



Design Review Board Meeting Minutes
Monday, June 23, 2025
7:30 p.m.

Board Members:

Mark Gluesing, Board Chair (P)
Steve Dornbusch, Board Member (P)
Susan Opton, Board Member (P)
Felix Zemel, Board Member (P)
Elisa Litchman, Administrative Specialist, Planning & Community Development (P)

Mark Gluesing, Chair, called the meeting to order on June 23, 2025, at 7:30 p.m. He reviewed the remote meeting procedures.

Applicants & Attendees:

1. Tom Taricano, FastSigns representing Ace of Diamonds
2. Anne-Marie Bajwa, President and CEO of the Charles River Center; Phil Crean, Project Manager, Planning Office of Urban Affairs; Jason Szymanski, TAT; Rebecca Bachand, RBLA Design LLC - Charles River Heights, 59 East Militia Heights Drive.

Agenda Item 1:

Tom Taricano, FastSigns representing Ace of Diamonds located at 6 Brook Road, Needham, MA, and applying for signage.

Tom Taricano, FastSigns, explained that Ace of Diamonds will be a softball training facility. He previously spoke with the Building Commissioner regarding a Special Permit and was told this application could move forward as presented without a Special Permit due to the quantity of signs proposed. The primary sign is an aluminum bar frame sign with vinyl graphics. The mounting clips will be galvanized, and all brackets will be on the sides and not showing. Both signs are proposed to be 96"x48" which will match the signs that were previously on the building. The secondary sign on the other side of the building will match the location of the existing sign on the building.

Mr. Dornbusch asked if the signs will be illuminated. Mr. Taricano stated that they are not internally illuminated. There is one existing overhead light above the sign.

Upon a motion duly made by Mr. Dornbusch and seconded by Ms. Opton, it was voted to approve the signs for Ace of Diamonds at 8 Brook Road, as submitted. Felix Zemel – aye; Susan Opton – aye; Mark Gluesing – aye; Steve Dornbusch – aye; Motion passed 4-0-0.

Agenda Item 2:

Informal Discussion with Philip Crean, Real Estate Project Manager for a Comprehensive Permit project under Chapter 40B to be located at Charles River Heights, 59 East Militia Heights Drive.

Chair Gluesing noted that this project will be reviewed by the ZBA for final approval and the Board can draft comments or recommendations to the ZBA. The group is appearing at this time for an informal review.

Anne-Marie Bajwa, President and CEO of the Charles River Center, explained that the proposal is for an affordable housing development, Charles River Heights. This is a mission-based inclusive supportive housing project. The mission of the Charles River Center is about community and being included in the community. Roughly half of the proposed units will be designated for the clientele of the Charles River Center, and the other half of the units will be for the general community with various income abilities. The project will include a 50/50 integration for the people supported by the Charles River Center, providing them with intermittent flexible staff support. The project has been designed to be inclusive of the Needham community.

Phil Crean, Project Manager, Planning Office of Urban Affairs, explained that this project is a collaborative 40B, as it is a low-income housing project. The approach has been collaborative with the Town. The project has had a CPA funding commitment from the Town approved by Town Meeting. The applicant met with the Planning Board last week and met with Town staff the week prior. The applicant will be submitting its project eligibility letter application to the Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities in the next couple of weeks. That process will take about four months, including a comment period for all Town boards and Staff. The applicant anticipates receiving the project eligibility letter likely in mid-September. The applicant will then put together the comprehensive permit application and submit that to the ZBA in October. At some point, the applicant will be back to submit a more formal application to this Board.

Mr. Crean stated that the applicant is proposing 86 affordable units of housing; half of which will be set aside for the Charles River Center clientele and five units of those will be staffed. Those individuals will require approximately 30% of staff time and those units will also be handicap accessible. The applicant is proposing a 4,400 s.f. community room which will be open to members of the community, community groups, and the Town. There are existing walking trails nearby and the applicant would like to connect those trails to the site. The applicant is proposing four buildings, including one three story building which will house the majority of the units, and three single story structures. The plan shows 61 parking spaces, at a 1:1 ratio for the affordable units. The applicant is also discussing a potential partnership with North Hill regarding a shuttle service. All four buildings will be designed to achieve passive house standards.

Jason Szymanski, TAT, reviewed the proposed site plan. The main entrances will be off East Militia Drive, including an oval-shaped turn-round space providing drop-off space and visitor parking. Vehicular circulation moves around to the rear of building. The three one story buildings will each contain studio apartment units and a shared common living space. The shared units will have their own private bathroom and kitchen space. The community room building will also contain a lobby space, the mail and package management office, and a small lounge space providing access to the courtyard beyond it. The ground floor of the three-story building has a lot of fenestration with the community room being the focal point of the drive as one enters the site. The one-story buildings are clad with the combination of shake siding and standing seam metal. The three-story building will use similar materials to the one-story buildings in slightly different ways but with the same palette of materials. There is screening for the HVAC systems proposed on the roof of the building.

Rebecca Bachand, RBLA Design LLC, stated that the proposal includes tree-lined entry streets while maintaining as many existing trees as possible. The perimeter of the site is currently heavily wooded and some retaining walls will be added to try to maximize the tree retention along the edges. There are some invasive plant species on the site, and the proposal will include revegetation with native species. The plan shows the line of Conservation Commission jurisdiction and the limit of work in that area includes grading and revegetation with some additional plantings for screening. The intention is to use native, drought tolerant, low maintenance plant species. Foundation plantings will be included along the buildings, including screening for seating areas. There is an existing mix of lighting on the site, and she reviewed some proposed sconces. All lighting will be dark sky compliant.

Mr. Zemel stated that he is in full support of the concept.

Mr. Dornbusch stated that he is supportive of the project in hopes of helping with the housing crisis.

Ms. Opton asked about the proposed outdoor programming potential and where it may occur on the site. Ms. Bachand stated that most formal programming will occur in the larger courtyard, but there can also be passive recreation around the perimeter of the site.

Chair Gluesing complimented the proposed building designs, especially reading as residential buildings upon entering the site. He also likes the proposed material mix and colors. Having the community center be more daylit with additional glazing will be helpful and a nice addition to the site. He stated that the Board appreciates the proposed planting plan thus far. Defining the areas of proposed lawn will be helpful, along with different types of landscape edge areas than lawn. He suggested that the lighting around the site should be low-level, and pedestrian scaled in order to be a good neighbor. He suggested that community gardens may be nice to include on the site.

Mr. Zemel recommended reaching out to the co-chairs of the Committee on Disability to discuss this project.

REVIEW

Minutes of 6/2/2025 minutes

Upon a motion duly made by Mr. Dornbusch and seconded by Ms. Opton, it was voted to approve the meeting minutes of June 2, 2025. Felix Zemel – aye; Susan Opton – aye; Mark Gluesing – aye; Steve Dornbusch – aye; Motion passed 4-0-0.

Upon a motion duly made by Mr. Dornbusch and seconded by Ms. Opton, it was voted to adjourn at 8:20 p.m. Felix Zemel – aye; Susan Opton – aye; Mark Gluesing – aye; Steve Dornbusch – aye; Motion passed 4-0-0.

Next Public Meeting – July 14, 2025, at 7:30pm via Zoom Webinar