

MELROSE PLANNING BOARD**MEETING MINUTES****Regular Meeting****Monday, March 27, 2023****7:45 PM****Milano Center, 201 W Foster Street, Melrose**

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

ABSENT: Paul King

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

The meeting was called to order at 7:50 PM by Anne DeSouza Ward acting as Chair until Chair Greg Sampson arrived.

APPROVAL OF MINUTESPlanning Board Regular Meeting, March 13, 2023

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

ZONING AMENDMENTS

Denise Gaffey, City Planner, explained that two public hearings were held to review the proposed zoning amendment package: one with of City Council on March 6, 2023 and one with the Planning Board on March 13, 2023. Members of the Council raised several questions and concerns and the Planning Board discussed them during their last meeting; no one from the public appeared or commented during either hearing. The Planning Board reviewed a draft report that they will send to the City Council that addresses the issues raised by Members of the Council. The report does not recommend any changes to the proposed zoning amendments.

Ms. Morelli made a motion to accept the report as written and send it to City Council. Mr. Welch seconded the motion. All voted in favor. None were opposed.

Documents: Zoning Amendment Recommendation Letter to the City Council 3.27.2023

Chair Greg Sampson arrived at the meeting following the discussion on the Zoning Report.

SITE PLAN REVIEW & SPECIAL PERMITS

Case 22-009, 14-24 Tremont Street, Eli Pechthold & Greg Young—K&K Developers Inc (c/o Garden Homes Development)

David Lucas, Attorney, Greg Young, Developer, Michael Lawson, Architect, John Barrows, Civil Engineer, and Vinod Kalikiri, Traffic Engineer, appeared before the Board to present the case. Attorney Lucas provided an overview of the project noting that the property is currently used for vehicle storage and for Dogwood Cottage, a doggy daycare. He noted that this location is in the City's Housing Production Plan (HPP) as a target site and the project will add 107 more units to the City's housing stock, 16 of which will be affordable. He reviewed the project's fiscal impact study and noted that more information on the project's landscaping will be discussed at a future session. He also commented that a neighborhood meeting was held with abutters where concerns over the size of the building and parking were raised.

Mr. Young reviewed the history of the property explaining that it was used as a coal yard and then became an oil depot. Stephen Longmuir purchased the site and the oil tanks were removed in the 1980's and 90's. He also provided information on Garden Homes Development and the company's portfolio which spans the Northeast and southern California. He noted that the company owns and manages all of its developments.

Mr. Lawson described the building's architectural details and plans. There will be cellar level parking that is semi-below grade and hidden from the streetscape. There is also parking at grade on the right of the building. From the main entrance, it is possible to see through the building to the courtyard in the back. The first through fifth floors will have stacked, one-bedroom and two-bedroom units. The units on the first floor facing Tremont St. are raised up from street level and have stoops and private entries to activate the streetscape. The units on the fifth floor have balconies. The design proposes a C-shaped building with units flanking the sides of the courtyard. The courtyard area has grill stations, a lawn space, and a wading pool. Residents will also have access to private dining areas, a club room, and a roof deck.

The building is setback from the street to allow for drop offs in the motor court outside the main entrance. The building is fully sprinkled with standpipes in the staircases. The sustainable features include podium level parking to reduce the heat island effect, EV charging infrastructure, landscaping to increase the site's pervious surfaces, water sense plumbing and low flow fixtures, ENERGY Star appliances, electric heat pump systems, LED fixtures, operable windows, a construction waste management plan that reduces waste, bicycle parking, low VOC materials, and individual unit metering for water and electrical utilities.

Mr. Lawson noted that the building's design is contemporary with brick detailing, cast stone cornices, brick cornices, and fiber cement paneling. The top floor is stepped back to minimize the height of the building, which is 62 ft., and the design layers the building with a defined bottom, middle and top. There are storefront and bay windows on the first floor and a cornice on the fourth floor. There will be landscaping along the front of the building.

Mr. Kalikiri reviewed the traffic report highlighting the project's transportation-oriented features including its proximity to public transportation and nearby retail amenities, the availability of a

well-connected sidewalk system, and the number of bicycle parking spaces offered onsite. He noted that the existing uses on the site include Dogwood Cottage, which is an active use that generates traffic, and a parking lot with 58 spaces.

To gather data, the report inventoried the site's current conditions, conducted an analysis of the other planned changes and projects in the area, estimated the proposed project's travel generation, and analyzed traffic patterns with and without the development's construction. The report studied traffic from the site to Lynn Fells Parkway, West Emerson St., and along Tremont St. Engineers also reviewed vehicles speeds, crash data, traffic control methods, and roadway geometry, and conducted site visits during the morning and afternoon peak hours. Results indicate that the project will generate a nominal amount of traffic with minimal new impacts to the studied roadways. The project also incorporates features to prevent excessive traffic including garage doors that can be opened remotely from a distance to prevent queuing, unbundled parking, and a transportation demand management plan.

