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October 28, 2014

DRB Memorandum

Memo to: Rob Morra, Building Commissioner
Jonathan Tucker, Planning Director
From: Christine Brestrup, Senior Planner
Subject: DRB Meeting – October 21, 2014

The Tuesday, October 21, 2014, meeting of the Design Review Board began at approximately 6:35 p.m. in the Town Room, Town Hall.

Design Review Board members Michael Hanke, Derek Noble and Jonathan Salvon were present. Also present was Select Board liaison, Jim Wald.

Applicants and their representatives who were present were George Hicks for North Amherst Library, Carsten Dahl for 61-63 Main Street, Nonny Burack for the Public Shade Tree Committee, Kyle Wilson and David Williams for Archipelago Investments, and Michael Ben-Chaim and Mary Kraus for 28 Shays Street.

DRB 2015-00012 – Jones Library/North Amherst Library – 1200 Sunderland Road – Review of new railings for existing stairs

Recommended approval without conditions

George Hicks, Maintenance Director for the Jones Library, presented the application. Mr. Hicks proposes to replace the railings at the stairs for the front entrance to the North Amherst Library. The existing railings are not up to code. The new railings will be 1 ¼" schedule 80 metal pipe and will be similar to those installed by Teagno Construction at the Jones Library last year. The new railings need to be presented to the Historical Commission for its review. The Library has money from the "Holland Fund" to do the work.

Mr. Hanke stated that the new railings are better than those at the Jones Library. There are gardens below the end of the handrails, so it will not be a problem that the railings will protrude beyond the end of the stairs.

DRB 2015-00013 – Ting-wei Tang – 61 – 63 Main Street – Review of enclosure for existing porch and deck

Recommend approval with conditions

Carsten Dahl, contractor, presented the application for Mr. Ting-wei Tang. The plan involves enclosing the porch on both sides of the rear of the building, on the second floor. The porch on the west side (61A) is currently enclosed by a half-wall of white clapboards, with an open area above. The porch on the east side (63A) is currently enclosed by a half-wall of vertical wooden siding, with an open area above. The proposal is to enclose both sides, leaving the clapboards on the west side and the vertical wooden siding on the east side and adding screens at the top of the half-walls. The impetus for this work is the fact that rain was entering the porches and causing a problem on the first floor.

Board members stated that they would like to see the same treatment for the half-wall on both sides, and they recommended the clapboard, since it is a more common material on older buildings in town and therefore more compatible with the surrounding downtown area.

Board members recommended that the half-wall on both sides be the same color, preferably white or off-white. They agreed that vinyl siding is acceptable. Mr. Carsten plans to put a cap on both of the half-walls. He will install the partition pieces for the screens so that they are evenly spaced.

Conditions

1. Half-walls shall be faced with horizontal siding, either clapboard, “cedar-cement board” or vinyl siding.
2. The horizontal siding shall be the same color on both sides.

DRB 2015-00014 – Public Shade Tree Committee – various locations – Review of design of memorial/honorary plaques for shade trees

Recommended approval without conditions

Nonny Burack presented the proposal for the PSTC. The granite block is 9” x 9” and is 2” thick. The bronze plate is centered in the granite block. Ms. Burack presented an actual granite block with bronze plaque, which had already been fabricated.

One plaque, in memory of Bill Hutchinson, will be installed on Jeffrey Lane, at the base of one of the street trees that has recently been planted there by the PSTC. The other plaque, in honor of Hope Crolius, will be installed at the North Amherst School, at the base of a tree that has recently been planted there.

DRB 2015-00010 – Archipelago Investments LLC – One East Pleasant Street – (site is currently known as the “Carriage Shops”) – Review proposed mixed-use building with 78 dwelling units and retail/commercial space and associated site improvements (*continued discussion*)

Recommended approval

Mr. Wilson and Mr. Williams had appeared before the Design Review Board on September 30th and had received many comments from Board members as well as from members of the public. They returned to the Design Review Board on October 21st and presented a revised design.

