

MELROSE PLANNING BOARD
MEETING MINUTES
Regular Meeting
Monday, January 22, 2024
7:00 PM
Cassidy Conference Room, 562 Main Street, Melrose

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

ABSENT: None

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

The meeting was called to order at 7:00 PM by Mr. Sampson.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Planning Board Regular Meeting, December 18, 2023

Board Members had no comments or adjustments to the minutes. Ms. DeSouza Ward made a motion to approve the meeting minutes. Ms. Delahaij seconded the motion. All voted in favor, except for Mr. Welch who abstained. None were opposed.

SITE PLAN REVIEW & SPECIAL PERMITS

Case 23-005, 521-529 Franklin Street, 521 Franklin St, LLC Matthew Roman, Manager
Matt Roman, Applicant, Bob Bell, Attorney, Peter Quinn, Architect, Ken Crammer, Traffic Engineer and Will Schkuta, Civil Engineer, appeared to present the case.

Attorney Bell explained that this project is a keystone to the revitalization of the Highlands neighborhood. He reviewed the history of the neighborhood and the use of Corinthian Hall. It provided a fun space for events but was not accessible. The City Council recently approved moving the zoning district line to the property line so that the parking lot changed zones from URA to BA-2, which the rest of the parcel was zoned. This was a first step in making this project possible. He is hoping that the other development projects in the area do not negatively influence the judgement of this project, which has been contemplated for years.

Peter Quinn explained the architectural and landscape plans in detail. Some of his comments included the following. The style of the new portion of the building is craftsman. They are planning for the commercial tenants to remain. The salon space will have to be adjusted slightly for the new residential corridor from Franklin Street. Corinthian Hall's exterior materials including the windows on the rear of the building will be maintained. He explained the shadow study and pointed out that the trees are not modeled and they currently cast a shadow to the north.

Will Schkuta described the proposed stormwater management plan and the utilities for the project. An infiltration system was installed in the parking lot of the property around 2017 and the gutters from the roof tie into it. It does not have a connection to the municipal system and the system has worked well. The soils on the site are suitable for infiltration.

Ken Crammer explained the traffic impact study and what assumptions went into it, which were conservative. The vehicle queuing at the intersection is projected to increase by five feet, which is less than the length of a car.

The Board members discussed and asked questions about the following items. They requested additional information as noted.

1. Move the garage door back so that a car has full visibility onsite (and leaves sidewalk clear) since they will be waiting at times to pull out onto street due to queuing.
2. Include a pedestrian warning signal.
3. Provide a graphic representation of queuing on Greenwood Street – does it reach Woodlawn Ave? Explain if there is a risk of more cut through traffic on Woodlawn as a result of this proposal. Give more detail on how the projected traffic from surrounding projects was considered in the calculations.
4. Design comments:
 - concern that the building would be imposing on the existing structure
 - consider ways of reducing massing
 - large eaves are working against smaller top to the building
 - Craftsman versus colonial – does that work?
 - try for more complementary colors between the buildings
 - height of window on Belmont Street elevation seems odd
 - address blank gray wall
 - add detail to the dormers
 - add articulation to the brick base
5. Additional 3D view to show context between the new and existing buildings and neighboring buildings – how much space is there between new dormers and windows of the new building?
6. How do package deliveries to the building work and move in/move out?
7. Fix height on elevations
8. Will solar be installed or just solar ready? The green building plan is thoughtful. The building will be electric except that the restaurant will still use gas.
9. Provide turning movements for trash truck in municipal lot
10. Parking spaces at end of garage are difficult to access
11. How much light will the balconies get to be able to grow plants in planters?
12. Can outlets be located in the basement bike room?
13. Identify the affordable units
14. Refine solid waste management for restaurant to use trash room (can you put in a lift?)
15. Is there space for a compost bin in trash room?
16. Confirmation that the transformer location is acceptable to National Grid
17. Parking memo justifying parking space reduction (include info on usage of rear parking lot since these spaces will be eliminated for restaurant and salon).

