

MELROSE PLANNING BOARD
MEETING MINUTES
Regular Meeting
Monday, May 23, 2022
7:30 PM
Remote Meeting

PRESENT: Tim Bailey, Beth Delahajj, Anne DeSouza Ward, Brian Gregory, Paul King, Carla Morelli, Greg Sampson & Jack Welch

ABSENT: None

STAFF PRESENT: Denise Gaffey, Director and City Planner, Lori Massa, Senior Planner & Maya Noviski, Assistant Planner

The meeting was called to order at 7:36 PM by Mr. Sampson.

Pursuant to An Act Extending Certain COVID-19 Measures Adopted During the State of Emergency signed by Governor Baker on June 16, 2021, this meeting was be 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 could be found on the City of Melrose's website, at www.cityofmelrose.org. 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, they would be post on the mmtv3.org website an audio or video recording, transcript, or other comprehensive record of proceedings as soon as possible after the meeting. A link was also available on www.cityofmelrose.org.

Meeting access information was found at the following link:
www.cityofmelrose.org/remotemeetings.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Planning Board Regular Meeting, April 25, 2022

Board Members had no comments or adjustments to the minutes. Mr. Gregory made a motion to approve the meeting minutes. Ms. DeSouza Ward seconded the motion. All members voted in favor. None were opposed.

SITE PLAN REVIEW

Case 22-002, 453-463 Franklin St., Franklin Development, LLC

Robert Bell, Attorney, began by providing an overview of the project noting that this is the first project to utilize the City's new Special Permit for Density Incentives in the BA-2 District. He explained that this project does not need any variances nor Board of Appeals actions, as long as the developer meets the Planning Board's criteria. Attorney Bell described some of the benefits

of this project including increasing the housing supply and affordable housing supply, implementing various green building materials and sustainability features, and increasing the City's revenue. He responded to concerns about the developments impact on the City's infrastructure capacity by noting that the City was built to withstand a greater population than it is currently serving. Attorney Bell moved on to introduce Robert Johnson, Applicant and Developer.

Mr. Johnson described the proposed project. He explained that the building is 42 feet high with a FAR of 2.9 and 8.2% open space considering the proposed balconies and pervious area along the back of the building. There will be 21 residential units, with one-, two- and three bedroom units, and one commercial unit. Twelve of the units will have balconies and nine will have Juliet balconies. The building's lighting has been designed to minimize light pollution on the sidewalk.

The project was created based on the goals of the City's Housing Production Plan and the Density Incentives, and caters to the philosophy of transit oriented development due to its proximity to the Highlands Commuter Rail Station and public bus service. There will be 13 total parking spaces and 30 bicycle racks. Mr. Johnson noted that this project is the perfect type of infill project and the goal with this redevelopment is to construct a building with a low carbon footprint and high energy efficiency. Mr. Johnson described several of the building's proposed green features including solar panels, EV charging stations, water sense fixtures, Energy Star appliances, heat pumps with zone control, efficient tankless hot water heaters, LED lighting, an Eco Space Traction elevator, glazed windows, and air sealing. Mr. Johnson submitted an ENERGY STAR Partnership Agreement for certification and has consulted with Energy Code Advisors.

Mr. Johnson described the buildings proposed design including EIFS on the top and bottom of the building with clad siding in the middle and a brick façade. He noted that a neighborhood meeting was held with neighbors voicing concerns about the building's appearance which he tried to accommodate with a new rendering that he presented at the meeting. He explained that he is open to design opinions and wants to make sure the building fits within the neighborhood context. He also noted that the new rendering shows an enclosed trash storage space and provides screening for the parked cars facing Marvin Rd. The bicycle parking will be located at the back of the parking area, which will remain unscreened. Between the lot line and the edge of the parking area, there is a three-foot space that will be planted with greenery. Mr. Johnson concluded by introducing Kenneth Cram, Traffic Engineer.

Mr. Cram began by explaining the traffic impact assessment for this site. He explained that the traffic impact assessment analyzed the safety and crash history at the Franklin St. and Marvin Rd. intersection from 2015-2019 noting that there had been two reported crashes: one which resulted in property damage and the other, personal injury. Mr. Cram also analyzed public transit access acknowledging the bus routes on Franklin St. and Main St., and the commuter rail at the Highlands Commuter Rail Station.

