

MELROSE PLANNING BOARD
MEETING MINUTES
Regular Meeting
Monday, May 20, 2024
7:00 PM
Cassidy Conference Room, 562 Main Street, Melrose

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

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 7:02 PM by Mr. Sampson.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Zoning Subcommittee Meeting, April 23, 2024

Ms. DeSouza Ward made a motion to approve the meeting minutes. Mr. Gregory seconded the motion. All voted in favor, except for Beth Delahaij who abstained and Carla Morelli who was not present for the vote. None were opposed.

Planning Board Regular Meeting, April 29, 2024

Mr. Aveni made a motion to approve the meeting minutes. Mr. Welch seconded the motion. All voted in favor, except for Beth Delahaij who abstained and Carla Morelli who was not present for the vote. None were opposed.

SLOPE PROTECTION SPECIAL PERMIT

Case 22-007, Montvale Street Lot D5 0 40A, Armando Plata (*continued public hearing*)

Bob Bell, Attorney, submitted a written request to continue the case to July 22, 2024 because the Applicant requires additional time to respond to the Board's requests from the previous hearing. Ms. DeSouza Ward commented that there have been repeated requests for continuances for this case, which is burdensome for the neighbors. Board Members felt it was important that the Applicant be fully prepared at the following hearing with all the requested materials and granted a continuance for two months to allow time for this to happen.

Mr. Welch made a motion to grant a continuance to July 22, 2024. Mr. Aveni seconded the motion. All voted in favor except for Carla Morelli who was not present for the vote. None were opposed.

Documents: Request for continuance

APPROVAL NOT REQUIRED PLAN

Case 24-002 31-39, Mt. Zion Road

James Mitchell, Attorney, and Jack Sullivan, Engineer, appeared to present the case. Attorney Mitchell explained that the lot in question is registered land that the owner would like to divide into two conforming lots; the plan has been approved by the Land Court. Mt. Zion Road is a private way that is mostly paved except for a small section at the end of the street. The road has a width of 20 ft. of pavement and is in good condition. Mr. Sullivan added that there is a fire hydrant located in between the two lots and the existing utilities could service future dwellings. The intention is to create lots to construct a single-family dwelling on each.

Board Members questioned if the road was a cul de sac or a throughway and it was confirmed that the road dead ends at the City line. One Member asked how fire trucks turn around on the road and Attorney Mitchell responded that they most likely use private driveways. Members thought that fire trucks may end up backing down the street. Since the road is a private way they need to make the determination that the road provides adequate access to the lots in order to endorse the plan. They agreed that the road was steep but that there was adequate access to the lots.

Members wondered if work has already occurred on the sites. The development team said that some trees have been cleared. Members said that the lots may be subject to slope protection given the topography and that the topography on the submitted plan is what is used to measure the slopes, not the current conditions, which may have already been altered. The Board requested that the Applicant follow-up on submitting the slope protection calculations to the Building Commissioner before further modifying the lot.

Mr. Aveni made a motion to endorse the Approval Not Required plan. Ms. DeSouza Ward seconded the motion. All voted in favor, except for Carla Morelli who was not present for the vote. None were opposed.

Documents: Approval Not Required Application dated May 15, 2024
Updated Approval Not Required Application dated May 20, 2024
Approval Not Required Plan of Land dated May 17, 2024
Approval Not required explanation of access dated May 20, 2024

RECOMMENDATION FOR A COMPREHENSIVE PERMIT APPLICATION

Next Board of Appeals public hearing on June 5, 2024

Case 24-009, 164 Essex Street, Cedar Park Development, LLC

Denise Gaffey, City Planner, provided a brief overview of the project and explained that the Applicant has been working with the City and the neighbors to design a project that will fit within the neighborhood context. She noted that the proposed site was identified in the City's Housing Production Plan as an opportunity site given its proximity to the Cedar Park Commuter Rail Station and Downtown Melrose. The Board of Appeals opened the case on May 15, 2024, and Members had comments and questions that the Applicant is expected to respond to at the following hearing.