Mr. Barrows provided an overview of the site's civil plans. The team will cut and cap utilities to the existing buildings on the site and discontinue the connections to the water system. Separate domestic water and fire service is proposed. The project will connect to an existing 15" MWRA sewer line. The building will also have a gas connection. The site is 93% impervious and most of the existing runoff is collected by catch basins in the center of the site. An analysis of the drainage patterns found that the site drains to the City's sewer system, but the project will discontinue the connection. This will reduce the impact and reduce inflow and infiltration. Stormwater systems are proposed in the back of the building and underneath the garage slab to hold and infiltrate runoff. The project decreases the stormwater runoff generated from the site.

The Chair asked if the Board members had any initial questions or comments. Members wondered about the HVAC units on the roof and if the project is proposing makeup air units to compensate for the exhaust from the housing units. Mr. Lawson noted that air systems have not yet been identified. A decibel rating was requested to make sure that the HVAC system follows the City's noise standards. Members were curious about the site's infiltration capacity and where the runoff will drain. Mr. Barrows explained that most of the water will recharge into the ground water which has sandy soils that can handle infiltration. The water that doesn't recharge from the driveways will go back into the municipal system. Board Members requested a summary of the status of the environmental conditions and actions that may be required because of the past uses that formerly contaminated the site.

A member asked if the Board's approval of the additional density would result in the City getting closer to the state mandate for 10% of the housing unit to be affordable. Ms. Gaffey noted that this development will not add a substantial amount to the City's overall percentage but it was also clarified that the project is following the City's affordable housing requirement and will contribute 15% of the total units affordable to households with incomes that do not exceed 80% area median income. Members also wondered if the variance request for the left side yard setback was to accommodate the parking structure and if the rest of the building on that side complied with the setback, which Mr. Lawson affirmed. One Board Member asked if a mixed-use building was ever considered noting that the proposal eliminates commercial space and since the City does not have a lot of it we should consider maintaining what we do have. The

Development Team responded that a mixed-use building was not contemplated. One Member worried about the impact that 107 units would have on the school systems and Ms. Gaffey confirmed that Staff conducted an analysis which indicated that this is not a concern, and it was noted that from a fair housing standpoint this should not be a consideration.

Members asked about the building's sustainability features including the EV chargers and the bicycle room access. Mr. Lawson explained that 15% of the parking spaces will accommodate EV infrastructure and more can be added in the future based on need. The bicycle room is in the cellar-level parking area and is accessed through the vestibule. Cyclists can use the loading door on the right of the parking area to exit onto Tremont St. rather than through the garage doors. Board Members requested adding more bicycle parking. Members also asked about the building's gas connection and the elements of the building that will be gas-powered. Mr. Lawson explained that some equipment will be gas powered, such as the generator and hot water heaters, but a decision on kitchen appliances has not been made.

Members asked about the building's sound attenuation given its proximity to the railroad tracks and were curious about the decision to locate the courtyard in the back of the building facing the railroad. Mr. Lawson explained that the railroad is set back from the building and that a parapet wall will be installed between the courtyard and the tracks. There will also be landscaping to buffer the sound. The c-shape of the building also helps with sound attenuation and mitigation.

Chair Sampson clarified the Planning Board's jurisdiction in this case and asked the City Planner to summarize the City's review. Ms. Gaffey noted that notification was provided to relevant Department Heads and a meeting was held with police, fire, engineering, inspectional services and planning. Engineering issues are summarized in a separate memo and most can be handled as conditions of a decision, except additional information is needed regarding the stormwater; the fire captain noted that plans for the fire alarm and sprinkler system will need to be reviewed prior to issuing a building permit; the Building Commissioner noted the requirement for a 3rd party review and asked for details regarding proximity of utility poles to the building.

Ms. Gaffey noted that the planning department supports the proposal for multi-family housing to address the urgent need for housing and acknowledges that this location is ideal and identified as an opportunity site in the Housing Production Plan. The proposal improves upon existing conditions and non-conformities, but there are valid concerns about density and scale which will require careful consideration and modifications to the plans. Planning staff identified items that need additional consideration including the style and massing of the building, additional perspectives, a shadow study, additional bike parking and a review of safety for cyclists and pedestrians, a solid waste plan, a lighting plan, and screening for roof top units.