18. What type of energy efficient windows are proposed?
19. Response to Engineering comments
20. Financial analysis: Applicants seeking a special permit pursuant to this § 235-66 shall be required to submit a financial analysis.
21. Will the one-bedroom units on the third floor of the existing building work or will they need to be studios because of their size and layout? Mr. Quinn believed that they would work as one-bedroom units because the floor area was larger than it looks and there are large windows in the front and back of the units.
22. Will the site be filled in the area marked as crushed stone? It was confirmed that this space will be filled.
23. The garage will be mechanically vented.
24. The restaurant currently uses the same door in the proposed plan that will be used to bring trash out of the building so that will not be a change in operation.

Four people appeared to provide comments on the case including Daniel Giatrelis, owner of 513-517 Franklin Street, Thomas Perriard of 569 Franklin Street, and Victor Shinglam Hui and May Chan, owners of 533-541 Franklin Street. Dr. Giatrelis has a dental office on the first floor of his property and he is concerned about parking. He said that flooding is not an issue. He asked if the fence in the alleyway next to his building will be changed and the response was it will not because it is on his property. Mr. Perriard thought that the building was too tall and lacked sufficient setback. He liked the proposed park in the City owned land. Mr. Shinglam Hui said that Mr. Roman was nice to offer his tenants the ability to continue to use the trash area on the subject property. He mentioned an issue about grading and runoff at the back of his property.

Ms. DeSouza Ward made a motion to continue the case to February 26, 2024 in order for the Applicants to provide the additional information requested to the Board. Mr. Welch seconded the motion. All voted in favor of the continuance. None were opposed.

SLOPE PROTECTION SPECIAL PERMIT

Case 23-004, Dexter Road Lot H3 0 12, Szecon Development, Inc.

Sean & Laura Szekely, Applicants, Rich Williams, Engineer, and Jesse Schomer and Jim Mitchell, Attorneys, appeared to provide an update on the case since the last public hearing. Attorney Schomer explained the renderings provided, site section, updates to the civil plans including changes in the front yard grading and the trees that will be preserved, and noted that the revised stormwater calculations were acceptable to the City's Engineering Department.

No one appeared to speak in support or in opposition to the project.

Members were appreciative of the additional and revised materials presented. By visiting the site with the proposed footprint marked, the Board members were able to clearly visualize how the house would mostly sit on the flat portion of the site and how much of the slope would be removed. The site section provided also helped to visualize the impact to the sloped area in context. It provided a representation to better understand the volume of land that is proposed to be excavated for the house and rear yard which members found was relatively minor in volume.

In combination with a better understanding of the existing conditions, the amount of earth that would be removed and the additional and revised design details provided, the members explained how the proposal met the special permit finding that the project uses innovative architecture, landscaping, circulation and site design.

A member said that it would be beneficial if the land excavated for the footprint of the building was used for the fill needed for the front yard.

Members agreed that the project includes a huge benefit to the conservation land with 4.9 acres of the site being preserved.

Mr. Aveni made a motion to close the public hearing. Ms. Morelli seconded the motion. All members voted in favor of closing the public hearing. None were opposed.

Ms. Morelli made a motion to approve the Slope Protection Special Permit. Mr. Bailey seconded the motion. All members voted in favor of granting the Special Permit except Mr. Welch abstained as he was not present at the first public hearing for the case. None were opposed.

Case 22-007, Montvale Street Lot D5 0 40A, Armando Plata

Robert Bell, Attorney, and Armando Plata, Applicant and Architect, appeared to present the case. They discussed how they find that the area in the private way to the middle of the way is owned by the abutting property owner with an easement for abutters over the land. Attorney Bell said that he feels this property is a classic case for meeting the Slope Protection Special Permit and Variance findings. He pointed out how the current plan does not include cutting into the rock to provide parking, which a past application included.

Mr. Plata explained the architectural and site plans. A raingarden will be used for stormwater management. A utility pole will need to be relocated to accommodate the site plan. He will either need to remove soil in the private way in front of his abutter's property or construct a retaining wall in the street.

