



Town of Ashland

MASSACHUSETTS

Design Review Committee Meeting

Meeting Minutes

Thursday, July 20, 2023 at 7:00 PM

Via ZOOM

Attendees:

Cathy Rooney
Hannah Stein
Ujwala Pawnarkar
Brendan Carey

Public:

Helen Nichole
George Rakas

1. 7:00 PM – Call the meeting to Order
2. Correspondence & Updates: - None.
3. Historic Commission Intro – Helen Nickole – To use 9-49 Homer as an example: the 2 houses are historic by virtue of their age, built in 1840 and 1900. The Building Inspector for the building permit/demolition. And he would give them the application for a Demolition Delay. Besides Age, Architectural significance, and if someone worthy of note had lived in the house, done historic deeds. Currently there is no requirement to retain the historic features of the building.

For example Hall House - An event that happened there, that was the house/ barn of Henry Warren – the inventor of the synchronous motor was invented in the basement or the barn on the property. The synchronous motor was a significant development.

Do you take into the consideration the condition of the building – criteria?

If the building is sound, they might advocate for it to be saved. Sometimes demolition happens by neglect.

If a structure is deemed historic and worthy of saving the applicant has to delay the demo for a year, by right. The applicant is supposed to be making efforts at saving those buildings. Rarely is the teardown mitigated. We have a lot of historic structures that don't exist anymore. Those historic buildings are a connection to our collective past. It is more sustainable to save structurally sound buildings rather than to knock them down and start over.

For instance – if a building is privately owned, what's the Best Management Practice to encourage them to keep the historic façade? If a building is publicly owned we have something to say about the inside and the outside. If public monies like CPC were used, those parts of the structure would have to be saved. Historic district would also mean that the buildings were protected.

We don't have a legitimate historic district now. They are working with an historic preservationist from Hopkinton – Stacy Spies – to work on establishing a Historic District with it's own Commission

George Rakas - We met George Rakas at the Ashland Farmers Market. George has been construction project manager, and an engineer for a large sustainable energy company. Citizens should be able to have a say about what happens in their towns. What are the consequences of this, or any development for Ashland?

Understanding the impact to the citizens and for the future of the town. He is an historical renovation/ contractor in the past. His job was to help the contractors keep the towns' character true to their desired aesthetics. The towns still have character here – unlike one of the neighboring cities. Repercussions of parking, congestion, traffic. George has been construction project manager, and an engineer for a large sustainable energy company.

For 9-49 Homer, those buildings have been renovated so many times that they potentially do not have any historical significance. It would just be their foundations right now. The applicant needs to produce an EIS (Environmental Impact Study) due to the impacts of building in the entire envelope, putting in garage parking, and because of the constant vibration of the trains and the property proximity to the railroad tracks (within 100'). Currently, the ground is considered settled within 100' of the RR tracks due to their vibrations. Once they start breaking ground, they are creating a large area of unsettlement of the soils, which can crack existing foundations, utility lines, sidewalks and underground tanks and supply lines.

They need a similar Impact Report for that RR Station Building across Homer Street, and the gas station across Alden Street from the project. If they don't have it, they have to supply. It is imperative that they do things the right way as the digging, jack hammering, drilling and blasting will create additional significant vibrations to both those areas and other nearby structures. The applicant must abide by the noise compliance etc.

The process is that they do the SAS for all the area (Surrounding Area Study), including the municipal sidewalks, and the new utility lines in them. Then, based on the cost of repairing/replacing any breakages, they must have an insurance policy that would cover any and all potential damage in full. If any repairs to infrastructure, utilities, foundations and other public and private structures and utilities in the area. Those entities would apply to the insurance company to recoup the cost due to damage caused by construction. If their contractors cause damage – they will be held liable.

