

MELROSE PLANNING BOARD
MEETING MINUTES
Regular Meeting
Monday, January 25, 2021
7:30 PM
Remote Meeting

PRESENT: Mike Cassavoy, Anne DeSouza-Ward, Paul King, Robert Mercado, Carla Morelli, John Sadowski, Greg Sampson & Jack Welch

ABSENT: Sharon Petrillo

STAFF PRESENT: Denise Gaffey, Director, Emma Battaglia, Senior Planner & Lori Massa, Planning Coordinator

The meeting was called to order at 7:35 PM by Ms. DeSouza-Ward.

Pursuant to Governor Baker's March 12, 2020 Order Suspending Certain Provisions of the Open Meeting Law, G.L. c. 30A, §18, and the Governor's March 15, 2020 Order imposing strict limitations on the number of people that may gather in one place, this meeting of the Melrose Planning Board was conducted via remote participation to the greatest extent possible. Meeting access 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 was 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. An audio or video recording, transcript, or other comprehensive record of proceedings was posted on the mmtv3.org website as soon as possible after the meeting. A link was also available on www.cityofmelrose.org.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Planning Board Regular Meeting, December 21, 2020

Mr. Mercado made a motion to approve the meeting minutes. Mr. Welch seconded the motion. All members by roll call voted in favor. None were opposed.

Design Review Subcommittee Meeting, December 17, 2020

Mr. Cassavoy made a motion to approve the meeting minutes. Mr. Welch seconded the motion. All members by roll call voted in favor. None were opposed.

SLOPE PROTECTION SPECIAL PERMIT

Case 20-003, 22 Montvale Street, Armando Plato

Attorney Bell requested to continue the case to have additional time to submit information to the Board. Mr. Sampson made a motion to continue the case to March 22, 2021. Mr. Mercado seconded the motion. All members by roll call voted in favor. None were opposed.

SITE PLAN REVIEW & AFFORDABLE HOUSING SPECIAL PERMIT

Case 20-004, 40 Vine Street, 39 Tappan Street LLC

Attorney Patrick McAvoy, Michael Carter, Engineer and Mark Wilcox, Architect, Daniel Galvin, Owner, Kevin Carter, appeared to present the case. Attorney McAvoy requested to make a monetary contribution instead of providing an affordable unit on-site.

Mr. Carter, Engineer, explained the site plan and zoning information. The Zoning Board of Appeals previously granted a variance for the driveway width. The footprint of the building is now smaller than it was originally proposed. This allowed the driveway to increase from 20 to 23 feet in width. The driveway width variance is still in effect. A recharge, infiltration system is proposed in the rear yard for the stormwater runoff. There would be no increase in rate or volume of runoff. There would be a six-foot vinyl fence around the site.

Mr. Wilcox, Architect, discussed the design of the building. They will try to use green building practices by buying local and using energy efficient systems.

The Board discussed how the application materials included requests for waivers; however, it appears that all of the relevant materials were submitted and the only waiver needed was for a LOS analysis. They did a trip generation calculation but did not include a full traffic analysis or level of service plan for the nearby intersections. A full topography plan was submitted even though there is minimal topography on the site. A signage plan was not submitted but only a small address sign is proposed on the front.

Mr. Sampon made a motion to open the public testimony portion of the hearing. Mr. Welch sectioned the motion. By roll call vote, all members were in favor. None were opposed.

Shane O'Donohoe of 39 Vine Street stated that the building looks tall and out of place on the street.

Finn McSweeney of 160 West Wyoming Street was glad to see a project in the RCOD. The MBTA considered the number of residents in the walkshed of the commuter rail station when determining if they were going to close stations recently. He had three questions: Are the dimensions of the elevator being large enough for e-bicycles to access the basement?; What is in the zoning that is precluding the affordable unit from being built on-site?; What is the developer's perspective on converting the parking spaces in the future when they are not needed?. Mr. Galvin said that installing conduits for future electric vehicles would be a good idea. Mr. McSweeney said that Vine Street has a distinct "neighborhood feel" and it would be nice to understand if the design has any sort of purposeful front yard activation. A bike rack is nice, but it should be covered. The yard could use a couple of Adirondack chairs. Tenants could realistically spend time in the front yard.

Patrick Jefferson of 34 Vine Street asked about a timeline for the project to begin and if there are any other steps that need to happen. Attorney McAvoy said that the hopeful timeline is this spring. They do not have a timeline for construction.

The Board discussed how this parcel is in the RCOD and a four-story building is by-right. They saw no way of granting a variance from the affordable housing requirement that they recently amended with careful consideration.

A member asked if there any solar panels being planned for the roof. Mr. Wilcox said that no solar is planned. There will be condensers and the elevator overrun and no room for panels. The panels need to be ten feet from the edge of the roof so it limits the available space. Mr. Wilcox stated that the roof will need to be constructed to carry the load of future solar panels.

A member asked if they will use fossil fuels for heat. They were planning to use gas and instant hot water heating. They have not looked into the heat pump technology that Melrose is encouraging. They are not opposed to electric heating. The condensing units will be very quiet.

The current building is large but only has two units. The interior was so poorly laid-out that it was difficult to work with.

The Board discussed the design and materials of the building. The building is not in keeping with the residential scale of the neighborhood. It looks like a downtown building. It is difficult to fit in with 2 ½ story houses but it is possible to use a mansard roof or other treatments to better fit the residential character. There will be a fiber cement board on the front façade. The upper floors are a Hardi clapboard. They should submit elevations of all sides and a rendering that shows more detail of the building and materials. The front elevation shows storefront windows on the first floor. The residents may feel vulnerable. Mr. Glavin said that there will be a patio in front of the sliding doors. They have to see how much space there is to design the patio.

