



Design Review Board Meeting Minutes
Monday, June 10, 2024
7:30 p.m.

Board Members:

Susan Opton, Board Member (P)

Felix Zemel, Board Member (P)

Steve Dornbusch, Board Member (P)

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

Steve Dornbusch, Acting Chair, called the meeting to order on June 10, 2024, at 7:30 p.m. He reviewed the remote meeting procedures.

Applicants & Attendees:

1. Gary McCoy, Poyant Signs, representing CVS
2. Paul Sahagian, Owner of Learning Express, and Joe Foley, Dorchester Awnings
3. Scott Melching, Architect, representing Needham Garden Center
4. David Becker, Owner of Sweet Basil restaurant

Agenda Item 1:

Gary McCoy, Poyant Signs representing CVS located at 980-986 Great Plain Avenue and applying for signage.

Gary McCoy stated that there are currently two signs, one on the front and one on the rear, 22” high under 32 s.f. with the existing CVS logo. The new logo is 21” high and below the 32 s.f. allowance. The signs will be of the same construction methodology and illumination as the existing signs.

Upon motion duly made by Mr. Zemel and seconded by Ms. Opton, it was voted to consider both sign applications for this applicant as one vote. Steve Dornbusch – aye; Felix Zemel – aye; Susan Opton – aye; Motion passed 3-0-0.

Mr. Zemel asked about an additional existing illuminated sign in the store’s front window. Mr. McCoy stated that this is not part of the scope of work for this project and will likely remain.

Upon motion duly made by Ms. Opton and seconded by Ms. Zemel, it was voted to approve the application as submitted. Steve Dornbusch – aye; Felix Zemel – aye; Susan Opton – aye; Motion passed 3-0-0.

Agenda Item 2:

Paul Sahagian, Owner of Learning Express and Joe Foley, Dorchester Awnings representing Learning Express located at 1029 Great Plain Avenue and applying for awnings with signage.

Paul Sahagian, Learning Express, explained that the proposal is to replace the existing awnings to change the color and place white lettering for the business. The logo for Learning Express Toys & Games is proposed to be placed on the main awning over the doors. The request is to be able to place the wording “Books-Games, Baby Gifts, Puzzles, Tween-Crafts,” on the smaller awnings to the side of the main one.

Mr. Dornbusch stated that he would be more comfortable with the main awning wording as proposed, and remove all text on other awnings or to remove the “Toys & Games” wording on the awning over the entrance and keep the text on the smaller awnings. The proposed wording for “Books-Games, Baby Gifts, Puzzles, Tween-Crafts,” seems to have a lot of letters and may be too much for the space.

Mr. Zemel stated that he believes the proposed “Books-Games, Baby Gifts, Puzzles, Tween-Crafts,” wording is well spaced on the awnings. If this is approved, he would propose a condition that there not be a sandwich board in the front of the store, unless for special events.

Mr. Dornbusch stated that he believes a sandwich board would have to be approved anyway.

Ms. Opton asked if any lettering is proposed for the windows. Mr. Sahagian stated that there is not. Ms. Opton stated that the proposed lettering for the awnings seems appropriate, as the awnings seem plain without any lettering. She asked if each awning equals a sign when calculating the allowable space. Mr. Dornbusch expressed concern with allowing the additional awnings being a slippery slope. Ms. Litchman explained that this may require a Special Permit, as each awning would be considered a sign.

Ms. Opton suggested approving the main awning sign at this time and coming back at a future time to consider the additional awnings.

Upon motion duly made by Ms. Opton and seconded by Ms. Zemel, it was voted to approve the main awning as submitted, and no lettering on the smaller awnings at this time. Steve Dornbusch – aye; Felix Zemel – aye; Susan Opton – aye; Motion passed 3-0-0.

Agenda Item 3:

Scott Melching, Architect representing Needham Garden Center located at 53 Chestnut Street and applying for signage, awnings and façade changes.

