

MELROSE PLANNING BOARD
Special Meeting & Public Hearing
Thursday, October 16, 2008
7:45 p.m.
Aldermanic Chamber

PRESENT: Mike Cassavoy, Richard Connolly, Ed Cassidy, Bob Mercado, Gerry Marcus, John Sadowski, Anne DeSouza-Ward, Tom Pawlina and Carla Francazio

Denise Gaffey, Planner, and Matt Hennigan, Assistant Planner, were present.

The meeting was called to order at 7:50 p.m. by Mr. Cassavoy.

SITE PLAN REVIEW-AFFORDABLE HOUSING SPECIAL PERMIT

SP 08-007, Stone Place, Stone Place Limited Partnership

Ms. Gaffey started the public hearing by reading the public notice and Mr. Cassavoy offered some brief opening remarks before welcoming the Applicant's representative to begin their presentation. Robert Bell, the Applicant's representative, introduced the Development Team that includes Rob Del Savio and Joel Bargmann from the Architect, Bob Clarke and Ryan Bianchetto from the Engineer, Mike D'Angelo from the Landscape Architect and the Applicant, Tani Halperin with Mercer Properties, Inc.

Mr. Bell opened with a housekeeping issue and asked that the address on the application be changed to have all correspondence go through his office. Mr. Bell indicated that the traffic report shall be presented at a separate meeting and informed the Planning Board that a consultant has been engaged to perform a fiscal impact study. Mr. Bell began his presentation by complementing the City on how far it has come in recent years in terms of strengthening its development policy. Mr. Bell stated that Applicant's project is real and moving forward. Mr. Bell assured the Planning Board that the project is viable with the resources to make it happen. Mr. Bell indicated the application according to the Building Commissioner is in accordance with the City Zoning Ordinance and only requires Site Plan Review and Affordable Housing Special Permit approvals. Mr. Bell stated to the Planning Board that the application meets all zoning requirements and reviewed each individual requirement listed on the zoning summary on Sheet C-1. Mr. Bell introduced the Architect, Rob Del Savio. The Architect oriented the Planning Board as far as the location of the site and explained the layout of the proposed buildings. The Architect indicated that the application includes a total of 300 residential units; 27 of which will be designated as affordable units. The Architect highlighted the individual buildings that comprise the proposal. Building A shall be three stories in compliance with the Zoning Ordinance and assist to form a gateway to the site. The Architect explained that the Building A shall house the leasing office as well as the clubhouse and other amenities. The Architect explained that window replacements and masonry restoration are proposed for Building C, the existing landmark mill building, along with the alteration of the dormers. The new Building C connector will require the removal of the existing one-story connector and the construction of a new four-story connector that will be open to pedestrian traffic on the ground floor to facilitate circulation within the campus. The Architect explained that the three buildings at the rear of the site shall be wood framed construction, four stories in height and feature French balconies and brick detail. The first floor of each building will be 5' above grade to accommodate parking below. The Architect indicated that improvements to Building E will include window replacements and masonry restoration in addition to the installation of French balconies to offer added light.

Mr. Bell introduced Bob Clarke to present an overview of the engineering related to the application. The Engineer reviewed with the Planning Board the site circulation and the four connection points to Washington Street. The Engineer shared that the site includes 425 parking spaces and 35 percent open space. The Engineer discussed the proposed drainage improvements and highlighted that all drainage

work will meet MA DEP standards. The Engineer indicated that the proposal includes an 8" closed loop fire main that will tie into the water line on Pleasant Street. The Engineer described the sewer line replacement component of the proposal. Mr. Bell introduced Mike D'Angelo, the Landscape Architect, to highlight the proposed landscaping. The Landscape Architect indicated that the entrances will feature the use of evergreen shrubs, native trees, perennials, and ornamental grasses. The buffer on the southern edge of the site will include deciduous trees and evergreen shrubs. The buffer adjacent to Town Estates will be comprised of evergreen trees as well as deciduous trees and shrubs. A combination of fencing and landscaping is proposed around the electrical substation and along the eastern boundary of the site, adjacent to the rail line right-of-way. A small grove of trees is proposed for the pool area.