The left side of the building is too close to the property line to be able to have bays like those on the right side of the building. The Architect added wide trim to the windows. The change in materials and horizontal lines help but this side has a flat look. The Board does not want it to be a monolithic building.

The developer intends for these to be apartments. If they want to plan for them to be condominiums, they need to consider soundproofing. Mr. Galvin said that they will consider soundproofing even as apartments.

A landscape plan should be submitted. There should be functional open space for the residents. Mr. Carter said that he would submit one that takes the comments into consideration.

A member asked if residents will have storage in the basement. The plan is to have storage. There will be an elevator to the basement for easy access.

A member asked if there a grading plan that shows that the runoff will make it to the infiltration system and not sheet flow to neighboring properties. Mr. Carter explained the grading plan.

There is also a drainage report. They reviewed the curbing to prevent runoff. It is proposed to be a bituminous curb. The Board asked for it to be a better quality material. There should be a curb or wheel stop in front of the parking spaces. A curb is not proposed because the grade slopes down towards east.

The back-out of the parking spaces will require a few turns. A member asked if any protection of the building from the driveway was proposed. The Architect will revisit it.

On the southwest side there is a house in close proximity and the Board asked the Applicants to consider the impacts to this house..

There is a seven percent grade at the back of the building that they will look into.

If a stretcher can fit in the elevator an e-bicycle should fit.

The fence will be PVC, vinyl fence that will be a picket fence.

The Board would like to see the specifications on the condensing units, the screening for the condensing units, the overall façade design and articulation, the two first floor unit sliders and the condition in front of them, a full landscaping plan with mature trees, a signage plan, clarity on the materials, curbing for drainage, turning radii and protection of the building. The building and site need to be built as proposed on the plans so the detail should be considered.

Mr. Sampson make a motion to continue the case to February 22, 2021. Mr. Cassavoy seconded the motion. By roll call, all voted in favor. None were opposed.

Documents: Site Plan Review & Affordable Housing Application, Case 20-004, 40 Vine Street

RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE BOARD OF APPEALS

Board of Appeals Public Hearings on February 10, 2021:

Case 20-033, 9 Harding Road, Michael Stankavish & Amy Basile

The Board did not recommend approving the proposal. They found it problematic to take a nonconforming accessory structure with minimal setbacks and to make it part of the principal structure. The garage did not comply with the required setbacks for an accessory structure and a principal structure has even greater required setbacks. The proposal would exacerbate the nonconformities and be unsafe. There appears to be other options to construct an addition that would be more conforming.

Mr. Sadowski made a motion to send the Board of Appeals a letter with these comments. Mr. Sampson seconded the motion. By roll call, all voted in favor. None were opposed.

Documents: Application Materials, Case 20-033

Case 20-034, 27 Temple Street, Joseph & Robin Higgins

The Board recommended denying the variances. There were an excessive number and degree of variances needed for this proposal. The creation of two new lots that are so undersized, especially considering the slope protection regulations, was not warranted. They were sympathetic to the need for more housing but found that this was not an appropriate location for it.

Mr. Welch made a motion to send the Board of Appeals a letter with these comments. Mr. King seconded the motion. By roll call, all voted in favor. None were opposed.

Documents: Application Materials, Case 20-034

Case 20-035, 33 Ryder Avenue, Joseph Guzzo

The Board was supportive of granting the variances for the addition, but not in favor of granting relief for the garage extension. The front porch and second floor addition are designed to fit the character of a typical house in the city and will only increase the footprint of the structure for an open porch. The site plan is lacking the detail needed to know the extent of the work that would be needed to accommodate the garage extension. A fire hydrant may need to be moved and a tree cut to accommodate the driveway. Also, the garage would be close to and very visible at this location on the corner lot.

Mr. Sadowski made a motion to send the Board of Appeals a letter with these comments. Mr. Cassavoy seconded the motion. By roll call, all voted in favor. None were opposed.

Documents: Application Materials, Case 20-035

Case 21-001, 2 Hemenway Avenue, Eleni Kaplan & Marc Okrent

The Planning Board had no objection to this application. The property was a large corner lot and it made sense to locate the addition where it was proposed. Also, ten feet is a typical residential setback.

Mr. Sampson made a motion to send the Board of Appeals a letter with these comments. Mr. Morelli seconded the motion. By roll call, all voted in favor. None were opposed.

Documents: Application Materials, Case 21-001

OTHER

Comprehensive Permit Application, 12-16 Essex Street, Carroll Essex LLC

The redevelopment of 12-16 Essex Street that the Planning Board approved for a mixed-use building did not move forward because the Historic District Commission members did not approve of demolishing the building.

The number of units, parking lift system and aspects of the design of the building have changed but there are a lot of similarities between the proposal. The blank façade is still an issue. The units are small. Melrose does have a minimum unit size but the zoning dimensions can be waived.

The Zoning Board of Appeals will open the hearing this Wednesday. Members could listen to the presentation to the ZBA and discuss at the February hearing to provide a recommendation letter to the ZBA. The Applicant's Attorney could present the case to the Board in February. Members requested for the Attorney to just focus on what is different between this proposal and the last.

Documents: Comprehensive Permit Application Materials, Case 21-003

NEXT MEETING

Michael Cassavoy announced that he is stepping down from the Planning Board. He has been on the Board for over twenty years.

The next regular meeting is scheduled for Monday, February 22, 2021 at 7:30pm.

The meeting adjourned at 10:10 pm.