MELROSE PLANNING BOARD
MEETING MINUTES
Regular Meeting
Monday, September 12, 2022
7:30 PM
Remote Meeting

PRESENT: Tim Bailey, Beth Delahaij, Anne DeSouza Ward, Brian Gregory, Carla Morelli, Greg Sampson, Michael Aveni & Paul King

ABSENT: Jack Welch

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

The meeting was called to order at 7:33 PM by Mr. Sampson.

Pursuant to An Act Relative to Extending Certain State of Emergency Accommodations, signed into law by Governor Baker on July 16, 2022, 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:
https://www.cityofmelrose.org/remote-meetings

APPROVAL OF MINUTES
Planning Board Regular Meeting, August 22, 2022
Board Members had no comments or adjustments to the minutes. Mr. King 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 22-008, 31-39 West Wyoming Avenue, Navem Partners
James Heffernan, Applicant and Developer, appeared before the Board to present the project. He provided a brief history explaining that two years ago the Board of Appeals granted a variance for a setback violation for this project when it was designed as a nineteen-unit building. With the creation of the Special Permit for Density Incentives in the BA-2 District, Mr. Heffernan's team delayed redesigned the plans. The new proposal is for a 5-story, mixed use building with 26

residential units above a commercial space on the ground floor, and 22 parking spaces. Sustainable building techniques are incorporated into the design including the provision of a bicycle room with space for 30 bicycles. Mr. Heffernan explained that the application is for a Site Plan Review, Special Permit for Density Incentives in the BA-2 Districts, and a Special Permit for Reduced Parking.

Ken Feyl, Architect, described the building's architectural plans beginning with the layout of the ground floor. The residential and commercial entrances are located along West Wyoming Avenue. There are 19 covered parking spaces for residents at grade with three additional commercial parking spaces directly behind the commercial space along the exterior of the building. The bicycle room and generator room are also on the ground floor, along with rooms containing residential and commercial, solid waste and recycling receptacles. He explained that the ground floor is setback from the street to provide a covered area for the residential and commercial entrances and to give more space along the sidewalk.

The second through fourth floors each have six two-bedroom units and one one-bedroom unit, and the fifth floor has four two-bedroom units and one one-bedroom unit. All the two-bedroom units have recessed balconies. The second and third floors also have tenant storage rooms, the fourth floor has a fitness room, and the fifth floor offers a community room and a shared roof deck.

Mr. Feyl continued reviewing the building's design explaining that there is a 55 ft. grade to the top of the main roof with some sloped parapets along the face of the building. Horizontal and vertical siding are proposed to provide a textured contrast and the building will be a tan color, which will contrast with the recessed balcony areas. The building's signage, located on the overhang and by the residential entrance on West Wyoming Ave., will remain the same as in the previous proposal. The proposed sustainable features include an enhanced building envelope, high efficiency electric heat pumps, low flow plumbing fixtures, Energy STAR efficient appliances, enhanced glass windows, and drought tolerant plantings. Three electric charging stations will be installed with the ability to add more as demand increases and 140 solar panels will fit on the roof of the building. The team is exploring installing a green roof on the shared roof deck and becoming a certified level two Energy STAR multifamily building.

Kristin LaBrie, Engineer, explained there will be a sidewalk built with pervious pavers along the back of the building and along Berwick St., which will transition into pavement before the building's parking entrance. The design incorporates the existing walkway that runs from the parking lot behind the building and connects to the sidewalk on Berwick St. creating an ADA compliant walkway that stretches to the corner of West Wyoming Avenue and Berwick St. The design attempts to reduce the amount of pavement on sight by only using pavement on the pedestrian walkways from the parking to the back entrance and from the existing sidewalk to the residential and commercial entrances on West Wyoming Ave. The other areas around the building will be landscaped or filled with materials such as gravel or mulch.

