



Design Review Board Meeting Minutes
Monday, August 7, 2023
7:30 p.m.

Board Members:

Mark Gluesing, Board Chair (P)

Susan Opton, Board Member (P)

Felix Zemel, Board Member (P)

Elisa Litchman, Administrative Specialist, Planning & Community Development (P)

Applicants & Attendees:

1. Lauren Pasquarella, Barlo Signs, representing Gentle Giant located at 422 Hillside Avenue and applying for signage.
2. Heather Hopkins, Hazel Wood Hopkins Sign Permit Consultants, representing Mass General Brigham located at 1450 Highland Avenue and applying for signage and an awning.
3. Tom Ryder, Needham Town Engineer, applying for message board signage to be located at 500 Dedham Avenue, Public Services Administration Building.
4. Evans Huber, attorney with Frieze Cramer Rosen & Huber, LLP, representing Neehigh LLC owner of 629 Highland Avenue and applying for a site plan review.

Chair Gluesing called the meeting to order on August 7, 2023, at 7:30 p.m. He reviewed the remote meeting procedures.

Agenda Item 1:

Lauren Pasquarella, Barlo Signs, representing Gentle Giant located at 422 Hillside Avenue and applying for signage.

Ms. Pasquarella explained that the proposal is for a non-illuminated, dishpan sign to replace an existing sign. The sign is proposed to be 2" deep, centered above a bay door, and has digitally printed vinyl graphics. The existing sign will be removed. The lettering on the sign is proposed to range from approximately 4"-21" high.

Ms. Opton suggested that the placement of the sign could be better but has no concern with the sign itself.

Mr. Zemel stated that he likes that the proposed sign matches the size of the existing sign.

Chair Gluesing stated that the Board does not generally like to see phone numbers placed on signs. He noted that the existing sign would likely not have approved at 32.5 s.f., as the limit is 32 s.f. He suggested changing the proposed sign from 9'4" to 9'1". Ms. Pasquarella agreed.

Mr. Zemel explained that phone numbers on signs can sometimes be useful. Disallowing this could impact public safety, if people are seeking to find a number quickly while driving by. Ms. Pasquarella agreed that the applicant finds the phone number to be integral to the sign.

Upon a motion duly made by Ms. Opton and seconded by Mr. Zemel, it was voted to approve the sign for 422 Hillside Avenue, with the condition that it be shortened to a width of 9'1". Susan Opton – aye; Felix Zemel – aye; and Chair Gluesing - aye. Motion passed 3-0.

Agenda Item 2:

Heather Hopkins, Hazel Wood Hopkins Sign Permit Consultants, representing Mass General Brigham located at 1450 Highland Avenue and applying for signage and an awning.

Ms. Hopkins explained that the sign proposed for the front elevation is 24"x 84", 14 s.f., non-illuminated, and an aluminum backing with aluminum mounted letters. The second proposed sign is on the parking lot elevation. There is an existing dimensional, non-illuminated 31 s.f. sign. The proposal is to replace this with a 32 s.f. aluminum panel sign with vinyl graphics. The rear of the site also has an existing awning that the applicant is proposing to recover and change to 7 s.f. non-illuminated graphics. This is being proposed due to Mass General Brigham taking over many small medical sites throughout the State.

Mr. Zemel suggested that the proposed white panel sign, EO3, more closely match the white building. Ms. Hopkins stated that she would request this of the applicant, but the applicant has a standard white it uses for its signs.

Ms. Opton stated that the placement of the proposed sign EO3 should match the placement of the existing sign on the window. She would rather the applicant fix the holes on the building and move it up.

Chair Gluesing noted that the Highland Avenue sign seems to show a mounting channel. He asked why this is not also proposed for the sign on the side. The applicant stated the side sign is surface mounted, the screws will be painted to match the sign.

Upon a motion duly made by Ms. Opton and seconded by Mr. Zemel, it was voted to approve the three signs for 1450 Highland Avenue, with the condition that sign EO3 be located in the same area as the existing sign, and to make the white as close to the color of the building as possible. Susan Opton – aye; Felix Zemel – aye; and Chair Gluesing - aye. Motion passed 3-0.

Agenda Item 3:

Tom Ryder, Needham Town Engineer, applying for message board signage to be located at 500 Dedham Avenue, Public Services Administration Building.