Scott Melching, architect, explained that the proposal is to place a hardware store in the back of this property, when the Garden Center moves to the front. The entrance will be located off Chestnut Street. The owner has partnered with True Value hardware for that portion of the business. On the left-hand side of the building, there is a current workshop area for the Garden Center. This has an overhead rolling door, which is proposed to be replaced with a new, larger door (extra 2’ wide), with an added light. The light will be directed downward and only shine on the door. The existing façade of this area is a BrickMaster, pressed faux-brick material. This area will be reclad with composite siding.

Mr. Zemel asked if the proposed lighting is dark sky compliant and the purpose of the lighting. Mr. Melching stated that this will be dark sky compliant, as it is downcast. The purpose for the lighting is for when bringing in materials during winter months, when it gets dark early.

Upon motion duly made by Ms. Opton and seconded by Ms. Zemel, it was voted to approve the façade change for the garage door and lighting application, as submitted. Steve Dornbusch – aye; Felix Zemel – aye; Susan Opton – aye; Motion passed 3-0-0.

Mr. Melching stated that the second application deals with the façade along Chestnut Street. Currently, each door is in a different location, each window is in a different location, and each window is a different size. There are four awnings proposed to clean up this façade. These will be located symmetrically to the center of the building. These will be used to cover the windows, making them appear more symmetrical. The awnings will be the same size, to provide clear organization to the façade. There is also a proposal for six gooseneck, dark sky compliant lights, only to shine onto the awnings. The awnings are 5’6” tall and come 14” off the building. These are meant to add color, organization, and focus on the brand of the business.

Mr. Zemel noted that the awnings will do the façade justice, especially if the façade is not being updated. This will help tie the building into the downtown area.

Upon motion duly made by Ms. Opton and seconded by Ms. Zemel, it was voted to approve the second application for the front façade awnings and lighting, as submitted. Steve Dornbusch – aye; Felix Zemel – aye; Susan Opton – aye; Motion passed 3-0-0.

Mr. Melching explained that the request is for the Board’s feedback on the sign applications in order to further discuss them with the Building Commissioner. The store currently has two signs indicating that the Learning Center and Garden Center were sharing the space on the north and south facades. Two signs were allowed because there were two frontages, one on Keith Place and one on Chestnut Street. The Building Commissioner has stated that only one frontage sign is allowed. The first application was to replace both signs, but there is a difference of opinion with the Building Commissioner on this. A new vinyl sign on the same metal background, the same height and size, stating “Needham Garden & TrueValue Hardware” is proposed for both of these existing sign locations. The light fixture will be repaired and replaced in kind. This is not internally illuminated. Each sign is 22 s.f., and this is proposed to stay the same.

Mr. Dornbusch stated that he cannot override the Building Commissioner. If only one sign is allowed, the second one will need to be smaller. A Special Permit application would be needed to keep the two signs the same size as the existing ones.

Mr. Zemel asked about the rationale for the two frontages, leading to the two existing signs. Mr. Melching stated that both streets show up on Google Maps and the assessor’s maps. It is unclear if the second street is a paper way. Ms. Opton stated that two signs would have been needed in the past, as there were two businesses on this property. As this will now be one combined business, and there will no longer be a side entrance, it appears only one sign would be needed. Mr. Melching explained that the door on the back right of the building will still be used as a lawn care area, but this will no longer be a front door.

Mr. Zemel suggested continuing this item until the two entrance issue can be better determined. Mr. Melching agreed that the applicant is looking for the Board's feedback on this item at this time in order to move to the next step.

The Board discussed a proposed projecting sign. It was noted that the full circle of the sign will need to be calculated, and the sign would need to be reduced to 1'8" diameter.

Upon motion duly made by Ms. Opton and seconded by Ms. Zemel, it was voted to continue the third application for the two wall signs, until more information can be provided. Steve Dornbusch – aye; Felix Zemel – aye; Susan Opton – aye; Motion passed 3-0-0.

Mr. Melching stated that the fourth application is to place the new business logo on three doors, two on Chestnut Street and one to the lawn care area. The logo is a clear 2' tall circle sign.