Mr. Cram analyzed the amount of traffic this new development would generate by evaluating both the retail and residential uses of the building. For the retail component, he began by

comparing Franklin Market, the existing use on the site, to a similarly sized convenience store. He found that this use typically results in around 2,000 vehicle trips per day, although he believes that Franklin Market generates less traffic with most vehicles likely already on the road passing by the business. To estimate the number of vehicle trips for the proposed retail space, Mr. Cram used vehicle trip data for a liquor store, which has the highest traffic impact, to build a conservative forecast but clarified that this is not the intended use of the retail space. Without any adjustments for transit, Mr. Cram believes that the site would generate 322 daily trips with 9 extra trips during the morning peak hour and 43 extra trips during the evening peak hour; most of the evening trips are assumed to be associated with the retail space rather than the residential units. Mr. Cram concluded that the new project will generate less traffic than the existing use today.

Mr. Cram mentioned that the site will have two points of access to the parking garage: Marvin Rd. and the easement from Chipman Ave. Mr. Cram noted that the 13 parking spaces provide adequate parking for the project because of its proximity to public transportation. Additionally, the Institute of Traffic Engineers' parking manual suggests that a parking rate of half a space per unit is adequate to serve parking demands. Mr. Cram's parking review also included analyzing parking availability in the immediate vicinity to serve the commercial component of the project. He identified a number of available spaces along Marvin Rd. perpendicular to the railroad tracks, Franklin St. and Chipman Ave, although he noted that he was in the area at non-peak hours.

Mr. Cram submitted a traffic demand management program geared towards supporting utilization of public transportation or reliance on alternative methods of transportation. This includes having tenants provide information to a transportation coordinator who could help organize a carpool. The transportation coordinator would also advertise transportation schedules in the lobby or community area. Mr. Cram mentioned that the Applicant is exploring hosting Zipcar or another carsharing company on site, and installing EV charging stations. Mr. Cram concluded by introducing Peter Ogren, Civil Engineer.

Mr. Ogren began by explaining the existing and proposed sewer and water connections.

Mr. Ogren noted that the City is requiring a stormwater management plan. The City does not allow new direct connections to the drainage systems, which the Applicant understands. Mr. Ogren noted that the current site is virtually all impervious and the new development does not alter its permeability. Mr. Ogren mentioned that the site is flat so there will not be a change in the grade of the land.

Marina McIntosh, Architect, went on to explain the exterior details of the building. She noted that working with the neighborhood and taking into consideration the prominent location of this project, the new rendering shows a grand entryway and corner expression for the retail space. A brick façade was included to match the neighborhood context. Considerations of the brick pattern and the arching of the windows demonstrate a more historical impression, as well as the siding

along the fourth floor level. Ms. McIntosh noted that screening was included along the ground level of Marvin St. to shield the view of any parked cars, as well.

Ms. Gaffey proceeded to explain that this is the first project to utilize the Density Incentive Special Permit that was approved by City Council last year. The Planning Office views this project as supporting the City's Master Plan, the Housing Production Plan, and the smart growth planning work the City and the Planning Office has undertaken. This site was identified as an opportunity site in the Housing Production Plan, and it promotes the transit-oriented goals of the new MBTA Multifamily Zoning requirements. Ms. Gaffey expressed that this mixed-use building will bring new residents to the area while improving the streetscape and pedestrian experience in the Highlands. She added that there is an abundance of community support for the existing market in that location as it provides an important amenity to the neighborhood, and she encourages the Applicant to retain that type of use at this location if possible.

Ms. Gaffey noted that some elements of the project will need more detailed discussions such as the rideshare program. Also, the DPW provided comments and the Applicant should review and respond to those items.

Planning Board Members had several questions and comments regarding traffic and parking, building design, bicycle access, the proposed sustainability features, and the financial analysis conducted for the Incentive Zoning Special Permit. Board Members were curious about the forecasted decrease in vehicular trips. Mr. Cram explained that since the use of the retail space has not yet been identified, he cannot fully predict what the trip generation rates will be but if the space remains a convenience store, the traffic rates will be the same with eight additional trips in the morning. He noted that the retail space will be decreased by about 700 square feet.