The applicant must produce a technical proposal on all phases of their construction and development. Soil on older sites like this are usually contaminated from the legacy of old usages/ buildings. Previous history of the land like an Auto Repair shop – if that leaked, or if they had spills, the trucks that have parked there and other storage that might have happened there. The previous owner let the school bus company stored the buses there (diesel); and also owned an oil business – all on unpaved soil. All contaminated soil must be remediated and disposed of in accordance with all state and federal guidelines. Proof of completed remediation by the state DEP will be submitted to the town so the building phase can begin.

Just one of these items is enough to trigger an impact for the EIS. A Soil Core(s) sample will be taken to test for ground contamination – (this is a usual part of building construction), the lot itself, and the perimeters so that any potential contamination is found, cleaned up and disposed of properly.

Soil Studies – are they done? If so, where are the results? Did they follow the ISO (International Standards Organization) approved process of testing?

How are they proceeding if they find ledge, or to install the footings for a building that large? Are they using explosives, and what's the range, strength, etc. This is a yearlong project. What are the additional impacts on the immediate and farther afield neighborhood, noise, soil, traffic congestion etc.? The project should have a full-time Safety Officer, a Neighborhood Liaison, a full-time police detail (paid for by developer) and a Clerk of the Works. These are positions that should be stand alone to the contractors normal building crew. Daily work flow and weekly progress charts should be submitted to the town so the town can prepare to direct resources for traffic control and possible utility outages.

Additional comments are as follows: The height of 40' (or close to that) breaks the coherence of Main Street – it looks out of place and will dwarf the other buildings on the street, and in the neighborhood and it will change forever the Look and Feel of downtown Ashland. We won't be able to go back.

Masonry front fascia – be compliant with downtown Ashland. For three stories, they need a variance. If they want the variance, they must be in compliance.

Sustainability 100% on the building. Will we start overloading the utilities that just got buried underground with all these new large projects being proposed? What is the current Draw/Usage; then tell Ever-Source and what is the current capacity and load that has been installed in downtown? Based on the number of apartments, 9-49 will need two transformers and, the Mills Buildings even more. What will both of them do to the water requirements and the sewer capacity? How many units are being removed and how many units are being built? How much will the current utilities be deficient?

In Ashland – what are the consequences of this development for Ashland?

The committee is in agreement that a letter be written to the Planning Board. A motion was made by Ujwala Pawnarkwr, seconded by Brendan Carey to ask Hannah to draft a letter to the PB. We will meet next week briefly to discuss. Unanimous consent – Ujwala Pawnarkwr, Brendan Carey, Hannah Stein, Cathy Rooney.

George Rakas asked about, and is interested in joining the committee. He has lots of knowledge and information for us. Cathy will forward him the information about applying for the other associate position.

4. Hearing for 9-49 Homer Ave continued from June 15, is now continued until August 3
5. Reports
 1. AFM – Report from event: those who were there briefly commented in favor of what the value of doing outreach, and we will start working on final edit of the survey, publicizing and getting it up online.

No discussion of the following other reports.

2. Comprehensive Plan: BN - updates
 3. Reporting Documents for Reviews by DRC (Template): ongoing
 4. Plate Glass windows and building sides stanchions (sent to DRC) HS & CR - photos
 5. Signage: HS
 6. Scenic Roads: BC
 7. Other Reports
6. Minutes – any outstanding – none this time.
 7. Discussion of parking lot bylaws and design – minimum parking spaces for trigger.
 8. Discussion of proposed bylaw changes and comments from the Planning Board
 - i. Changes to the design review triggers (section 9.6)
 - ii. The site plan review application requirements (section 9.4)
 9. Discussion of proposed guideline changes and presenting changes to Planning Board
 - i. Planting intro and guideline fact sheets
 - ii. Parking guidelines
 10. Other Business –
 11. Adjournment. – A motion was made to adjourn at 8:30pm by Brendan Carey, seconded by Ujwala Pawnarkwr Unanimous Brendan Carey, Ujwala Pawnarkwr, Hannah Stein, and Cathy Rooney.