Mr. Dornbusch stated that the signs will need to be within 3 s.f. Mr. Melching stated that he will redesign the signs to be square and to fit within the 3 s.f. requirement. The hours will be lined up with the logo, on the bottom portion of the door, along with the business address.

Ms. Opton asked if these would be considered window signs. There is a 25% requirement for signs on windows. Mr. Melching stated that the doors are each approximately 18 ½ s.f. Ms. Opton stated that the logo could likely be 3 s.f., but the hours portion of the sign may need to be reduced.

Mr. Zemel stated that he does not believe the regulations would not consider these doors as windows.

Upon motion duly made by Ms. Opton and seconded by Ms. Zemel, it was voted to continue the fourth application for the three door signs, until more information can be provided. Steve Dornbusch – aye; Felix Zemel – aye; Susan Opton – aye; Motion passed 3-0-0.

Mr. Melching stated that the fifth application is for a projecting sign. This sign is proposed to be a 1'8"x1'8" square, projecting between the awnings, to the right of the entry when looking at the front façade. This will project over the front sidewalk.

Mr. Dornbusch noted that this sign should be 4' from the wall and 8' high.

In response to a question from Mr. Zemel, Mr. Melching stated that this projecting sign will not be illuminated. Mr. Zemel stated that this sign appears to be out of place with the other items proposed. This seems to overcrowd the façade, with all of the other awnings proposed.

It was explained that there is no street parking on Chestnut Street, so the signs on the side of the building may be necessary in order to illustrate the business. Mr. Melching stated that this proposal was created in order to address visibility to those traversing Chestnut Street.

Upon motion duly made by Ms. Opton and seconded by Ms. Zemel, it was voted to continue the fifth application for the projecting sign, until more information can be provided. Steve Dornbusch – aye; Felix Zemel – aye; Susan Opton – aye; Motion passed 3-0-0.

Ms. Litchman stated that the existing awning over the current door to the Garden Center was not part of the four awnings that were earlier approved. Mr. Melching stated that a quote is being generated for that awning currently and that he would like it included with the second application for the awnings.

Upon motion duly made by Ms. Opton and seconded by Ms. Zemel, it was voted to include the fifth, side awning, to be included with the second application, as submitted and previously approved. Steve Dornbusch – aye; Felix Zemel – aye; Susan Opton – aye; Motion passed 3-0-0.

Agenda Item 4:

David Becker, Owner of Sweet Basil restaurant located at 942 Great Plain Avenue and applying for outdoor seating.

David Becker, owner of Sweet Basil, explained that the proposal is to create a patio for outdoor seating, including jersey barriers and heavy planters to line the sidewalk.

Mr. Dornbusch asked about the jersey barriers. Mr. Becker stated that these will be painted in a pansy theme. Mr. Zemel suggested asking the Needham Council for the Arts to consider a mural for the barriers. Mr. Becker agreed to look into this.

In response to a question from Mr. Zemel, Mr. Becker stated that the patio will take up two parking spaces. Mr. Zemel stated that he is in favor with this, as long as the accessibility pathway is met.

Upon motion duly made by Ms. Opton and seconded by Ms. Zemel, it was voted to approve the application as submitted. Steve Dornbusch – aye; Felix Zemel – aye; Susan Opton – aye; Motion passed 3-0-0.

Minutes:

Minutes from the 05/20/2024 meeting

Upon motion duly made by Ms. Opton and seconded by Mr. Zemel, it was voted to approve the meeting minutes of May 20, 2024, as presented. Steve Dornbusch – aye; Felix Zemel – aye; Susan Opton – aye; Motion passed 3-0-0.

Upon motion duly made by Ms. Opton and seconded by Mr. Zemel, it was voted to adjourn at 9:04 p.m. Steve Dornbusch – aye; Felix Zemel – aye; Susan Opton – aye; Motion passed 3-0-0.

Next Public Meeting – June 24, 2024 at 7:30pm via Zoom Webinar