MELROSE BOARD OF APPEALS
MEETING MINUTES
Public Hearing
Wednesday, April 30, 2025
7:30 p.m.
Remote Meeting

Present:
David Roache
Bryan Thorp
Chris Coughlin
Daniel Gelormini
Benjamin Rosenberg
Jeffery Ugino
Raj Singh

Absent:

Staff Present: Maya Noviski, Senior Planner & Adam Forrester, Assistant Planner

The meeting was called to order at 7:30 pm.

Pursuant to Chapter 2 of the Acts of 2025, this meeting was conducted via remote participation. Specific information and the general guidelines for remote participation by members of the public and/or parties with a right and/or requirement to attend this meeting were found on the City of Melrose's website, at www.cityofmelrose.org/remote-meetings. No in-person attendance of members of the public was permitted, but every effort was made to ensure that the public could adequately access the proceedings in real time, or in the event that we are unable to do so, on the mmtv3.org website an audio or video recording, transcript, or other comprehensive record of proceedings was posted as soon as possible after the meeting. A link was also available on www.cityofmelrose.org.

Application materials were posted to the City's website: www.cityofmelrose.org/board-appeals.

ELECTION OF OFFICERS

Mr. Roache made a motion to nominate Bryan Thorp as the new Chair. Mr. Coughlin seconded the motion. Motion passes 5-0. Mr. Thorp is elected Chair of the Board of Appeals.

CASES BEFORE THE BOARD

25 002 – 199-201 Essex Street – The application of Carroll Essex LLC for a Comprehensive Permit pursuant to M.G.L. c.40B, s. 21 for an approx. 44,060 sf, 5-story mixed-use building with approx. 1,400 sf of commercial space, 50 residential units, of which 13 will be affordable as is required and regulated under the law, and 22 parking spaces at 199-201 Essex Street, Melrose, MA, on a lot of land containing 16,136 sf and shown on Assessor's Map C8 0 12 & C8 0 14.

Robert Bell, Attorney, Mark Caroll, Applicant, John Connery, Financial Consultant, Tim Johnson, Architect, Bob Griffin, Engineer, Mike Paige, Engineer, Bob Michaud, Transportation Engineer, & Mark O'Hagen, Consultant, appeared before the Board to present an overview of the proposed project.

Attorney Bell presented an overview of the history of development in Melrose and the need for this mixed-use development in this part of Melrose. He highlighted how this mixed-use project is important for this neighborhood in Melrose and is right for the area. It is a transit-oriented, mixed-use development that is a better use of the site than the current use. Also, he noted how this project helps address the housing crisis in the area by bringing 50 new residential units, 13 of which are affordable, to the City. Overall, he emphasized that this project will be beneficial to the city via tax revenue, to the neighborhood as this project is the right use for the area, as well as increasing access to housing in the City.

Mr. Caroll, Applicant, presented an overview of the reason for the proposed project. He noted that the current use of the property is not the best use of the site, and that the proposed mixed-use development is a better fit for the area and the city overall.

John Connery, Financial Consultant, shared a financial analysis of the project. He noted that based on market research, the units will mostly be rented by young adults and the elderly, so the impact on the school system will be minimal. Also, he commented that this project could be a flagship development in the area to promote more 40B projects and help the City well exceed the 10% affordable unit requirement from the State.

Tim Johnson, Architect, presented an overview of the building design and site layout. He noted the access to the trash room via the driveway easement. One Board Member asked if this easement is documented. Attorney Bell commented that it has been documented. Mr. Johnson highlighted the parking layout, unit mix, storage areas, basement/utility areas, roof deck, and roof plan. He also provided an overview of the materials used on the exterior of the building.

Mike Paige, Engineer, presented an overview of the civil plans. He provided an overview of the water lines, sewer lines, stormwater management, and soil evaluation report of the site. He noted that the proposed stormwater management system will improve the conditions on the site. The current conditions are mostly impervious surface. The water catch basins will be installed under the building.

Bob Michaud, Transportation Engineer, presented an overview of the Traffic Study Report. He noted that the report analyzed the potential impact on traffic at the site and the intersection at Essex Street and W. Emerson Street, and also the intersection at Essex Street and Myrtle Street. He highlighted that this site will have a low impact on traffic in the area due to the proximity to public transit options, limited vehicle parking, and ample bike parking.