Prior to leaving the meeting, Ms. Burack presented a letter to Mr. Wilson and Mr. Williams, from the Public Shade Tree Committee, with a copy for the Planning Board, requesting that the southeastern wall of the existing building with the mural remain in place and that the 13 trees along that wall not be removed.

Mr. Williams thanked the Board and members of the public for their previous comments.

Mr. Wilson presented new façade elevations and new floor plans and site plans. He stated that the new building would not be built right up to the property line. Previous comments had included how the building addresses the cemetery, the institutional look of the building, how the building coverage overwhelms the site and the window proportions, among other things.

Mr. Wilson stated the windows now have a reduced scale and proportion. The mural is pulled back into the building. It will now be 5 to 6 feet from the property line and will be more integrated into the building. The building will also have reduced “building coverage”.

Most of the murals painted by David Fichter are painted on an existing building, so the new proposal for the mural fits that pattern. A portion of the building at the southeast corner will turn the corner and be visible from East Pleasant Street.

There will be wayfinding signs, including a low wall with lettering, along the walkway between the Toy Box building and the new building, leading people back to the cemetery. The new building will have a continuous precast base along the south wall to unify the building and draw people back to the cemetery.

The grade changes along the southern and western walls have been modified. The floor plan has been reduced. On the north side, there will be two brick elevations, interspersed with a wood façade that wraps around the courtyard. The continuous green roof has been eliminated and replaced with an open parking area with trays supported by steel posts that will serve the function of a green roof by catching and controlling stormwater. The north façade no longer needs to be 16 feet tall at the garage entry, but can be shorter (about 8 feet tall) with wood screens rather than metal walls. The screens will be in the form of an 8 foot tall transparent wood fence with sliding gates for the garage entry. The gates will be operated by a key fob.

There will be planting along the northern property line on the border of the Summerlin property.

Mr. Wilson stated that the building coverage was now reduced to about 62% rather than the previously proposed 80%.

There will be a café on the southwest corner which will be consolidated into the collaboration space. The collaboration space on the 4th and 5th floors has been eliminated, along with the cut-out in the façade at that level. The new collaboration space on the ground floor will be larger and accessible from the street.

Mr. Wilson presented the engineer's plan (prepared by SVE Associates). He described the 6 foot grade change along the façade and how it would be handled both on the interior and the exterior.

The parking lot design is approximately the same in terms of layout. There will be solid "green roof" trays over two bays of parking. These will be 10 feet high and constructed of metal. Service trucks and trash will still be able to get through, in the aisle beside the "green roof" trays.

The transformer and electrical room will be located at the northwest corner of the building.

There will be a granite curb on the northern side of the alley driveway, to create a planting area along the northern property line. The pavers on the "Woonerf" will be granite.

There will be improved sidewalk all the way from the southern property line to the north side of the alley driveway. Columnar Red Maples are proposed for the streetscape along East Pleasant Street. The area between the sidewalk and the street will be grass, to take up the grade change. The trees will be planted in planters with native shrubs in the planters as well.

The unit mix in the building has changed with many more 2-bedroom units. The 2-bedroom units are efficient and appeal to a broad demographic. There will be 84 rather than 78 units, with more apartments, but fewer beds per apartment. The number of bedrooms will be 192, rather than 182 as in the previous proposal.

There may be an opportunity to plant trees along the southern side of the property, possibly on town land. Also, trees can be planted in the cemetery, along the mural side of the building. The developers could work to save the trees along the cemetery side, but the trees will die shortly after the construction is completed. It is better to remove the trees and plant new ones. The small crabapple along East Pleasant Street will need to be removed.

The grade will be lifted up along the mural, so that the mural will be at the level of the viewer.

Hilda Greenbaum of Montague Road asked about the relationship of the mural, the fence and the edge of the building on the cemetery side. The mural will be painted on the building, with the property line about 5 feet away and the fence another 3 feet from the property line.

Mr. Salvon commented as follows:

- The applicants took the comments from the last meeting and made a strong attempt to integrate the comments into the new design;
- The building is less dominating when seen from the cemetery side;
- There is more wood on the façade and the modulation on the street side is better;
- He likes the wood corbelling at the corner.

