



APPROVED MEETING MINUTES

DESIGN REVIEW BOARD

The Amherst Design Review Board virtually met on ***Monday, March 8, 2021***, at **5:00 P.M.**

This meeting was recorded on Zoom and may be viewed on the Town of Amherst YouTube Channel. Click on the following link to access this meeting recording:

<https://youtu.be/3aZsRGTu7Z0>

The meeting was called to order by Chair, Catharine Porter at 5:00 p.m. with the following members:

PRESENT: Catherine Porter, Chair; Erika Zekos, Jan Marquardt, Lindsay Schnarr, and Thom Long.

ALSO PRESENT: Christine Brestrup, Planning Director; Ben Breger, Planner; Maureen Pollock, Planner and staff liaison to the DRB; and Project representative, Chris Farley, AIA of Kuhn Riddle Architects.

At this Meeting, the Amherst Design Review Board will conduct the following business:

ANNOUNCEMENTS: None

NEW BUSINESS: None

APPLICATIONS:

- a. **DRB 2021-08, Town of Amherst** – To review the Downtown Senior Mobility Improvements Project, located at and adjacent to the **Bangs Community Center property, 70 Boltwood Walk.**

Project representative, Ben Breger, Amherst Planner was present.

Mr. Breger explained the scope of work for this project. The overall project area includes improvements at 3 interconnected locations which provide important access for seniors and other visitors in the community to vital services and other key destinations in downtown Amherst. The 3 locations include:

1. Construction of a new ramp adjacent to the Bang's Community Center leading to the Musante Community Health Center; resurface steps to existing staircase adjacent to building; and add wayfinding signage to promote the Musante Community Health Center;

2. To activate the Boltwood Walk Plaza as an area for outdoor dining, with the installation of tables, chairs, and plantings;
3. Improve visibility conditions of existing crosswalk, west of the Bang Center building, which connects to existing sidewalk, known as Pleasant Walk;

The proposed ramp will include a sitting area with 4 new benches, a new 12-foot high light fixture, and new plantings. Two trees will need to be removed, but the Town plans to replace them. Warning detection pads will be installed at each end of the ramp, as a visual cue, for persons who have low vision or are blind. The existing wooden retaining wall is in poor condition and will be re-constructed with a new concrete retaining wall. A new u-shaped bike rack is to be located adjacent to the ramp.

The improvements to the existing crosswalk include: painting a new ladder pattern on the pavement, continental design, to help guide pedestrians and alert drivers to the crosswalk location; and installing new detectable warning surface panels at the toe of each crosswalk ramp, as a visual cue for persons who have low vision or are blind. Also, the existing STOP sign will be relocated to a location before the crosswalk, so that drivers know to come to a stop before the crosswalk.

Mr. Breger showed DRB members the construction details for Boltwood Walk Plaza which includes the following: 3 replacement benches, 3 fixed to ground bistro table and seats, 5 equinox umbrellas, 2 'standard height' movable table and 8 chairs; and four (4) 6-foot high wind breaks. Mr. Breger stated the Town is working with a consultant from Stantec Engineering. The consultants recommend 6-foot high wind breaks between each table in the plaza area, but the Town may wish to not purchase the wind breaks and purchase more plantings instead.

Ms. Porter stated the areas around the Boltwood Walk Plaza and the Bangs Center are in poor condition, so any improvements would be helpful. Stated she would like to see nice landscaping incorporated in this scope of work. Stated the proposed tables and chairs should not be movable and that they should be fixed to the ground, as members of the public may want to walk off with them.

Ms. Marquardt stated the success of the activated outdoor area at Boltwood Walk Plaza is dependent on the plantings. Stated there are many vehicles that drive past this area. There needs to be sufficient visual screening from vehicles passing this area in order for this space to feel welcoming and attractive to visitors and residents. Asked if movable tables and chairs could be chained at the end of each day.

Ms. Schnarr stated the proposal offers great improvements to these areas. Asked if the Town is considering whether to install a light at the crosswalk, as it is a blind spot for pedestrians and motorists.

Ms. Schnarr stated the location of the proposed ramp is in a poorly lit area that is tucked away from the adjacent sidewalks, buildings, properties, and cautioned that pedestrians may feel unsafe using the ramp, especially during the evening hours. Suggested that the ramp provide an

overhead light fixture that is downcast and shielded; and provide plantings with low heights, as a way to increase the visibility of this area.

Ms. Schnarr stated she would like the outdoor dining area located at the Boltwood Walk Plaza to be a desirable space for the long term (post COVID).

Ms. Zekos stated she shares similar concerns as Ms. Schnarr and would like the ramp to be well lit and only propose new plantings with low heights.

Mr. Long stated that he believes the proposed 4-5 tables, alone, will not provide real potential for activating the Boltwood Walk Plaza and suggested that the surrounding outdoor areas (i.e. outdoor space adjacent to the Bueno Y Sano and by Johnny's Tavern) could really help activate this overall Plaza for a more inviting and comfortable urban plaza.