Mark O'Hagen, 40B Consultant, provided an overview of the affordable unit part of the proposed project. EOHLC will be involved with the lottery for the affordable units and review the units on a yearly basis to make sure the units remain affordable.

Board Members asked for more details on the Soil Evaluation Report due to the current conditions of the site and what potential contamination may have occurred. Mr. Carroll provided more details on the report. He noted that soil borings were done and found minimal contamination and they have an abatement plan to address the issue. He also provided more details on the Construction Management Plan.

Board Members had the following questions/comments for the Applicant and the rest of the development team:

- Members asked for more clarity on the requested waivers for dimensional regulations. Attorney Bell noted that the height/story relief was requested due to abutting building being at a similar scale. The proposed height fits the neighborhood context. The front setback is aligned with the abutting building to the right. Mr. Carroll noted that they met with the Planning Board, and they approved of the proposed design of the building.

- Members asked for more clarity on the driveway easement access and use. The development team will update signage to make the driveway usage clearer.

- One member asked for more clarity on the parking garage layout. They noted that the current parking layout will be difficult to navigate.

- Members noted that the current location of the transformer on the plan is likely not feasible as National Grid does not usually allow for underground transformers. Another location above ground on the site should be explored.

- Members asked about the two parking spaces along the driveway easement and who would access them. Mr. Carroll commented that they are for the staff of the commercial unit and not for customers or residents.

- One Member commented that the stormwater management system could be installed along the edge of the property instead of under the building. The development team will look into it.

- Members were generally supportive of the design of the building and the transit-oriented aspect of the project.

- One Member commented that the materials proposed should be reconsidered. They would like to see higher quality materials used.

- Members asked for details on mail/package room to be updated on the plans.

- One member asked for details on the soil analysis of the site. Mr. Carroll referenced the report submitted that indicated it is a buildable site and nothing concerning was present in the report.

- One Member commented that there could be a potential issue with this development being built during a similar timeline to other large projects in the area. Planning Staff shared that traffic and safety issues will be managed and that other large projects in the area are not on the same timeline.

- One Member asked why the fifth floor has a different design than the floors below. Mr. Johnson explained that it is a design choice. Members asked for an updated rendering of the design of the fifth floor, specifically materials and colors proposed.

The Board received several public comments during the meeting.

- City Councilor Ryan Williams, 70 Otis St., appeared before the Board to speak in support of the proposal noting that energy efficiency, proximity to public transit and downtown, and the mixed-use being positive highlights of the project.
- The Board received written comments as well. Bruce and Maureen Kearnan, 23 Avon St., wrote that they are concerned with the lack of parking and the impact on the city. James Guadette, 185 Essex St., wrote that they are concerned with parking and flooding/stormwater management issues this proposal will cause. Kathy Cotter, 54 Ashland St., wrote that they are concerned with the size and scope of the proposed project, as well as traffic issues it will cause. Dennis Stratford, 185 Essex St., wrote that they are concerned with that impact that this project will have on the structural integrity of abutting buildings. Catherine Cronin, 120 W. Emerson St, wrote in support of the project. Edwin Merced, 185 Essex St., wrote that they are concerned about traffic.

The Board asked the Applicant for the following to be updated and presented at the next public meeting:

- More detailed elevations. Specifically, detail on how the cement boards will be handled.
- Possible redesign of first floor and parking layout to have a different alignment of the driveway.
- Explore placing infiltration system on edge of property and not under the building.
- Update on transformer location and correspondence with National Grid.
- More detailed construction management plan.
- Include adjacent properties on renderings.
- Clarification on easements and access routes to the property for trash pickup and the two parking spaces that will be used by the commercial space.
- More details on the mail/package room.

By roll call the Board voted 5-0, to schedule a site visit for May 5, 2025 @ 5pm and continue the case to May 28, 2025.

Documents:
ZBA Application 25-001
Architectural Plans 4.23.25
Civil Plans 4.22.25
Traffic Study 1.3.24
Environmental Site Assessment 8.14.24

OTHER BUSINESS

Meeting Minutes
Mr. Coughlin made a motion to approve the meeting minutes from March 12, 2025. Mr. Rosenberg seconded the motion. By roll call the Board voted, 5-0, to approve the minutes. Voting Members included Benjamin Rosenberg, Jeffery Ugino, Chris Coughlin, Bryan Thorp, and Daniel Gelormini.

Next Meeting
The next meetings are scheduled for May 14 and May 28, 2025.
The meeting adjourned at 9:45 pm