Several Board Members were concerned about the number of parking spaces this project offers. One member posited that the City of Melrose may not have the amenities and services in place to allow for all trips to be non-vehicular traffic. Also, the rideshare program could be located elsewhere so as to not take a parking space that could be used by a resident. Members wondered if the spaces are uncoupled from the rent of the units and requested more information on how the bike area would be accessed. Members requested that the financial analysis conducted for the incentive zoning include more detail and explanation of the listed costs.

Members requested more perspectives of the rendering specifically looking down towards the intersection of Marvin Rd. and Franklin St. and from the north elevation where this project would abut the proposed 14 Chipman Ave project. Members also requested a rendering that included the proposed 14 Chipman Ave project to better visualize how the two buildings would fit together. Members were overall more supportive of the second rendering.

Some voiced concern over the building's potential to block neighbors' sunlight and requested a shadow study. Members were curious if the Applicant considered step backs on the upper levels of the development to reduce the building's bulk. More information was also requested about the

type of construction materials that will be used to minimize the noise disturbance from the Melrose Highlands Commuter Rail Station. Members also voiced concern over the project's balconies proximity to the lot line facing 437-445 Franklin St. Members posited that there is potential for 437-445 Franklin St. to be redeveloped in the future and the units facing that building would have limited access to light, especially if the future redevelopment built to the lot line, as well.

Members were curious about the project's open space calculations and landscaping plan, and if the project was solar ready. Mr. Johnson noted that the roof has been designed so that solar panels could be installed and would not be easily seen from the street. He explained that he is in the process of identifying a source for the solar panels and the building will be solar ready before it is occupied. One member asked about the snow storage management and plans. Planning Board Members emphasized the importance of having the developers of 14 Chipman Ave. and the proposed project consider each other's designs and work together to ensure a cohesive redesign of this block.

The Board opened the hearing up for public testimony. The following people spoke: Michael M. Nachshen of 28 Chipman Ave, Finn McSweeny for the Melrose Pedestrian and Bicyclist Committee of 160 W Wyoming Ave, John Todd of 42 Chipman Ave, Kevin Sullivan, address unknown, Kori Mendonsa of 102 Richardson Rd., Robert Butler of 10 Chipman Ave., Andy Monat of 57 West Hill Ave., Phil Iantosca of 32 Ellsworth Ave., Maureen Buzby of 54 Highland Ave., and Margaret Zirker of 48 Chipman Ave. Concerns over parking and the use of Chipman Avenue as an off-site parking location, were raised. Concerns about increased traffic and higher congestion due to elevated usage of car sharing services and deliveries, were put forth. Additionally, concerns over traffic and safety control measures, communication efforts about developer-led neighborhood meetings, access to the shared easement, bike parking security, the use of the retail space, and rodent control were raised.

Those in support commented on the transit-oriented nature of the development and critical housing shortage. They mentioned that the capacity of the historically underdeveloped Highlands Neighborhood can withstand this project and 14 Chipman Ave. Community members suggested that the developer's streetscape fund be used for a permanent parklet in front of the building. The Board heard mixed comments about the buildings design with some supporting it and others believing it does not fit within the neighborhood context.

The Board received 10 letters noting similar comments both in support and opposition of this project.

Board Members agreed that the Applicant should include a discussion on how an increase in deliveries will impact traffic and requested a rendering showing the project from Tremont St. down Franklin St. and along Marvin Rd as well as the other items noted. The Applicant requested a continuance for this case to be heard at the Planning Board meeting on June 27, 2022.

Mr. Welch made a motion to accept a continuance and hear this case on June 27, 2022. Ms. Morelli seconded. All voted in favor of the continuance. None were opposed.

Documents: Application Materials, April 5, 2022
Financial Analysis
Inspectional Services Letter, October 22, 2021
Architectural Plans, May 23, 2022
Site and Topography Plan, June 23, 2020 & January 18, 2022
Traffic Assessment, February 18, 2022
Construction Management Plan, February 1, 2022
Energy Star Partnership Agreement, September 21, 2021
Energy Code Information, September 10, 2021
Title 5 Flows, August 24, 2021
Lighting Plan and Fixture Specification, August 17, 2021
Incentive Zoning Information, May 23, 2022

Case 22-003, 14 Chipman Ave., Waypoint Development

David Lucas, Attorney, appeared before the Planning Board to introduce the project, which seeks to redevelop the VFW building. He noted that while the VFW currently has a canteen and function hall, the lot is underutilized with a large parking lot with little permeability or green space. Attorney Lucas explained that the cost of upkeep and maintenance has become prohibitive for the VFW. The Applicant has been working with the VFW for about five years to come to a redevelopment agreement. This includes removing the function hall, retaining the canteen, adding one ground floor retail unit, which will be open to the public, and 40 residential units over four stories.

