



TOWN HALL
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DESIGN REVIEW BOARD
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June 15, 2009

DRB Memorandum #2009-06

Memo to: Bonnie Weeks, Building Commissioner
Jonathan Tucker, Planning Director
From: Christine Brestrup, Senior Planner
Subject: DRB Meeting – June 8, 2009

The Monday, June 8, 2009, meeting of the Design Review Board began at 6:35 p.m. in the First Floor Meeting Room of the Town Hall. Members Janet Winston (Chair), Kathryn Grandonico, and Jonathan Salvon were present. Also present were Christine Brestrup, Senior Planner, Jason Skeels, Town Engineer, Eric Donnelly, applicant, and Linda and Greg Donnelly of Shutesbury.

The Board turned to **Appointments**.

Appointments

DRB #2009-00017, 48 North Pleasant Street, Eric Donnelly for Amherst Martial Arts – install a wooden, carved blade sign over the door at Amherst Martial Arts

Recommended approval, with conditions

Eric Donnelly presented the application. He made the carved, wooden sign as a gift for his martial arts teacher at Amherst Martial Arts. He would like to install the sign as a blade sign above the door to Amherst Martial Arts. Mr. Donnelly presented the carved wooden sign that he had made in Wood Technology Class, with Mr. Stewart Olson, at Amherst Regional High School. The sign is carved from a cedar board and is 30” long x 19” wide and it is 1” thick. It is stained a medium brown, the letters are a dark brown or black. The sign is coated with a weather-proof sealant. The sign contains the words “Amherst Martial Arts” along with a carved picture showing a martial artist in action.

Mr. Donnelly presented a touched-up photograph showing how the sign will appear in place, along with a drawing of the frame and bracket that he proposes to use to attach the sign to the building. The frame and bracket will be made in a blacksmith shop and will consist of an “L” metal bracket with two curled ends and a tension bar made of twisted metal. The bracket and frame will be painted black. Mr. Donnelly stated that Mr. Olson helped him to design the bracket and that Mr. Olson is a former sign maker who has used similar brackets to install signs elsewhere.

The sign will be less than 10% of the wall area. The wall area is at least 28’ x 10’ or 280 square feet. A sign of 28 square feet would be allowed. The proposed sign area is 3.75 square feet.

The Board members asked questions about how the sign would be viewed by passersby. Mr. Salvon said that the new sign is very nice and noted that it will partially block the existing white sign (“Amherst Martial Arts”). He suggested that the owner of Amherst Martial Arts should be encouraged to remove the white sign.

The Board members discussed putting the sign on top of the bracket to gain height. Mr. Skeels, Town Engineer, stated that the bracket would be stronger if the sign were hung from it rather than if the sign sat on top of it.

The Board members recommended installing the sign and bracket higher on the wall for better visibility. Mr. Salvon sketched a new position for the sign, about 20 inches above the originally-proposed position. Mr. Donnelly stated that the vertical member of the bracket would be about 24 inches and the horizontal member would be about 30 inches long.

Conditions

1. Move the sign up on the wall about 20 inches for better visibility.
2. Encourage the owner of Amherst Martial Arts to remove the existing white sign.

Old Business

Redesign of Intersection at Route 116 (West Street) and Pomeroy Lane (Pomeroy Village)

Jason Skeels, Town Engineer, presented information on the new traffic counts taken during the spring of 2009. Mr. Skeels stated that the recent traffic counts were done by counting a full week of traffic. He stated that it took longer than usual to obtain the traffic counts since one of the counters is broken. He only counted through traffic and did not count turning movements. He did count speed and volume. Mr. Skeels distributed the original traffic counts from the report by Cana McCoy from 2006 along with the new counts. He noted that the old traffic counts represented only one day of counting. He also noted that both sets of counts were done at the same time of year (early May 2006 and May 2009, while the university and colleges were still in session).

In the 2006 report a total of 11,116 vehicles were observed passing on West Street, northbound and southbound, in a 24 hour period.

In the 2009 report an average of approximately 9,600 vehicles passed on West Street, northbound and southbound, in a 24 hour period.

Mr. Skeels noted that the volume of traffic didn't change much from 2006 to 2009. He also noted that the 2009 volume was an average taken over a full week, while the 2006 volume was a one-day volume. He believes that a full-week count gives a better representation of volume than a one-day count.

Mr. Skeels also studied speeds on West Street and Pomeroy Lane. The posted speed on West Street is 40 mph. The 85th percentile speed northbound was 50.86 and the 85th percentile speed southbound was 43.54, in both cases exceeding the posted speed. Mr. Skeels stated that the splitter islands will be beneficial for reducing speeds on West Street. He also noted that there are many accidents southbound at the curve in the road, before the intersection, especially in icy conditions.