Mr. Breger stated that is a point well taken. The scope of the MassDOT grant only focuses on the areas abovementioned but the Town would like to work with private business owners who wish to provide more outdoor dining areas in/around the Boltwood Walk Plaza.

Ms. Marquardt asked if the crosswalk could be raised. Mr. Breger stated that would be too costly and is not included in the MassDOT scope of work. The primary scope of work for this grant is to construct a new ramp, which is the most costly element of the grant. The other items included in the grant scope are secondary components.

Ms. Zekos stated she does not have any concerns with the tables and chairs being moveable. Stated she does not believe the wind breaks, as shown, are too heavy. Stated she would like to see alternative designs that allow for more visual connection through them.

Ms. Marquardt stated she would prefer to see more plantings provided in lieu of the wind breaks.

MOTION: Moved by Ms. Marquardt, seconded by Mr. Long, and voted (5-0) to give a positive recommendation to the Planning Board for the Town of Amherst's proposed work (SPR 2021-08) located at and adjacent to the **Bangs Community Center property, 70 Boltwood Walk**, as submitted, with the following suggestions:

1. Selection of plant material for the space in/around the new ramp should be based on height which will retain visibility from the adjacent sidewalks, buildings, and properties.
2. The selection of the light fixture at the ramp should be down-cast and shielded.
3. In lieu of the installation of the wind breaks at the Boltwood Walk Plaza, please provide more plantings, as a visual barrier from vehicles travelling through the adjacent parking lot and drive.

- b. **DRB FY2021-10, Town of Amherst** – To review the submitted Site Plan Review application to the Amherst Planning Board, for the proposed addition to the existing

North Amherst Library building and add new parking, walks, utilities, drainage and landscaping, for property located at **8 Montague Road**.

Project representative, Chris Farley, AIA of Kuhn Riddle Architects was present.

Mr. Farley presented the proposed project. Stated the Town wants the scope of work to address the following:

1. Make the existing library building and building addition ADA compliant;
2. Provide a library/community meeting room;
3. Upgrade the existing system to provide LED lighting, electric system for heating and cooling, try to make the building zero net energy, and provide triple pane windows;

The project consists of a 1,210 square foot addition to the existing 926 square foot library building for a total gross floor area of 2,136 square feet. The addition will provide a fully ADA accessible components, such as: community meeting room, door entrance, restrooms and connector to the existing building. The existing building will not be altered except at the north side where the addition will connect. All work is proposed on the east, west and north sides of the existing library. The south side of the building (toward Pine Street) will remain unchanged. There are currently approximately 9 unmarked spaces at the existing parking lot on the north parcel. A total of 10 spaces will be maintained in a reconstructed parking lot. Two of parking spaces will be ADA compliant. A new ADA accessible route will connect to existing walkways and sidewalks. The curb cut on Montague Road will be closed and the project will only have vehicular access from Sunderland Road.

Stated the Town wants to keep the building exterior façade unchanged, as much as possible.

The new addition will have wooden shingles and would have darker green trim. The new addition will have a standing seam metal roof. The peak of the roof for the new addition will be lower in height than the existing building's roof. There will be new plantings along the perimeter of the new building addition, in front of the new door entrance at the parking lot, and a section along the west and east property line.

Ms. Schnarr stated the proposed project looks and sounds exciting. Asks if access from Montague Road to the existing parking lot will be discontinued. Mr. Farley responded, yes, access from Montague Road will be discontinued. Ms. Schnarr suggested that more plantings be provided along the new parking edge, as the road access will be discontinued. Mr. Farley responded that the Town informed him that Montague Road may be realigned in the future so he didn't want to propose extensive plantings at the location, and suggested more plantings could be proposed as part of the Montague Road realignment project. Mr. Farley stated east of the property will have a sidewalk and some planting.

Ms. Zekos stated that she likes that the proposal takes inspiration from the existing building. Asks if a solar study has been provided to explore whether roof mounted solar is feasible for this site. Mr. Farley responded he was not instructed by the Town to explore solar feasibility on this site, so a study has not been provided. Mr. Farley stated the building has a wooden truss, so he could make sure that the building can structurally support roof-mounted solar panels. Ms. Zekos

asked about the rationale for the location of the 2 ADA parking spaces, as shown on the submitted site plan. Mr. Farley responded he wanted to provide a greener, softer visual sequence using plantings for visitors exiting the north entrance. Mr. Farley stated the distance to the 2 ADA parking spaces shouldn't be an issue. Ms. Zekos stated that the proposed tree, *Betula Nigra* 'Heritage' (BNH) located north of the building addition will only be short for a limited time period and cautioned that the height at its full maturity may overwhelm the building entrance and hide it from view. Mr. Farley responded that is a point well taken and he will study that more.

