

NEEDHAM PLANNING BOARD MINUTES

June 7, 2011

The regular meeting of the Planning Board held in the Public Services Administration Building, was called to order by Sam Warner, Vice-Chairman, on Tuesday, June 7, 2011 at 7:30 p.m. with Messrs. Ruth and Jacobs and Ms. McKnight as well as Planning Director, Ms. Newman and Recording Secretary, Ms. Kalinowski.

Correspondence

Mr. Warner noted the following correspondence for the record: Michael Greis phoned to reschedule due to a School Committee change.

7:30 p.m. – Judi Barrett – 40B Guidelines.

Judi Barrett, of Community Opportunities Group, stated she was here to see what the Board thinks. Ms. McKnight asked why this was undertaken. Ms. Newman noted it was initiated about 18 months ago. The town needed regulations and rules and to develop a set of guidelines. They had never articulated the goals and objectives. Other committees had developed guidelines. They put money aside, then delayed it. They are now going forward with the project.

Mr. Jacobs asked what the Board's authority is to develop guidelines. Ms. Barrett stated there are no explicit authorities or guidelines but it goes better when put down on paper what they want. Mr. Jacobs asked if there are any legal challenges to any communities that have established guidelines. Ms. Barrett stated she is not aware of any. This is just a tool to regulate.

Ms. Barrett handed out a list of questions and multiple choice answers and asked what are the town's authorities. Mr. Ruth noted they were a mixture of all the answers. Mr. Jacobs noted to reach the 10% statutory minimum and to meet local and regional housing needs. He did not feel it was to create projects that look/feel "like Needham." Ms. McKnight stated reaching the 10% statutory minimum and even exceeding is the way to go. She feels they are pretty close. She noted the system no longer allows kids of parents who grew up in Needham as a priority.

Mr. Ruth asked if they could target people with disabilities. Ms. Barrett stated they could but they are a protected class. Mr. Ruth stated they need restrictions through CPA. Mr. Warner commented they should target young families and elderly. He would like to take pictures of what he likes. Ms. Newman stated they will be doing that.

Mr. Warner asked if a 40B could make a neighborhood better. Ms. Barrett informed him it depends on your view. Mr. Ruth noted the issue is density. Mr. Warner noted they should encourage towns to leave the streets better off and to trade landscaping. Mr. Jacobs stated he would like to see other people come up with all kinds of ideas. They do not need to duplicate others.

Ms. McKnight noted it is usually 8 units per acre. On Garden Street they originally wanted 12 but settled on 6. It was very nicely done. They preserved the historical house. It was originally 2 bedrooms. Her neighborhood wants families. This project has a neighborhood feel. In the end it was a good project. She noted projects in residential zones should stick to 8 units maximum per acre.

Mr. Ruth noted he has one concern. This is much more about guidelines in residential rather than other districts. This is not a message they want to send. Ms. McKnight noted a concern that development has an adverse affect on schools or an extra burden on schools. Many feel it will not have an impact on schools due to the small size of the units.

Ms. Barrett stated they feel the question “whose buy-in is most important in order for a set of 40B guidelines to be effective” will help town boards and be informative to town government. Ms. McKnight stated the developers buy-in would be most effective. It would be effective if they buy-in and if they do not buy-in it will be a waste. Mr. Ruth stated any buy-in from the community is unrealistic. It is June and the project is supposed to be done in 6 weeks. Ms. Barrett stated the question is more in designing the process by which the guidelines are implemented. Mr. Ruth noted that affects how they are adopted. Ms. McKnight stated the Historical Commission was left out of the list of groups. She feels they should be included. Mr. Ruth echoed Ms. McKnight’s comment.

Ms. Barrett asked if the guidelines should set preferred sites. Are any locations better than others? Mr. Ruth noted it is not such a large geographic area. He feels anywhere in town is potential. Ms. Barrett asked if some areas of town make more sense than others. Mr. Ruth noted the answer could change depending on the scale of the project. Mr. Jacobs stated he is not comfortable setting a location at all.

Ms. Barrett asked how far the town should go to communicate the guidelines. Should they publish the guidelines and help people listen? Should there be expedited permitting or just come talk to us? She asked what the Board’s thoughts were. Mr. Jacobs stated through whatever this process is there will be clear preferences and priorities established by the town. If this is not true then this question has no real answer for him. There needs to be clear preferences before the town should go any distance to communicate to developers.