Prior to opening the floor to the public Chair Sampson noted that the Board received a lot of correspondence from the public related to this proposal and that all correspondence is reviewed by board members and is part of the record. The Board received 28 letters including 27 in opposition and 1 in support, and presentation materials from neighbors. In addition, Janine Venuti of 39 Altamont Ave., Cindy Luongo of 74 Lake Ave., Andrew Ferentinos of 89 Lake Ave., John MacDonald of 39 Lake Ave., Guy Sturgis of 60 Lake Ave., Marie Haggerty representing 75 Lake Ave., Michelle Shafer of 93 Lake Ave., Roger Graf of 32 Lake Ave., James

Stringer of 92 Lake Ave., Sandy Brown of 130 Tremont St., Thomas Dick of 82 Lake Ave, Houghton Yonge of 220 Essex St., Marilem Ferentinos of 89 Lake Ave., Martine of 93 Lake Ave., Councilor Jack Eccles of 99 Essex St., Finn McSweeney of 160 W. Wyoming Ave., and Christopher Park of 76 Vinton St., appeared to speak about the proposal.

Mr. Ferentinos commented at length on behalf of many of the members of the public in attendance, including several architects. He provided illustrations expressing concern about the size and scale of the development and encouraged the developer to consider alternatives. These materials were also submitted to Board Members.

In addition, most of the public who commented expressed concerns about the proposal including:

- Losing commercial property;
- Concern that the development deviates from the City's Master Plan and Housing Plan
- The lack of community benefits;
- The lack of affordable units and the anticipated high rental cost;
- The FAR calculation was questioned.
- Concern that the building is too large and shadow would be cast over residential abutters and negate their roof top solar panels.
- Added traffic volume and congestion.
- Traffic safety on Lake Ave., its use as a cut-through street, and emergency vehicle access for the Fitch Home;
- The precedent set by approving the proposal;
- The lack of visitor parking;
- The site's potential environmental hazards and the treatment of stormwater;
- The proposed astroturf and lack of trees; and
- The proposed loading zone will not work as intended.

Others provided suggestions including relocating vehicle access to the south edge of the property and away from Lake Ave. to discourage cut through traffic, reducing the building's size, adding more green space, redesigning the building to minimize the impact of shadow on the neighbors' solar panels, and replacing the private entrances in the front of the building with community amenity space.

The members of the public who spoke in favor of the proposal noted that the project positively maximizes the lot area, many projects in Melrose require zoning relief so the relief needed is not unique, and the project supports transportation-oriented development. Additionally, if the project were to be downsized, it would take away affordable units as well as market-rate units that have an impact on the supply and demand and cost of housing at a time when there is a significant housing crisis in the region.

Members clarified that the Developer does not control the rental amount for the affordable units because the limit is set using specific calculations based on the area median income.

The Board requested more information for the next session of the public hearing including:

- Details regarding the traffic improvements that the City will be implementing at Tremont St. and West Emerson St., and West Emerson St. and Vinton St.
- A shadow study
- Additional renderings to view the proposed building in context
- Information about sound attenuation,
- Additional bicycle storage
- Information regarding visitor parking
- The dimensions of the roof equipment,
- Information regarding the environmental contamination and any further actions that may be required
- Information on the operation of the loading area
- More consideration of traffic concerns and circulation.

Ms. Morelli made a motion to continue the public hearing to May 22, 2023. Ms. DeSouza Ward seconded the motion. All voted in favor of a continuance. None were opposed.

Documents: Applicant Materials for Case 22-009

RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE BOARD OF APPEALS

Case 23-004, 77 School Street

Board Members had no objection to the proposed plan. Members felt that the addition is appropriate for the lot size and shape given the lot's wide rear yard. Furthermore, the abutters on either side are far enough from the property lines and they should not be affected by the setback violation. Members also commented that the proposal follows the pre-existing nonconforming side yard setback.

Ms. DeSouza Ward made a motion to send a neutral letter to the Board of Appeals. Mr. Gregory seconded the motion. All voted in favor. None were opposed.

Documents: Applicant Materials for Case 23-004

Case 23-005, 12-14 Sylvan Street

Board Members were in favor of the proposal. Members noted that townhouses are a contextual building type in this neighborhood. It was noted that this site may have drainage issues and that the project increases the site's impervious surface, however, Members noted that the project's design and engineering details will be reviewed when the project undergoes Site Plan Review.

Mr. Welch made a motion to send a letter in support to the Board of Appeals. Ms. DeSouza Ward seconded the motion. All voted in favor. None were opposed.

Documents: Applicant Materials for Case 23-005

Case 23-006, 1 Washington Street

Board Members were opposed to the proposal. Members agreed that the project would not be the highest and best use of the site; especially considering its proximity to public transportation. Members also noted that the requested use was prohibited from this district when the Smart Growth Overlay District was created because it was determined that it would conflict with the overlay district.

Ms. DeSouza Ward made a motion to send a letter in opposition to the request. Mr. Aveni seconded the motion. All voted in favor. None were opposed.

Documents: Applicant Materials for Case 23-006

NEXT MEETING

The next meeting of the Planning Board is scheduled for April 24, 2023.
The meeting adjourned at 11:15 pm.