Sean Szekely, Applicant, was present and provided additional details about the project. He explained that he is working with the abutters on the right and the left and has held neighborhood meetings both with the direct abutters and those across the street. He noted that the parking for the Condominiums on the right encroaches onto his property, but he is working with the Condominium Association to grant them an easement to continue using the parking. He is also requesting an easement from the Condominium Association to add a walkway on their property that can be used for fire access. Mr. Szekely explained that the assisted living facility to the left of the project has requested that he install signs in their parking lot in front of the project to ensure residents and visitors do not park in their lot. Both abutters are open to working with him on crane placements.

Mr. Szekely explained that he is in the process of getting an easement from the MBTA to use the land for parking and landscaping behind the proposed building. He noted that the Board of Appeals requested that the southern corner of the building be better designed, and his team is working on updating the architectural plans to add more detail. The architect is also reviewing the articulation of the rear of the building. He noted that the Zoning Board of Appeals was concerned about the sound from the train reverberating across the track and affecting the residents behind the building and he is working with an acoustical engineer to mitigate the issue.

Board Members were curious if the project could go to the Design Review Subcommittee once it is approved. Ms. Gaffey explained that a condition can be added to the decision that requires the Applicant to provide a mockup for the Board of Appeals to review. One Member asked if the Applicant provided a shadow study. Mr. Szekely reviewed the shadow study with the Board which shows that in the winter, the building will mainly cast a shadow on the tracks rather than the houses to the rear of the building.

Board Members agreed that it would make sense to wait and see if additional parking is needed before creating more spaces on MBTA land. One Member suggested pulling the exposed parking spaces underneath the building so that they are screened and wondered if striping the on-street parking space is necessary or if it will be effective. Moving the curb is the way to ensure that no one parks in this area. Mr. Szekely explained that he has been communicating with the Director of Public Works about the proposed on-street parking plan and loading zone. He noted that she did not raise any issues with the loading zone. The neighbors requested that they maintain the parking spot so the project traffic engineer will re-analyze the plan to see if it is possible to retain the parking space.

One Board Member asked if the windows along the front of the building will be transparent. Mr. Szekely confirmed that they will be and added that he is planning on commissioning a local artist to create a mural along the back wall to provide interest to the building for pedestrians. He is also exploring the possibility of having an artist paint the transformer to improve its appearance since it will be required to be in an accessible place.

Mr. Welch made a motion to send a letter in support of the proposal to the Board of Appeals and Mr. Gregory seconded the motion. All members voted in favor. None were opposed.

Documents: ZBA Application Materials for Case 24-009

RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE BOARD OF APPEALS

Board of Appeals public hearings on June 12, 2024

Case 24-008, 376-386 Main Street

Members discussed the proposal and wondered if the sign would be turned off at night. Members agreed that although the surrounding uses are mostly commercial and the sign is not expected to negatively impact abutters, the Board of Appeals should condition that the sign does not flash and should be turned off after business hours. One Board Member commented that the rendering only shows the prices for two types of gas while the current sign has more. One Member wondered if the Zoning Board of Appeals should condition that the lights have the technology to dim them if they were too bright.

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

Documents: ZBA Application Materials for Case 24-008

Case 24-010, 8 Prescott Street

Members took no position on the request for variances. Members noted that this proposal is more conforming than the proposal the Board approved in 2021, which was not constructed, and agreed that the project will not impact abutters.

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

Documents: ZBA Application Materials for Case 24-010

Case 24-011, 83 Bellevue Avenue

Members discussed the proposal and the Building Commissioner's decision. Staff informed the Board that the ZBA denied a request in the 1970s to allow the dwelling to operate as a two family under the previous owners. Members agreed, based on the plans, that the dwelling appears to be used as a two-family but wondered if the Applicant could modify the dwelling such that it could continue to be classified as a single-family if they did not want it to be classified as a two-family. However, Members also agreed that since no changes were being proposed and the units appear to be laid out and function separately, the proposal would not affect the neighborhood and it would benefit the housing stock to have more diversity in housing types by having the house be a two-family dwelling.

Ms. DeSouza Ward made a motion to send a letter in support of the requests for a Special Permit and Variances, and to leave it to the judgement of the ZBA as to whether to grant the administrative appeal. Ms. Morelli seconded the motion. All members voted in favor. None were opposed.

Documents: ZBA Application Materials for Case 24-011

OTHER BUSINESS

The next Zoning Subcommittee meeting is scheduled for May 21, 2024.

The next Planning Board meeting is scheduled for June 24, 2024.

The meeting adjourned at 8:15 PM.