with the Planning Office via a memo or checklist. Mr. Matchak said he would work with Ms. Moraghan to develop a template.

Public Hearings

9-49 Homer Ave Site Plan and Special Permit – Continued from Jan 26, 2023

Mr. Matchak reported that the 9-49 Homer Ave. technical review was completed and the Fire Dept. outlined their concerns regarding the site's egress. Therefore, he is awaiting the applicant's revised plan.

Ms. Kendall stated that the Planning Board should send suggested design-related questions for the Design Review Committee (DRC) to Mr. Matchak. She also recommended scheduling a site walk for the board and the DRC.

Ms. Kendall motioned to continue the 9-49 Homer Ave Site Plan and Special Permit application to Thursday, March 9, 2023, at 7:15 pm. Ms. Tesmenitsky seconded the motion; Venkat-aye, Tesmenitsky-aye, Jurczyk-aye, Arjona-aye, and Kendall-aye; vote of 5-0-0.

10-60 Main St Special Permit and Site Plan Review - Continued from Jan 26, 2023

Mr. Matchak explained that the Planning Board requested the applicant provide additional Site Plan options. He uploaded the revised rendering to the town website and distributed it to the Planning Board. He introduced the project team, including Rich Gordan, the property owner; Scott Richardson, the architect; Craig Seymour, the economic development analyst; Joe Antonellis, the attorney representing the applicant; and George Connor, the civil engineer.

Rich Gordan stated that the project team appreciated the board's feedback and restructured the plan to open up areas of the property for all in the community to enjoy. Mr. Gordon noted the project's current economic challenges, such as increased material costs, supply chain issues, labor shortages, and high-interest rates. He said the project improvements would come at a price, as the project must be economically feasible. Therefore, they would provide 15% affordable housing.

Scott Richardson reviewed the modified plan, which included eliminating Building 40 and adding a courtyard between Buildings 30 and 50. The unit count remained the same. However, the lower level of Building 20 would be used for residential storage space. They proposed adding a Historical Room in Building 10 and granite tower elements to frame the entrance of the common area. Mr. Richardson noted increased parking, expanded green space, and open common areas.

The board members thanked the project team for their efforts to address their feedback. They provided a few additional comments, including possibly modifying the parking area around Building 10 to include green space and a pedestrian walkway near the waterfall. The members discussed the types of businesses that could occupy the commercial space that would bring more vitality to the downtown area and whether additional parking would be needed. The 200 units and the development's scale and density were also raised as a point requiring further discussion.

Ms. Kendall opened the meeting for public comments.

Mark Dassoni commented that mixed-use would benefit the site and thought this development would be a good example to cite in the Comprehensive Plan.

Joan Gonfrade asked about the towers' concept. Mr. Scott responded that they have usable space.

The board members summarized their questions and asked for more finite calculations concerning parking, the affordable component reduction from 25% to 15%, floor plans, the unit mix, a memo that outlines adherence to the bylaw and the implication of adding a fourth floor and exceeding the height limitation, and the Fire Dept's feedback.

Ms. Kendall motioned to continue the 10-60 Main St. Special Permit and Site Plan Review public hearing until March 9, 2023. Mr. Arjona seconded the motion. Venkat-aye, Tesmenitsky-aye, Jurczyk-aye, Arjona-aye, and Kendall-aye, with a vote of 5-0-0.

A future date for a joint meeting with the Conservation Commission (ConCom)

Mr. Matchak reported that a check-in meeting with ConCom was proposed to the ConCom Chair and the Conservation Agent Becca Solomon. He anticipated having a date for the meeting shortly and would provide ConCom with a list of points of interest for the discussion.

Discussion of new Pre-Application Conference with the Planning Board

Ms. Jurczyk suggested instituting an optional Planning pre-application conference for applicants. The idea was that it would streamline and make the process more efficient by addressing issues before beginning the public hearing. This would help reduce the number of continuances, time, and resources. The members supported the proposal and felt it should be considered when reviewing the Planning Board process.

Discussion of Accessory Dwelling Bylaw

Ms. Jurczyk proposed changing the Accessory Dwelling bylaw and making accessory dwelling units allowable by right. She suggested putting forth the proposal at the spring Town Meeting. Ms. Kendall recommended, as a first step, to pursue removing the requirement that the unit must be for a family member, as she thought changing the bylaw to by right would be a harder sell and require much more discussion.

Ms. Kendall said that she and Ms. Jurczyk would review the bylaw to see if it is relatively easy to modify to present as a warrant at the next Town Meeting.

Ms. Kendall motioned to add a placeholder for a bylaw change related to accessory dwelling units. Ms. Tesmenitsky seconded the motion. Venkat-aye, Tesmenitsky-aye, Jurczyk-aye, Arjona-aye, and Kendall-aye, with a vote of 5-0-0.

Planning Topics

Comprehensive Plan

No discussion.

Town Meeting Warrants

No discussion.

Scenic Roads Outreach

No discussion.

MBTA Communities

No discussion.

Economic Impact Tool

No discussion.

Reports from Board Members and Town Planner

Sustainability Committee

No discussion.

Design Review Committee (DRC)

No discussion.

Inclusionary Zoning

No discussion.

Community Preservation Committee (CPC)

No discussion.

Other

None.

Administrative Matters: future meetings, public hearings

Letter from Baystone Ashland LLC – February 2, 2023

Mr. Matchak explained that a joint meeting with the Select Board would be required to address the Covenant modification request submitted by Baystone Development, aka Ashland LLC. The applicant, Roy McDowell, requested an amendment to the Covenant approved in 2002 concerning the last phase of the Village of the Americas at 100 Chestnut St. He is seeking approval to allow the development of the remaining 174 units simultaneously. The basis of Mr. McDowell's request is to avoid an extended construction period that could disrupt the surrounding area.

Future Retreat Date

No discussion.

Applications Received

No updates.

Meeting Schedule

The next meeting is scheduled for March 9, 2023.

Topics for Future Meetings

Mr. Matchak noted that a meeting with the Upper Charles Trail Committee was rescheduled due to the school vacation.

Minutes Review

Ms. Kendall motioned to approve the December 15, 2022; minutes as amended. 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.

Adjournment

Ms. Kendall motioned to adjourn the meeting at 9:58 pm. Ms. Tesmenitsky seconded the motion; Venkat-aye, Tesmenitsky-aye, Arjona-aye, Jurczyk-aye, McClean-aye, and Kendall-aye, with a vote of 6-0-0.