He noted that by utilizing the Density Incentive Special Permit and increasing the FAR, the Applicant is able to add four additional units. There will be 38 parking spaces with nine spaces reserved for the VFW canteen. Attorney Lucas explained that this project will be requesting a variance from the Board of Appeals for placing residential units on the first floor of the building given the zoning district requirements.

Ed Champy, Applicant and Developer, continued by noting his experience with planning and redevelopment. He explained how the President of the VFW approached Waypoint Development inquiring if the Applicant was interested in purchasing and redeveloping the building. The Applicant explained that four units will be sold to the VFW which they will own and rent. The rental income along with the canteen earnings will help fund their organization in perpetuity.

William Lee, Architect, described the design of the project including placing brick on the ground level for a commercial typology with massing moves up and across the building. To articulate the residential element of the project, the design includes a series of indoor and outdoor spaces

along the long access of the building. Additionally, the massing on the top floor is set in to reduce the building's presence along on the street.

Mr. Lee noted that there is a 32 foot elevation change across the site with entrances and exits at varying levels. He also explained that the proposed plan increases the landscaping on the site. The landscaping plan implements zero scaping which includes using local, native species to reduce the number of resources such as irrigation and provide natural soil stabilization. Open space will increase by 2% open space while impermeable paving and stormwater runoff will decrease.

Mr. Lee noted that the parking lot off of Chipman Ave currently supports nine spaces, which will be reserved for the VFW, and the Applicant would like to renovate this area to create two more parking spaces and some accessible spaces. The site's lowest elevation is on Marvin Rd. where the parking garage, will be behind the retail space. Trash receptables will be located in the parking garage along with a shared use corridor with elevators and entrances to the main building. Bicycle storage will be located along a path that connects Chipman Ave. to Marvin Rd.

The upper floors of the project consist of a variety of residential units. The spacing of the mechanical units, which are all electric, are decentralized to minimize the run-lengths of the connections adding to the efficiency and reducing the energy loss of the layout. Each unit has ample access to open air, light, and outdoor space. There are also accessible, semi-recessed decks located directly off the living spaces.

Mr. Lee explained that the roof is solar ready with the HVAC systems positioned in the center to optimize the solar gains of future arrays and for the arrays to screen the HVAC units from the street. Other sustainability features include energy recovery natural ventilation systems, Energy STAR appliances, LED lighting, energy efficient plumbing systems, and groundwater recharge and stormwater systems to control stormwater on site. Furthermore, the design utilizes natural passive house principles to increase efficiency through the shape of the building. The proposed building envelope will ensure that the layers of the wall that control air and heat transmissions are continuous through continuous air barriers, and membranes wrapping the entire perimeter of the building to minimized thermal bridging issues. The building will also include exterior rain screens to help the exterior of the building dry to maintain its durability and high efficiency glazing systems.

The building's design increases the parking count of the site through a more efficient, entirely automated, puzzle system that decreases impervious area and controls for vehicle runoff. Mr. Champy explained that it takes a couple of minutes for the system to retrieve and deliver a car but residents can call their vehicle from their apartment so that it is ready upon arrival at the garage. Attorney Lucas noted that this parking system will need a variance because it does not fall within the definition of a parking space. The Applicant is also requesting a Special Permit for a reduced parking requirement.

Ms. Gaffey explained that the Planning Office views this as an important location for transit-oriented development that the building will fill a gap that the parking lot creates on Marvin Rd. This site is identified in the Housing Production Plan as an opportunity site with the development process having been underway for several years. This will be the second project to utilize the new Incentive Zoning Special Permit and the development will add six units to the affordable housing stock. Ms. Gaffey highlighted points of the project that will need more review and consideration including the solid waste storage and management plan, the bicycle storage location, the potential for a pedestrian signal around the parking garage, and DPW's engineering comments.