Mr. Ruth stated the High Rock Homes project was very successful. The town actively supported it but probably that project would not have been touched by these guidelines.

Ms. Barrett asked if they should steer developers toward the Local Initiative Program comprehensive permit process or take a more passive approach. Ms. McKnight stated it has meaning if you are nearing the 10%. Or if the town is bringing some land to the table and encouraging the development of housing then it is likely to go forward under the local initiative. Mr. Jacobs and Mr. Ruth both stated they did not have enough information to comment.

Ms. Barrett asked if they should offer trade-offs in order to get the best project it can obtain from a comprehensive permit developer. Mr. Ruth stated it depended on the project. Ms. Barrett commented if the guidelines say that then they are not giving much guidance to developers.

Mr. Warner noted they should have modest architecture and be small projects in order to be Needhamesque with exceptions. He would not trade good design. Small scale, good design and numerous ones would be his preference. Mr. Jacobs stated they would not come before the Planning Board. Ms. Barrett clarified they would be referred for comments to the Zoning Board of Appeals.

Ms. McKnight stated in a residential district project size is everything and she would trade anything to get the size.

8:15 p.m. – Senior Center Preliminary Meeting.

Steve Popper, representative for the applicant, stated they would like comments. He showed the Board what they have done so far. Joel Bargmann, architect, stated he would be submitting this in a couple of weeks. He noted he was showing the entire footprint but the submission would not show the entire MBTA site. The MBTA section would be re-milled and re-planed. He noted the MBTA has given permission to recount the parking on the site. They have also allowed 2 landscape islands to buffer the asphalt. The green space helps define an access road shared with the MBTA.

Mr. Bargmann stated they will create a streetscape buffer along Hillside Avenue as an amenity. There are no drainage issues. He noted this is a unified site. He noted there were not a lot of options due to the tightness of the site. They have tried to keep the building as far away from the tracks as possible. Entrance is on the south side.

Peter Gammer, Civil Engineer, noted there is a 24 foot wide drive entrance. They are widening Hillside Avenue for parallel parking spaces. A transformer pad will be in back. There will be a large infiltration system below the parking lot and the roof runoff will go to the infiltration system with a control structure tied into Highland Avenue. Utilities are off Highland Avenue with a 2 inch domestic water line and a 6 inch sewer line. There is a 3% grade all across the lot today.

Mr. Bargmann stated they need 89 spaces for the MBTA lot. The Mark Lee lot will be reconfigured for the Senior Center.

Nelson Hammer, of Hammer and Walsh, Inc., stated the trees are spaced evenly with narrow crowns. There will be an arborvitae hedge on the east side along the back and 7 trees within the lot. There is no lawn for the project but English ivy for ground cover. They will be replacing the existing planter at the corner. There is ground cover along the back of the building. The entrance will be pre-cast concrete pavers and they are using all full size parking spaces.

Liz Peart, traffic consultant, noted the current center has 75 to 100 visitors per day. The new center will have up to 200 visitors per day from 8:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. There will be up to 12 employees/volunteers. Most trips are outside the peak commute and spread out throughout the day. She noted Highland Avenue and West Street is satisfactory. At West Street and Hillside Avenue, West Street traffic is a level A with Hillside traffic sometimes a level service F. They feel the impact of the Senior Center will not cause more degradation to the intersection. She added there are 89 parking spaces.

Mr. Ruth stated the report shows a 90 second delay. He feels that is a lot. Ms. Peart stated she would not have reported that delay but the town wanted a figure. There is a limitation to the methodology. There is a current deficiency there now. The Senior Center will not aggravate it a lot.

Mr. Jacobs asked why the opening time is 8:30 a.m. and not 9:00 a.m. He was informed there was only staff there at 8:30 a.m. and the center opens at 9:00 a.m.

Ms. McKnight asked about turning movements. She feels people will use the Avery Square Circle to avoid the light. She has been told it creates speeding and unsafe conditions. Ms. Peart stated it takes 91 trips away from the intersection.

Ms. McKnight stated she wants it to be safe for people to walk. Ms. Peart commented she feels 8% will arrive by walking. She noted there are 89 parking spaces – 64 on-site, 12 on Highland Avenue, 1 at Avery Square and 12 in the Mark Lee lot for employees and volunteers. They are offering 4.5 spaces per square foot. They estimate peak parking demand at 60 spaces. They feel this is enough for a typical week day. The mid-day parking demand in the MBTA lot is 40 which leaves spaces but they are \$4 for the day.