Ms. Brestrup stated that she had met with Ron La Verdiere, owner of Amherst Office Park, regarding the plans for intersection improvements. Mr. La Verdiere had made the following suggestions:

1. That the north splitter island be moved either north or south from its proposed location to get it out of the way of existing and proposed driveway entrances. (Mr. La Verdiere stated that he has plans to develop the northeast corner of his property and plans to install a new driveway entrance near the southern end of the proposed splitter island.) Mr. Skeels responded that splitter islands can have gaps within them to allow for traffic entering the roadway.
2. That the proposed crosswalk across West Street near the new bus stops should be moved farther south to be more convenient for those coming from Amherst Office Park and those coming across the golf course to get to the convenience store. Mr. Skeels responded that the location for the proposed crosswalk relates to the new bus stop locations. Those who wish to cross farther to the south can use the crosswalk at the intersection.
3. That the splitter island on the south side of the intersection be moved farther north. Mr. Skeels responded that the roadway becomes constricted farther north due to the location of the bridge and that the proposed location as shown on the plan is optimal.

Ms. Brestrup reported on two meetings that she had with Jerry Gates, owner of the property located just north of the Hess Station:

1. At the first meeting, Mr. Skeels and Ms. Brestrup met with Mr. Gates. Mr. Gates agreed with the basic layout of the roadway improvements; however he was reluctant to grant an easement to the town for a walkway across his property to gain access to the proposed bus stops from the Pomeroy Court Coop. He was concerned about how such an easement would affect his ability to develop his property in the future. He requested that Mr. Skeels and Ms. Brestrup come up with some scenarios as to how his property could be developed while still providing access for pedestrians to cross the property.
2. At the second meeting Ms. Brestrup met with Mr. Gates and presented 4 or 5 scenarios showing how Mr. Gates property could be developed, including retaining the existing larger building while adding a smaller building to the north, or demolishing the existing buildings and constructing a new building with a pedestrian passageway. The new building could contain office and/or retail on the ground floor and residential space on the second and third floors. Mr. Gates was satisfied that he could develop his property and expressed willingness to grant an easement to the Town for pedestrian access across his property. Ms. Brestrup noted that the easement does not need to be pinned down in terms of location but could “float” depending on how Mr. Gates chooses to develop his property in the future. Mr. Gates stated that he would like a statement from the Town releasing him from liability for pedestrians passing through his property. He noted that the First Baptist Church has an agreement with UMass for students to park in the church parking lot and that the agreement contains a waiver from liability.

Mr. Skeels noted that Mr. Gates would continue to plow the parking lot, as he has always done. The Town could stripe the walkway through the parking lot or not, depending on what seems reasonable. Mr. Salvon noted that people use this parking lot as a passageway already to gain access to the existing northbound bus stop.

The Board discussed whether to reconsider the use of brick and concrete for the sidewalks and crosswalks in Pomeroy Village because of the expense. They determined that they would prefer to keep the brick and concrete for now. The difference in cost is about \$200,000 more for brick and concrete versus all asphalt, including asphalt curbing. Mr. Skeels stated that asphalt would be an appropriate material for the multi-use path on the west side of the road because that is a better surface for bicyclists and rollerbladers who would use the path.

The Board stated that they liked the plan for intersection improvements as it is currently designed. Mr. Skeels noted that the Town is applying for ARRA funding for other parts of Route 116, but that this part is not ready for bid. He agreed to prepare a lighting plan that would show the areas of the ground that would be lit by the proposed street lights.

The Board decided to hold a public hearing in mid to late September to obtain public input on the plan. Mr. Skeels noted that there is currently no money budgeted to do the work and that the plan will need to be presented to the Conservation Commission prior to construction. Ms. Grandonico stated that the Board should see a lighting plan prior to the public hearing.

Future Meetings

The Board scheduled its next meetings as follows:

- Monday, June 22nd
- Mondays, July 13th and July 27th
- Monday, August 17th

The Board members present would also be able to meet on the Tuesday after the dates noted above if that would be more convenient for other DRB members.

Cc:	Anita Licis, DRB	Jeffrey Bagg, Senior Planner	Eric Donnelly, Applicant
	Janet Winston, DRB	Nate Malloy, Associate Planner	Jason Skeels, Town Eng.
	Jim Wald, DRB	Aaron Hayden, Select Board Liaison	Guilford Mooring, Spt. of DPW
	Jonathan Salvon, DRB	Larry Shaffer, Town Manager	Peter Lillya, Pub. Transp. &
	Kathryn Grandonico, DRB		Bicycle Committee