Ms. LaBrie noted that there will be underground stormwater and groundwater recharge and infiltration using perforated pipes and stone, along with a treatment catch basin to collect some of the water. Most of the water will be collected through yard and area drains around the building

and discharged into the existing culvert. The plans propose a bike rack and a planter bed on Berwick St. and another planter on West Wyoming Ave. Rain barrels will also be installed to catch runoff from the roof and the water will be used to irrigate the garden beds.

Mr. Heffernan added that the team has worked with the Melrose Pedestrian and Bicycle Committee who requested changing the walkway steps on Berwick St. to a ramp, which is reflected in the plans. Additionally, based on feedback from abutters and from Staff, Mr. Heffernan is interested in converting the on-street parking space on Berwick St. to a designated ride hailing or "delivery only" space.

Denise Gaffey, City Planner, explained that Staff is meeting with Department Heads next week to review the project's plans. She noted that the Engineering Department is especially interested in the potential impacts of the project on the existing culvert. She explained that the zoning for this parcel requires that buildings not have a setback, however, this site requires a setback based on the location of the culvert. Although this project was granted a variance for this violation two years ago by the Board of Appeals, it has since expired, and the Applicant will have to re-appear before the Board.

Ms. Gaffey noted that when the project was originally proposed, Staff believed that it was a good candidate for a density incentive and still feels similarly. Staff support that it is a mixed-used, transportation-oriented development that incorporates many sustainable design features. The project will also add 26 housing units to the City, including four affordable units. She explained that the project site is identified as an opportunity site in the Housing Production Plan and promotes the overall goals of the plan. She noted that the design features and massing could be refined, and that the application is still pending the financial incentives portion of the Special Permit for Density Incentive in the BA-2 District.

Board Members were curious about the site's drainage and groundwater infiltration. One Board Member asked if the stormwater onsite is currently discharged into the culvert to which Ms. LaBrie responded that there is no existing onsite stormwater system and that all the runoff goes into the catch basins located on Berwick St. One Member requested exploring options for groundwater infiltration from roof runoff rather than having runoff directed to the culvert; the proposed rain barrels are mostly for water conservation and should not necessarily be viewed as a stormwater mitigation strategy.

One member asked what will be tying into the subsurface infiltration area. Ms. LaBrie explained that there is a contact catch basin that will capture runoff from the driveway. The runoff will be pre-treated and infiltrated. If there is a larger storm, the overflow would be directed to the culvert. Members emphasized reducing the burden on the existing culvert wherever possible. Ms. LaBrie noted that it is a tight site, but the design reduces overall flow to the culvert by providing pervious pavers and underground infiltration.

Members wondered about the commercial and residential parking. Mr. Feyl clarified that the commercial parking spaces are located on the exterior of the building and are labeled as such on the plans. All the proposed parking spaces are conforming, and infrastructure will be installed to increase the number of electric charging stations as demand increases. One Member suggested

rerouting the pedestrian path that cuts diagonally across the driveway to minimize traffic hazards. Additionally, the team was encouraged to consider activating the sidewalk for a more interesting streetscape. One Member commented that the proposed columns in the parking area may be difficult for cars to maneuver around. Mr. Feyl responded that the column placement can be altered and there is a 24-foot drive aisle all the way through the garage. One Member noted that the Applicant could apply for a Special Permit for Compact Parking spaces if that would provide more flexibility. One Member suggested restricting the parking space on the corner of Berwick St. to 15 minutes for commercial customers or trash pickup.

Members were curious about the landscape plan. One Member asked if the Applicant has explored planting trees on the sidewalk along the building. Mr. Heffernan responded that the sidewalk becomes very narrow and is not currently ADA compliant around an existing street tree on West Wyoming Avenue but they are exploring different options. One Member asked about landscaping on West Wyoming underneath the overhang. Ms. LaBrie explained that the plantings will be drought resistant and shade tolerant grasses and shrubs, designed by a landscape architect, that will be planted directly in the ground and watered by hand with water collected in the rain barrels. One Member suggested installing raised planter beds with seating to protect the plants and offer places to sit. A shadow study was also requested to understand how the building's massing would affect its surroundings and if the proposed plantings were correct for the proposed sun exposure.