Members said that the house design was innovative to protect the slope of the land; however, additional information is needed for them to determine that the proposal meets the criteria needed for them to grant a Slope Protection Special Permit.

Members requested that the following is provided:

1. Plan showing the limit of work and construction level controls that will be in place.
2. Revised erosion control plan. The current one shows controls at the property lines which indicates that work will be done in a much larger area than is described.
3. An explanation of how utilities will be installed on the property including if a pump will be necessary.
4. A detailed civil site plan showing utilities and all of the proposed hardscape on the site including the walkways.

5. Test pit data.
6. A landscape plan.
7. Renderings of the proposal with a view looking up Montvale Street.
8. Construction details of how the house will be pinned to the rock.
9. A detailed construction management plan.

Six people appeared to speak in opposition to the case including Mike Festa of 127 Boston Rock Road, John Nikou of 16 Montvale Street, Ernie Karelak of 25 Montvale Street, Mike Furtado of 21 Montvale Street, Lea Fasano of 32 Wyoming Heights, and Marie Monk-Smith of 40 Wyoming Heights. A summary of the issues and concerns include that the lot is unbuildable, they fear that there will be blasting, Mr. Plata cannot remove soil from the private way in front of another person's property as is shown on the plan, having cars parked sideways on the street will lower their property values, flooding is an existing huge issue and will increase with this plan, the plans keep changing and they do not trust that what is on a plan will be built. Additionally, parking in the street will create an accessibility issue for emergency vehicles and for snow removal. The City currently plows the street and snow is pushed to in front of the subject property.

Members discussed how the proposal to park in the street is generally outside of the scope of the application before them but it does relate to the feasibility for how this project can be constructed in a way that does not disturb more land than is represented. Members asked for more information about this issue.

Mr. Aveni made a motion to continue the case to March 25, 2024 in order for the Applicant to provide the additional information requested to the Board. Mr. Welch seconded the motion. All voted in favor of the continuance. None were opposed.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE BOARD OF APPEALS

Board of Appeals public hearings on February 7, 2024

Case 23-031, 365 Porter Street

The Planning Board recommended denial of the requested variances. The proposal includes minimal frontage with access only via a long private way that would negatively impact a vernal pool.

Ms. DeSouza Ward made the motion to send this recommendation and Mr. Welch seconded it. All members voted to recommend denying the variance. None were opposed.

Documents: ZBA Application Materials for Case 23-031

Case 23-034, 83 Lincoln Street

The Planning Board recommended denial of the requested variance. The Board amended the half story definition in 2013 and this proposal would create a new violation of this regulation. They

were of the opinion that the dormers could be made smaller and there would still be sufficient space to achieve the desired rooms in the half story.

Ms. DeSouza Ward made the motion to send this recommendation and Mr. Welch seconded it. All members voted to recommend denying the variance. None were opposed.

Documents: ZBA Application Materials for Case 23-034

Case 24-001, 34 Longfellow Road

The Planning Board had no objection to the request for a variance for the alteration of the structure in the nonconforming right-side yard. The Board was not in support of granting a variance for left yard as this would create a new nonconformity and it appears that the bulkhead could be shifted to another location.

Ms. DeSouza Ward made the motion to send this recommendation and Mr. Gregory seconded it. All members voted in support of the motion. None were opposed.

Documents: ZBA Application Materials for Case 24-001

Case 24-002, 1047 Main Street

The Planning Board was not in support of granting the requested variance as it appeared unnecessary. The accessory structure regulations are generous. The proposed accessory structure is large and could be made smaller if a roof overhang is desired.

Ms. DeSouza Ward made the motion to send this recommendation and Mr. Gregory seconded it. All members voted in support of the motion. None were opposed.

Documents: ZBA Application Materials for Case 24-002

OTHER BUSINESS

The next Planning Board meeting is scheduled for February 26, 2024.

The meeting adjourned at 11:00 PM.