Ms. Marquardt stated the design does a good job taking inspiration from the existing building, but she believes the proposed pillars supporting the addition entrance and naturally-stained shingle siding, and other small details shown in the rendered drawings look like they are from the Arts & Crafts architectural period instead of pulling from the original Victorian style of the existing building. Suggested that even the slightly different green color chosen for the trim of addition contributes to this impression. Ms. Marquardt also raised a question regarding the function of the circle under round arch within the gable to the left of entrance—stating that it makes no sense in terms of function or style references to original. Mr. Farley responded that after the permitting process with the Planning Board, the design team will conduct a closer study at the details Ms. Marquardt highlights. Stated they are all points well taken.

Ms. Porter stated the existing library building is beautiful and to be inspired by for this project. States she has concerns with the naturally-stained shingle siding and the colors chosen. Asks if the color of the proposed shingle siding could blend in better with the original building walls. Asks if the proposed shingle siding could be stained. Stated that this is her only concern, otherwise, this is a great project.

Mr. Long stated that Mr. Farley provided a great presentation. Stated he has studied the elevation drawings closely and that he sees a real continuity with the elevation drawings but can't see that continuity as clearly in the renderings. States he likes the building form and massing. States he is thrown off by the scale of the proposed windows. States that the larger windows on the west and north facades of the building addition in the drawings feel out of proportion and could work better as a bank of multiple smaller windows as on the east facade of the existing building.

Ms. Schnarr asked if new signage is being proposed. Mr. Farley responded he has not discussed signage yet with Town staff. Suggested that perhaps a monument sign would be proposed but he needs to discuss it with Town staff first. Ms. Schnarr stated she has concerns about the walkway abutting the parking spaces so closely. States she would like a buffer provided between the parking spaces and the walkway, as a safety measure. Ms. Schnarr asks why the connector roof is flat. Stated an intersecting gable roof could be provided instead of a flat one. Mr. Farley responded that he explored this and feels that it would draw too much attention than wanted, so that is why a flat roof was chosen. Stated there is no equipment proposed on the connector roof, just a sky light window.

Ms. Brestrup stated the Building Commissioner has suggested that the Town of Amherst could apply for a MAAB variance to maintain the south facing door as an entrance door. DRB members responded that they would be fine if the south facing door were to remain as an

entrance door. The new entrance on the north side of the proposed building addition is to be the ADA entrance.

Ms. Brestrup suggested that the style of the proposed benches should be consistent with the existing benches on-site. Ms. Brestrup asked if the existing building walls will be re-painted as part of this project. And if so, the colors would be more consistent throughout. Mr. Farley responded that this is point well taken and that he will look into whether the existing building is to be re-painted as part of this project.

MOTION: Moved by Ms. Marquardt, seconded by Mr. Long, and voted (5-0) to give a positive recommendation to the Planning Board for the Town of Amherst's proposed work (SPR 2021-06) at the **North Amherst Library, located at 8 Montague Road**, as submitted, with the following suggestions:

4. Ensure that the new building addition could structurally support roof-mounted solar panels, if/when the Town considers installing roof-mounted solar panels, either now or in the future;
5. Examine whether the height at its full maturity of the proposed tree, *Betula Nigra* 'Heritage' (BNH), shown in the submitted planting plan located north of the building addition, may overwhelm the building entrance and hide it from view. And if it does hide the entrance view, consider replacing this tree with one that is less in height at its full maturity which wouldn't block the entrance view;
6. Consider staining or painting (to match originals) the proposed wood shingles;
7. Reconsider the color choice of the proposed building trim;
8. Reconsider the layout and size of the larger windows, as they feel out of proportion;
9. Provide signage for the library;
10. Provide a buffer, i.e. vegetative buffer, between the walkway and the parking spaces, as a safety measure;
11. The style of the proposed benches should be consistent with the existing benches on-site;
12. Determine the condition of the existing benches, and consider replacing them if they are in bad condition;
13. Provide bike rack(s) on-site;
14. If the existing building walls are to be re-painted, the colors should be more consistent with the colors of the proposed building addition;
15. Make sure the architectural style and details of the proposed building addition are consistent with the architectural style and details of the existing building;
16. Remove the circle under the round arch within the gable to the left of entrance to the building addition, as shown in the rendered drawings.
17. If the Town decides to seek a MAAB variance request to maintain the south door as an entrance, the DRB is fine with this request;

- a. **DRB FY2021-09, Town of Amherst** – To review the proposed design alternatives for the Pomeroy Village Intersection Project, located at the intersection of **West Street (Route 116) and Pomeroy/West Pomeroy Streets**.

Project representative, Christine Brestrup, Amherst Planning Director was present.

Due to Board time constraints, the Board decided to postpone the review of this proposed project until the next DRB meeting.

APPROVAL OF MEETING MINUTES: None

OLD BUSINESS: None

GENERAL PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD: None

ADJOURN:

MOTION: Moved by Ms. Porter, seconded by Ms. Zekos, and voted 5-0, to adjourn at 6:36PM

**CATHARINE PORTER, CHAIR
AMHERST DESIGN REVIEW BOARD**