Mr. Ruth noted they may need to work around the MBTA train schedule for special events.

Mr. Bargmann noted there will be a pitched roof 35 feet in height to the highest point. They can make it work at 35 feet but it would be better at 38 feet. He asked if the Planning Board would support efforts to get 3 more feet in height. They would have to go to Town Meeting for a zoning change.

Mr. Bargmann noted the east and west windows are shaded by louvers. The shades should be about 18 inches deep but they are not allowed to protrude that much. There is a 20 foot 6 inch setback in front. They could move it back 6 inches for shades but they would lose greenery. Ms. Newman explained the background of the height limitations.

Ms. McKnight asked if a higher building would cast shadows on the office building next door. They could plot that out. Ms. McKnight noted they would like a movie theater in a terraced room that slants down. She asked if the higher height would get that.

Mr. Ruth noted the Hillside Business District exemption. Ms. Newman asked if they would want to expand. This would be the narrowest municipal. Ms. McKnight stated higher in back would block the train noise more. She noted buses and vans would be coming and going and asked where the buses would pull up. Mr. Bargmann stated they would drop off in front or by the door. Ms. McKnight noted the handicap spaces and stated they would probably need more. Mr. Bargmann noted there are multiple exits but not multiple entrances. There is a bike rack.

Ms. McKnight stated the roof water should be used to water plants. She asked if this included a system like that. Mr. Bargmann stated a harvesting system creates a lot of upkeep and is not cost effective. Mr. Jacobs stated he has no issue supporting an increase in height.

Mr. Ruth commented they should think about infiltrating water on the MBTA lot also. He agrees with Mr. Jacobs there is no issue with the height. He feels it is an appropriate choice to keep the spaces full size.

Mr. Ruth asked if there would be awnings. There will be on one side built into the building. Mr. Warner noted they should explore 3 stories and a flat roof. This is an ugly site and it will not make it worse. He stated he would not object to a 40 foot height.

Minutes.

Upon a motion made by Mr. Ruth, and seconded by Ms. McKnight, it was by the four members present unanimously:

VOTED: to accept the minutes of April 5, 2011 as presented with changes discussed.

Report from Planning Director.

Ms. Newman noted 225 Highland Avenue was looking at tenants. The tutoring fell through. There will be retail on the first floor and office on the second floor. There are 28 parking spaces – 22 on-site with the rest leased off-site. She wants feedback on Gymboree. It would be ages 0 to 5. The entire second floor is 3,875 square feet. The class size would be 8 to 12 kids and parents would participate. There would be one staff in the a.m. and 2 in the p.m. with the peak from 9:00 a.m. to noon. She asked if the use would work at this location. They would need to determine the parking requirement. She is concerned with the p.m. peak. There are 13 spaces used by upstairs currently.

George Giunta Jr., representative for the applicant, noted it would be music, dance and learning. 25% of the parents have multiple kids. Ms. McKnight noted exercise or indoor athletics facilities are allowed with a Special Permit.

Mr. Jacobs would like to make sure 15 minute intervals between classes is enough time. He feels more information is necessary. Mr. Giunta Jr. noted classes are 45 minutes to 2 hours.

Ms. Newman stated a personal trainer would like to go in the Abode property. There will be 3 staff and no more than 2 customers at any one time. Five spaces are required. Abode required 11 spaces. It is not necessary to do a parking study. She would petition to keep to the 2,500 square foot limit.

Mr. Warner noted he received an e-mail from Susan Abbott. The town is forbidden from setting regulations for putting signs for lawn care. Mr. Ruth noted that was for Town Counsel.

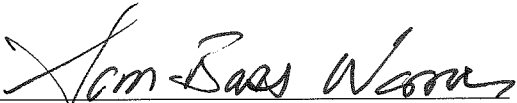
Mr. McKnight stated the Green Communities Study Committee hearing is on June 13 at Broadmeadow School. She would like someone, or all, to attend. She cannot be there.

Mr. Ruth noted Scott Ravelson has contacted him several times regarding 322 Reservoir Street and personal fitness. How can he get this tenant into the building?

Upon a motion made by Mr. Ruth, and seconded by Ms. McKnight, it was by the four members present unanimously:

VOTED: to adjourn the meeting at 10:30 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Donna J. Kalinowski, Notetaker



Sam Bass Warner, Vice-Chairman and Clerk