One Member was concerned about the retail space and the effects of the business on traffic, parking and pedestrian safety. Mr. Heffernan explained that pre-pandemic the team was considering a medical or dental office, or a café but they are open to suggestions. Mr. Heffernan noted that he has spoken with Melrose Bicycle and Pedestrian Committee and would investigate traffic calming measures to enhance safety. One Member expressed preference for something other than a medical or dental office explaining that they would like to see something that brings more liveliness and foot traffic to the rail station commercial node. One Member asked if the proposal includes public bicycle racks and Mr. Feyl noted that there is a proposed rack on Berwick St.

Members were curious about the interaction between the proposed building and the abutting houses on West Wyoming Ave. One Member asked if the plans included eliminating the site's downward slope. Ms. LaBrie responded that they are proposing to keep the same slope while creating a swale that will drain into the yard drains, which will discharge into the culvert. One Member asked about the distance between this project and abutting buildings to which Mr. Feyl responded that it meets fire safety code. Ms. LaBrie noted that the plan moves the existing building farther back from the lot line giving abutters more space between their decks and the building location. One Member asked if the abutters could walk around the building to access downtown and Ms. LaBrie explained that due to the grading, there will be a wall installed on the right side of the building so pedestrians will have to go along West Wyoming Ave to Berwick St. or cut through the adjacent property. These residents do not have access to cut through the site today.

One Member asked if a fence will be installed between the project and the abutters. Ms. LaBrie explained a fence is proposed along the northeast corner. It was also clarified that there is a fence along the Corey St. property parking lot.

One Member asked about the driveway material and if pervious pavers could be installed between the sidewalk and the commercial parking spaces. Ms. LaBrie noted that it is asphalt since the sidewalk will be salted during the winter and the salt will ruin in the pavers. One Member noted that they would like to see more architectural details presented during the following Planning Board hearing. It was explained that the renderings should be as realistic as possible with the intended color pallet, windows, signage, lighting, and landscape, especially before the Design Review Committee reviews and approves the proposal.

Members were supportive of the increased housing and site activation that this project offers. One Member commented that the Board should more thoroughly consider programming and space activation during the Site Plan Review process so that there are not vacant storefronts once projects are completed.

The Applicant stated that he would like to file with the Board of Appeals for a variance as soon as possible.

Four people appeared before the Board to provide public comments including: David Rotondo of 26 West Wyoming Avenue, Matthew Hartman of 3 Allen Place, David Wilson of 26 West Wyoming Avenue, and Finn McSweeney of 160 West Wyoming Avenue. Concerns included:

- Increased traffic
- Pedestrian safety
- Including afternoon traffic and school dismissal in the traffic report
- Building materials including cladding, windows, and lack of design elements
- Driveway placement
- Connecting the streetscape fund directly to specific projects
- One person commented that he was not sure why they could not provide the required parking spaces onsite

Supportive comments included:

- Increased density
- Site activation
- Transited oriented development
- Reducing parking and/or eliminating the commercial spaces entirely

In response to some of the concerns, Mr. Sampson explained that projects are eligible to apply for a Special Permit for Reducing Parking if the site is near public transit. The Board ensures that certain criteria are met before issuing the Special Permit and encourages Applicants to market to prospective residents who do not rely on personal vehicles and to incentivize utilizing public transit. Mr. Heffernan explained that developments tend to overestimate how much parking is needed resulting in a superfluous number of parking spaces. He also explained that the team tried

different design ideas to relocate the driveway to reduce traffic impact on Berwick St. but that those proposals had not worked for the site.

Ms. Morelli made a motion to continue the public hearing to October 13, 2022. Mr. Gregory seconded the motion. All voted in favor of a continuance. None were opposed.

NEXT MEETING
The next regular meeting of the Planning Board is scheduled for Thursday, October 13, 2022. The meeting adjourned at 9:20 pm.