Mr. Bell and Mr. Del Savio presented two renderings: one of a view looking toward Building A along Pleasant Street and the other of the chimney looking towards Building C with Building D on the right. Mr. Bell concluded the presentation by pointing out that the height of the Building A was designed not to overpower the homes across the street and is in accordance with the zoning ordinance.

Mr. Cassavoy proceeded to open the meeting to the public for questions and comments.

Gail Infurna, 198 Boston Rock Road

Alderman Infurna read a prepared statement which highlighted the rezoning process and the efforts of the Smart Growth Task Force. Alderman Infurna drew connections to the success of Oak Grove Village as a gateway to the City and expressed excitement for a similar outcome at Stone Place. Alderman Infurna recognized the concerns of her constituents which include traffic, parking, impacts with density, and flooding and looked forward to addressing these concerns during the public hearing and peer review process.

Louis Cantanzaro, 133 Whitman Avenue

Mr. Cantanzaro described his background with the Carpenter's Union and expressed that he would be looking forward to seeing the language for workers compensation for subcontractors.

Jennifer Lock, 56 Pleasant Street

Ms. Lock commented that it was her understanding that the rezoning was to allow for mixed use. Ms. Lock inquired about the plans for the other parcels in the Smart Growth District.

Jose Rotger, 25 Dyer Avenue (Vice Chair, Melrose Historical Commission)

Mr. Rotger expressed that the Melrose Historical Commission is very interested in the project. Mr. Rotger indicated that the Massachusetts Historical Commission had contacted the Melrose Historical Commission regarding a potential adverse affect in connection with the demolition involved. Mr. Rotger stated he is personally in favor of the proposal, but at the present time the Melrose Historical Commission does not have any comments to share. Mr. Rotger stated that the Commission looks forward to being involved in the process. Mr. Rotger asked to be provided with copies of the application for review by the Commission. Ms. Gaffey indicated that materials had been provided to the Commission by OPCD earlier in the week and that the Commission would be included on the site visit.

Melissa Wattenberg, 44 Brazil Street

Ms. Wattenberg expressed interest in the environmental and social impacts related to the proposal. Ms. Wattenberg stated that she heard that the Registry was moving and inquired whether this move had any connection with the Applicant's proposal. Ms. Gaffey confirmed that the Registry of Motor Vehicles is leaving its location in Melrose when its lease expires in November. It is unrelated to the Applicant's proposal, but it is a positive development.

Maryanne Ryan, 112 Washington Street

Ms. Ryan stated that she has lived in the area for 31 years and expressed that she thinks it is a great proposal. Ms. Ryan showed concern regarding the lack of mixed use involved in the project. Ms. Ryan indicated that she felt that the first floor would be ideal space for a convenience store, coffee shop, and/or a dry cleaning business. Ms. Ryan viewed it to be unfortunate that residents would have to go off site for services. Ms. Ryan expressed interest in creating a connection from the proposed project site to Oak Grove Village.

Linda Apple, 76 Pleasant Street

Ms. Apple expressed an interest for mixed-use to be incorporated in the project. Ms. Apple stated that there are no stores in the area in walking distance. Ms. Apple stated that there are lots of accidents at the intersection of Pleasant Street and Washington Street. Ms. Apple asked for a definition of the Smart Growth District.

Ms. Gaffey defined Smart Growth District and explained the rezoning process that was involved. Ms. Gaffey emphasized that the Smart Growth District provides incentives for mixed use but does not dictate mixed-use within each project and pointed out that there is opportunity for mixed use throughout the entire district. Ms. Gaffey stated that the City is not aware of any future plans for the Marty's Furniture property at this time. Ms. Gaffey pointed out that the Registry site is a very favorable location for commercial use.

Jackie Wattenberg, 42 Brazil Street

Ms. Wattenberg inquired regarding the potential for a restaurant to be included as part of the Applicant's proposal.

Ms. Gaffey responded that a restaurant is as of right within the Smart Growth District and it is possible for a restaurant to be located on another parcel. However, a restaurant is not part of the Applicant's proposal.

Mr. Cassavoy asked if there were any additional questions or comments from the public. Mr. Cassavoy informed the Applicant that the Planning Board also requests that an ANR be submitted. Mr. Cassavoy indicated that the Board would like to setup a site visit and looks forward to reviewing the Applicant's fiscal impact study. Mr. Cassavoy opened the meeting to questions from members of the Board.