Mr. Ryder explained that the Town has funding to install a variable message board. The proposed location is staked. The sign will have standard coloring and contain simple safety or municipal messages. The proposed message board is 3'x 7.5', two-sided, and includes a static header sign panel, approximately 1.5' tall. Messages will be displayed per Town Hall's policy. The sign will be installed on posts, the bottom of the sign approximately 2' above ground.

The Board agreed to continue this item until the final scale and artwork for the static header panel has been selected and proposed. The Board noted the electronic sign, and its location are acceptable. They asked that the applicant compare the pixel clarity of the proposed sign with the existing electronic sign at the RTS.

Agenda Item 4:

Evans Huber, attorney with Frieze Cramer Rosen & Huber, LLP, representing Neehigh LLC owner of 629 Highland Avenue and applying for a site plan review.

Mr. Huber explained that there is currently a group of five commercial buildings on this site. The proposal is to demolish these buildings and construct a 50,000 s.f. medical office building. This will include two levels of parking and a total of 250 parking spaces. One of the parking levels will be completely below grade and the other will be at grade, except where it is located underneath the building. The building will have a 25,000 s.f. footprint.

Daniel Barton, Maugel DeStefano Architects, stated that the site has a significant topography change from Highland Avenue to the back of the site. The new design of the site includes a 32' minimum setback along Highland Avenue. This allows for a robust landscape plan. The new plan also proposes an overall decrease in the length of building that fronts along Highland Avenue. The plan includes two major improvements including an approximate 12,600 s.f. decrease in impervious ground/parking/paved areas, or a 31% overall decrease, and an almost 12,000 s.f. increase of landscaped/pervious areas, totaling approximately an 82% overall increase in greenscape. Of the 250 spaces required to meet the requirements, only a portion of these is visible.

The proposed first floor of the building along Highland Avenue sits approximately 4'-5' above existing grade. The main entrance into the medical office space is located underneath the building, with a covered drop-off area for patrons and staff. The plan includes covered bike parking, pathways, and some illumination. The building is intended to be a state-of-the-art medical office, with a simple and straightforward design. The design of the site is intended to maximize the site's inherent characteristics, to minimize the view of the parking, and to enhance the site. A photometric plan shows minimal lighting intended for safety and to keep all illumination on site. All proposed lighting will be downward and night sky compliant. The proposed building is clad in metal panel siding and includes a louvered sunshade. There will be vision barrier screens at the roof level to conceal equipment. The site will include a landscaped outdoor plaza area. Emergency vehicle access will occur under the building. Planters are proposed to screen along the edge of the parking level. The layout of the site allows for circulation of vehicles between parking levels without having to exit onto Highland Avenue.

Mr. Zemel asked how this building will fit in with surrounding buildings, which are red brick. Chair Gluesing noted that he believes there will be upcoming changes to this neighborhood in the future. Ms. Opton agreed that this building may stand out a bit, but she is not opposed to this.

Ms. Opton noted that there is an unsightly telephone pole along Cross Street. Justin Mosca, VHB noted that this is not part of the project right now. The applicant team stated that it is currently proposed to be relocated. The hope is to remove it.

Ms. Opton asked about the location for the proposed red oaks. It was noted that these would likely be located along Highland Avenue or along Cross Street. Ms. Opton noted that acorns could be an issue for potential pedestrian locations. She also noted that the root systems created may be large. The Chair noted the size of the planting bed should support the trees proposed.

Chair Gluesing asked about any planned future signage for the site. The applicant team stated that a property number may be considered for the retaining wall, but signage will be held off on until a specific tenant is determined. Chair Gluesing noted that there are restrictions on hours of lighting that should be considered moving forward.

The Board noted that it is a well-designed building, and the site plan deals well with the topography of the site. The landscaping plan is very robust and varied, using terraced retaining walls and planting beds to deal with the site topography.

The Board stated that it would send along comments to the Planning Board.

Minutes:

Minutes from the 07/10/2023 meeting

Upon motion duly made by Mr. Zemel and seconded by Chair Gluesing, it was voted to approve the meeting minutes of July 10, 2023, as presented. Felix Zemel – aye; and Chair Gluesing - aye. Motion passed 2-0.

Upon motion duly made by Ms. Opton and seconded by Mr. Zemel, it was voted to adjourn at 9:01 p.m. Susan Opton – aye; Felix Zemel – aye; and Chair Gluesing - aye. Motion passed 3-0.

Next Public Meeting – August 21, 2023 at 7:30pm via Zoom Webinar