Board Members had several comments regarding the design of the project, traffic impact, solid waste management, and EV provisions. Members highlighted the need for this project and 453-563 Franklin St. to consider each other's design in order for the Board to review how the projects will interact. Members requested renderings from multiple angles including from Chipman Ave and Marvin Rd. Members noted that due to the elevation differences, the building will appear to be five stories tall from Marvin Rd. and suggested adding a more substantive setback for the top floor on that side of the building. A shadow study was also requested to analyze the potential impacts of the building's height. The Applicant explained that to ensure that the height of the building would not be intrusive, pictures were taken from the adjacent house on Chipman Ave and the height of the proposed building keeps in line with the tree line and preserves the view from the top of Chipman Ave.

Board Members also suggested adding deliveries to the traffic engineer's report, especially given the narrowness and busyness of Marvin Rd. and Chipman Ave. Members requested including a bike parking strategy or a bike storage space and questioned the layout of the parking garages' spaces, specifically with regards to the handicap space. One member asked how the Applicant will prevent residents from parking on Chipman Ave, which is a private way.

One member questioned the construction materials used to ensure sound proofing. The Applicant explained that they are implementing soundproofing techniques such as avoiding double hung windows, removing air gaps between windows, creating resilient channels in between the walls, and designing the envelope of the building to prevent excessive noise. The Applicant also clarified that the intention is to advertise the units as apartments but due to market changes, the units may be condos.

One member asked about provisions for EV charging with the proposed parking system and the solid waste management plan. The Applicant noted that they are revising the plan and will research EV charging stations. The Applicant also confirmed that they are working with an MPE Engineer. They are working on a revised trash and recycling bin layout.

The Board opened the hearing up for public testimony. The following people spoke: Mike Nachshen of 28 Chipman Ave., Andy Monat of 57 West Hill Ave., Cathleen Churchill of 43 Marvin Rd., Finn McSweeny of 161 West Wyoming on behalf of the Melrose Bike and

Pedestrian Committee, Kori Mendonsa of 102 Richardson Rd., Robert Butler of 10 Chipman Ave., and Margaret Zirker of 48 Chipman Ave. The Board also received 13 letters written both in support and opposition for this project. Comments in opposition included concerns over a reduction in neighboring home values, the bulk and size of the building, light and air impacts, parking, lack of outreach to neighbors, increased traffic, an unrealistic landscaping plan, incongruence with the neighborhood fabric, insufficient bike parking, and lack of traffic safety provisions along Franklin St. Comments in support included an appreciation of neighborhood engagement and the incorporation of residents' perspectives, increasing the number of housing units in Melrose, the sustainability features, the parking system, preservation of the VFW canteen, and the landscaping plan.

Mr. Sampson responded to the comments regarding developer-led neighborhood meetings by explaining that the City cannot obligate the developer to hold meetings, however the Planning Board meetings are intended for the public to comment and the public's comments are taken into consideration during the Board's deliberations. Mr. Champy also responded to some of the comments by noting that this project has a 14 foot setback which will help support some of the proposed plantings that will face the 453-463 Franklin St. project. Additionally, Mr. Champy discussed the impact of the building's massing on other neighbors' houses and he will provide a shadow study. He noted that he will also provide a rough massing of the 453-463 Franklin St. project to display how the two projects will interact. Mr. Champy requested a continuance for this case to be heard at the Planning Board meeting on July 25th, 2022.

Ms. Morelli made a motion to accept a continuance and hear this case on July 25, 2022. Mr. Gregory seconded. All voted in favor of the continuance. None were opposed.

Documents: Application Materials, April 13, 2022
Letter from Inspectional Services, September 11, 2020
Architectural Plans, March 18, 2022
Construction Management Plan, September 13, 2021
Traffic Impact Study, July 2021
Green Building Report, March 18, 2022
Water Demand Information, January 18, 2022
Narrative of Community Benefits, March 18, 2022

RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE BOARD OF APPEALS

Board of Appeals Public Hearing on June 8, 2022:

Case 22-010, 32 North Ave, Thatcher Freeborn

The Board took a neutral position on the proposal. Board Members discussed the design of the addition and the minimal impact of the portico steps on the right-side yard setback. Board Members also felt that the addition fits within the neighborhood context. A motion was made by Ms. DeSouza Ward and seconded by Mr. Welch. All members voted in favor. None were opposed.

Documents: Applicant Materials for Case 22-010

NEXT MEETING

The next regular meeting of the Planning Board is scheduled for Monday, June 27, 2022.
The meeting adjourned at 10:25 pm.