Mr. Sadowski asked Ms. Gaffey to explain the concept a zoning overlay. Ms. Gaffey indicated the rezoning allows for two layers of zoning. The industrial zoning designation still exists in respect to the present owners. The overlay district also allows for residential/mixed-use, uses which are not allowed in the underlying I district. A developer can choose one or the other (industrial or residential/mixed-use). Mr. Pawlina stated the need for peer review to take place to conduct an infrastructure review that includes water, stormwater, sewer, and traffic. Mr. Bell stated that the Applicant welcomes the peer review process. Mr. Pawlina MADE a MOTION to authorize the DPW to coordinate a peer review for the engineering associated with the proposal. Mr. Cassidy SECONDED the MOTION. All voted in favor. None opposed. Mr. Pawlina MADE a MOTION to authorize OPCD to coordinate a peer review for the Applicant's fiscal impact study. Mr. Cassidy SECONDED the MOTION. All voted in favor. None opposed.

Mr. Cassavoy indicated that the site visit would be determined at the Board's regular October meeting. Mr. Pawlina suggested that the site visit take place after the peer review. Ms. Marcus stated that two site visits might be appropriate.

Ms. DeSouza-Ward inquired why the Approval Not Required is necessary. Mr. Bell stated that the Building Commissioner requested the ANR because the site is comprised of multiple parcels. Ms. DeSouza-Ward expressed that the presence of a mixed-use component to the project would assist to alleviate traffic problems as well as help in terms of safety in the area. Mr. Bell responded regarding the lack of mixed-use included in the Applicant's proposal. Mr. Bell explained that the developer is a residential developer. Mr. Bell stated that the site does not lend itself to a retail use because no one wants to see parking in front of the buildings. Mr. Bell emphasized that parking is the main constraint. Mr. Bell pointed out that the proposed project wraps around the Marty's Furniture Building, which has parking in the front. Mr. Bell expressed that the Registry site is also an appropriate retail site due to its parking layout. Mr. Bell stated that the lot adjacent to the Registry has a lot of flexibility in terms of potential commercial uses because it is vacant and lacks any obstructions. Mr. Bell stated that mixed-use is a goal for the Smart Growth District and not mandatory to any particular site. Mr. Bell indicated that it is critical for the financing that the project be a residential project. According to Mr. Bell, Oak Grove Village has had a lot of difficulty filling its commercial space. Mr. Bell stated that there is still a shortage of housing of this type in the area and that the viability of commercial use in this location is seriously questioned by financiers.

Ms. Francazio expressed that she felt that the lack of mixed-use in the proposal is a missed opportunity. Ms. Francazio indicated that she is looking for signs that the proposal corresponds to the principles of Transit-Oriented Development. Ms. Francazio pointed out the Applicant's proposal includes more parking than is required by zoning. Mr. Bell replied that the proposed parking is not at the cost of open space and that in comparison Oak Grove Village has a high demand for parking that is unable to be met. Ms. Gaffey pointed out that 417 parking spaces are required by zoning. Ms. Gaffey added that parking spaces are required for the affordable units, which were not reflected in the Applicant's parking summary, and when this is taken into account there is no excess parking. Ms. Francazio expressed disappointment that a conventional development is being proposed in a Smart Growth District. Mr. Cassidy commented that mixed-use is difficult to manage. Mr. Cassidy continued that the City's main interest is enlivening the streetscape and enhancing public safety. Mr. Cassidy indicated that a few commercial units would not be unreasonable. Mr. Cassidy expressed that the walkway that connects the proposed development is poor and that improvements to building facades that abut the walkway would be a great benefit. Mr. Cassidy suggested the installation of street furniture, better sidewalks, and a bike lane to slow traffic.

Fran Walsh, 96 Pleasant Street

Mr. Walsh expressed that the public is very interested in the Applicant's proposal. Mr. Walsh asked the Planning Board to utilize the City web site to circulate more information about the project to the public. Mr. Walsh indicated that he was uncertain if the proposal is for condominiums or apartments. Mr. Walsh asked when the project is anticipated to be completed. Mr. Walsh commented that the Aldermanic Chamber is not a good setting for a meeting of this nature.

