

MELROSE PLANNING BOARD
MEETING MINUTES
Regular Meeting
Monday, April 24, 2023
7:30 PM
Remote Meeting

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

ABSENT: None

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

The meeting was called to order at 7:30 PM by Mr. Sampson.

Pursuant to Chapter 2 of the Acts of 2023, this meeting will 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 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.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Design Review Subcommittee Meeting, March 20, 2023

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

Planning Board Regular Meeting, March 27, 2023

Members discussed a public comment that the Planning Board received about the contents of the minutes noting that the minutes are not intended to be a verbatim transcript of the hearing and that the number of attendees is never recorded in their minutes. Member felt that the minutes adequately covered the meeting; however, in order to be responsive to the comment one Member suggested that the minutes be amended to specify that the Board received presentation materials in addition to the letters from community members. Additionally, one Member suggested clarifying that three architects spoke rather than just one. Mr. Welch made a motion to accept the minutes as amended. Ms. DeSouza Ward seconded the motion. All voted in favor except for Paul King who abstained. None were opposed.

SUBDIVISION PUBLIC HEARING

Summit Avenue, North Shore Residential Development (continued public hearing)

Patrick McAvoy, Attorney, requested to withdraw the case without prejudice. Mr. Welch commented that he was disappointed with the request after the amount of time and effort that the City and the neighbors invested and would have preferred for the developer to come up with a workable project.

Ms. Morelli made a motion to approve the request to withdraw without prejudice. Mr. Aveni seconded the motion. By roll call vote, all members voted in favor. None were opposed.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE BOARD OF APPEALS

Case 23-003, Comprehensive Permit Application, 28-54 Greenwood St.

Denise Gaffey, City Planner, explained that the Board of Appeals opened the case one month ago. Since the first meeting, the Board conducted a site visit and OPCD has been facilitating the retention of peer review consultants for geotechnical services to analyze the proposed blasting and effects of potential long term soil erosion, and civil engineering to analyze issues related to drainage and stormwater runoff.

Ms. Gaffey provided a brief overview of the project's history and application process and highlighted the main concerns including the ledge removal, limited onsite infiltration, traffic congestion, and building design. She noted that a Staff Report from OPCD was shared with Members of the Planning Board and the Board of Appeals, and it contained an alternative plan that would be less impactful. Members supported the views expressed in the Staff Report.

Members supported the retention of peer review services and commented that the Applicant's geotechnical engineer, GZA, is a reputable firm. Ms. Morelli attended the first ZBA hearing and felt that the geotechnical engineer gave a clear presentation. However, Members expressed concern about the incongruity between the site characteristics and the proposed project, and the number of requested waivers. They wondered if the Board of Appeals could impose a condition of approval requiring an independent geotechnical firm or clerk of the works be present during construction to represent the city's interest and the interest of the nearby property owners.

Members raised concerns over the traffic during construction and commented that the proposal promotes vehicular travel in a location with great transit access, which will exacerbate the bottlenecks on Greenwood Street. They felt the surface parking in front of the building is ill-conceived, resulting in five curb cuts and unsafe conditions for pedestrians and cyclists. Members also suggested improvements including moving the building forward on the lot and removing the surface parking; relocating the garage entrance to the far end of the building to encourage a less auto-centric design; adding more refinement to the front elevation of the building; switching the location of the electrical room and the bicycle room; and relocating the bicycle racks in the parking garage to make them more accessible.

Mr. Aveni made a motion to send a letter of recommendation endorsing the views expressed in the Staff report and reserving the Planning Board's right to share additional recommendations as new materials are submitted. Mr. Welch seconded the motion. Ms. De Souza Ward amended the motion to also include the Planning Board's comments in the recommendation.

By roll call vote, all voted in favor. None were opposed.

Documents: Comprehensive Permit Application for 28 Greenwood St.
Office of Planning and Community Development Staff Report

Case 23-007, 42 Boston Rock Rd.

Board Members agreed with the comments in the Staff Brief noting that a sunroom may be more intrusive for abutters in the rear than the existing deck and it could be built farther away from the property line. They agreed that the decision would best be made by the Zoning Board with input from abutters.

Mr. Welch made a motion to send a neutral letter of recommendation that endorses the views expressed in the Staff Brief. Mr. Aveni seconded the motion. All voted in favor. None were opposed.

Documents: ZBA Application Materials for Case 23-007

Case 23-008, 106 West Foster St.

Board Members noted that the building looks as though it was originally built as a home. Some agreed with the comments in the Staff Brief and others felt as though there are already several windows and adding more on the first and second floors and changing the first floor bedroom to a more open space, would inhibit the functional use of the units. Members were also conflicted about the request for a driveway width variance. Some felt that it was a pre-existing nonconforming condition that was de minimus; others posited that it can easily be brought into conformity and a landscaped area could be provided in the space.

Ms. Morelli made a motion to send a neutral letter of recommendation that included the Planning Board's discussion. Ms. DeSouza Ward seconded the motion. All voted in favor. None were opposed.

Documents: ZBA Application Materials for Case 23-008

Case 23-009, 32-34 Linwood Ave.

Board Members supported the request for the special permit for townhouse use; however, some felt that the design should be revised to be more consistent with the neighborhood context. One Member suggested that the Applicant add more landscaping to the plans, and another noted that the plans are difficult to read. It was clarified that if the Zoning Board granted the special permit and the project moved forward with four units, the development would have to undergo Site Plan Approval and plans could be revised then.

Mr. Welch made a motion to send a letter in support that includes the Planning Board's comments and design concerns. Ms. DeSouza Ward seconded the motion. All voted in favor. None were opposed.

Documents: ZBA Application Materials for Case 23-009

Case 23-010, 17 Philip Circle

The Board took no issue with this case but agreed that the garage should meet the standard parking space requirements. Members felt that the decision would best be made by the Zoning Board with input from abutters.

Ms. Morelli made a motion to send a neutral letter of recommendation. Mr. Welch seconded the motion. All voted in favor. None were opposed.

Documents: ZBA Application Materials for Case 23-010

ELECTION OF OFFICERS

Ms. DeSouza Ward nominated Mr. Sampson as Planning Board Chair and Mr. King as Clerk. Mr. Aveni seconded the motion. All members voted in favor. None were opposed and none abstained.

Mr. Sampson, as Chair, reappointed the subcommittee Members—Ms. Morelli as Chair of the Design Review Subcommittee and Ms. DeSouza Ward as Chair of the Zoning Subcommittee.

The Board did not change the membership of their subcommittees.

OTHER

Update on Zoning Amendment Package

Ms. Gaffey provided an update about the Planning Board's proposed zoning amendments. At the last Planning Board hearing, Members responded to City Council's initial comments and voted to recommend that City Council support the package without any edits. No public comments were submitted. The City Council separated the amendments into different orders, and all passed on April 18, 2023 except the BA-2 Zoning District Line Adjustment proposal which did not pass in committee but was subsequently sent back to committee by the council for further review. The committee meeting where the district line amendment will be discussed further is likely to be May 8.

Meeting Format

Members discussed the remote versus in person meeting format and agreed that they should select one approach consistently for future meetings. The Board decided to meet in person for the next meeting on May 22, 2023 at 7:45pm because the people interested in the case that will be heard that night have the expectation that the meeting would be in person. During the May 22 meeting the Board will make a decision about whether to meet in person or remotely for future meetings.

NEXT MEETING

The next meeting of the Design Review Subcommittee meeting is Monday, May 15, 2023.
The next meeting of the Planning Board is scheduled for May 22, 2023.
The meeting adjourned at 9:20 pm.