Ms. Marcus expressed that she was uncertain whether 425 parking spaces would be sufficient. Mr. Connolly commented regarding the proposed walkway through the Marty's Furniture parcel that connects the development. Mr. Connolly expressed that it appears that a lot of work would be required to make a successful connection as this area is presently very industrial. Mr. Bell stated the Applicant is currently in the process of working out some easement agreements with the owner of the Marty's Furniture parcel. Mr. Cassavoy inquired whether any environmental issues need to be addressed on the proposed site. Mr. Bell replied that the site is clean and that the Conservation Commission confirmed that there are no

wetlands on the project site. Mr. Mercado inquired how the Applicant's proposed parking compares to Town Estates. Mr. Bell indicated that he believes that the parking is comparable, but he can't remember. Mr. Mercado asked if there has been any communication with the City of Malden. Ms. Gaffey stated that she did reach out to the Planner in Malden who will be commenting along with the Malden Planning Board.

Mr. Pawlina expressed concern regarding the scale of Building A and its impact on the households across the street. Mr. Pawlina stated that Building A is right on the street and detracts from the mill building (Building C). Mr. Pawlina suggested that the height of Building A be more comparable to the Marty's Furniture Building. Mr. Bell responded that Building A was designed based on the zoning ordinance and added that zoning allows for another floor to be added to the Marty's Furniture Building. Mr. Del Savio indicated that it could be possible to reduce the roof line of the bays on Building A. Mr. Cassavoy inquired whether MEPA would be triggered. Mr. Bell indicated that there are no MEPA issues except for the Massachusetts Historical Commission component, which is the normal process when demolition is involved. Mr. Mercado asked whether the chimney is considered to be part of the landmark building. It was determined that the chimney is not included as part of the landmark building. Mr. Bell indicated that the Applicant wants the chimney to stay in place as long as it is structurally sound. Mr. Del Savio indicated that the chimney is surrounded by a one-story building at this time. Mr. Connolly asked whether the utilities would be buried. Mr. Bell replied that the Applicant's utilities will be buried. Mr. Bell indicated that they are still working with National Grid to try to get them to bury their lines. Mr. Sadowski revisited the issue of pedestrian circulation and encouraged the Applicant to explore alternatives that would better connect the site. Mr. Sadowski suggested shifting the proposed walkway along the rail right-of-way and potentially creating a connection to the Oak Grove MBTA Station that could include a bike path. Mr. Cassavoy encouraged more creativity with the landscaping and the use of landscaping to connect the two separate parcels. Ms. Francazio asked for more information regarding access to the chimney/courtyard area for residents that live in the surrounding area and whether a sidewalk was planned to offer access. Mr. Del Savio replied that the chimney area is imagined as mainly for residents of Stone Place and felt that the access from Pleasant Street might be too narrow for a sidewalk. Mr. Del Savio reviewed with the Planning Board the points of access/egress on the site. The members raised the issue of the intersection of Washington Street and Pleasant Street. Mr. Bell indicated that this intersection would be fully addressed during the peer review process and expressed that they acknowledge that off-site mitigation will be necessary but they are hopeful that signalization will not be required. Mr. Pawlina raised the issue of storm drainage and encouraged the Applicant to refer to the Site Plan Review criteria, which is more stringent than state requirements. Mr. Pawlina emphasized that one of the intents of the Site Plan Review criteria is for zero discharge on certain storm events. Mr. Clarke highlighted some components of the proposed storm drainage system including the upgrade of the drain line to 15" line from a 12" line. Mr. Connolly suggested that the application materials be posted on the City web site. Mr. Cassavoy inquired among the members for a possible future meeting date to discuss the traffic and fiscal studies as well as treatment of the streetscape. Ms. DeSouza-Ward MADE a MOTION to continue the public hearing to Wednesday, December 3, 2008 at 7:45 PM. Mr. Mercado SECONDED the MOTION. All voted in favor. None opposed.

Mr. Pawlina MADE a MOTION to adjourn. Mr. Sadowski SECONDED the MOTION. All voted in favor. None opposed.

Meeting adjourned at 10:30 p.m.