Mr. Noble commented as follows:

- He likes the new design;

- The building is now much more successful on the north side;
- He would like to see more space on the street side of the building but understands the need for space within the building; but he'd still like the building to be pushed back a few feet to gain more pedestrian space along the street;
- The façade at the entrance is the fulcrum of the building; can it be wrapped with wood for one more bay and also can there be wood along the top of the southwest corner section?
- He supports this type of scale and density in the downtown area;
- This is an exciting project.

Mr. Williams described the “frame and plane” concept of the design and stated that the building needs to be brick all the way to the top at the southwest corner.

Mr. Hanke commented as follows:

- He liked the edginess of the previous design;
- He would like to see the southwest corner as “its own building”;
- With the new wood added, the building appears to have a lot of stripes;
- He misses the canopies from the previous design and doesn't like the “balconettes”;
- The wood detailing is fussy and the wooden facades may not hold up over time;
- What will the visual impact be when the wood weathers?
- The mural placement on the new design is better;
- The north façade is improved;
- The building is less aggressive than the previous design;
- However, given all of these comments, this is still a “nice building”;
- It will provide tax benefits to the town;
- The building will also be a LEED-certified energy-efficient structure, which is a “win/win” for the town.

There was further discussion among the Board members. Mr. Salvon supported the new design and stated that it is markedly better.

All Board members praised the new illustrations, stating that the design is easier to see now that it has been put into context.

Ms. Greenbaum commented that the building has too much wood. She would prefer that the building be all brick. She supported the changes to the fenestration. “The windows are a major improvement”, she said.

The Board voted 3-0 to recommend approval of the application.

Mr. Hanke left the meeting.

Old Business

ZBA2015-00008 - Michael Ben-Chaim – 28 Shays Street – Review, at the request of the ZBA, designs for proposed two-family dwelling and associated site improvements (*continued discussion*)

No recommendation – Board will resume discussion on Tuesday, October 28th

Michael Ben-Chaim, applicant, and Mary Kraus, architect, presented the revised drawings, based on comments they had received at the September 30th DRB meeting.

Plantings had been added at the front of the building to create a screen. Arborvitae would be planted against the façade of the connector to screen the concrete wall. There will be a planter between the new Arborvitae and the concrete wall to protect the insulation at the footing of the concrete wall.

A new retaining wall will be built to the west of the connector. The wall will be constructed of rusticated block similar to the block in the existing retaining wall. Ms. Kraus presented a photograph of the rusticated block. The new wall will have a capstone.

Black Chokeberry will be planted along the driveway edge to delineate it. The area between the driveway and the building will be loamed and seeded, with walkways running through the grassed area going from the driveway to the doorways of the dwelling units.

Ms. Brestrup asked if the applicant had considered edging the driveway with timbers, to keep people from driving into the lawn area. Ms. Kraus stated that timbers would not be needed since the driveway area has been made wide enough to provide ample backing space for cars. She also noted that the Black Chokeberry would act as a barrier.

Hilda Greenbaum asked if the planting had been installed to screen this house from the Baird House, to the northeast. The applicant answered that the plantings had been installed. There was discussion about the placement and size of those plantings.

Ms. Kraus presented a detail showing the repair and resurfacing of the concrete wall under the connector. Arborvitae will screen the newly repaired concrete wall.

Ms. Kraus also showed two elevations proposed for the front of the building. One elevation showed the right-hand structure sheathed in shingles, the connector in blue vinyl siding and the left-hand structure in shingles. This is the existing condition. The alternative elevation showed blue vinyl siding on the left-hand structure to match the connector.

Ms. Kraus asserted that the alternative elevation with blue vinyl siding on the connector and on the left side gable looked more like a duplex and the alternative with the left side gable being shingles looked more like a single-family home.

There was extensive discussion about which of the two elevations looked more like a single-family home, as is required by the Zoning Bylaw for a two-family dwelling (Section 3.321 of the Zoning Bylaw).

Mr. Noble did not express a strong opinion on the visual aspects of the alternatives, although he stated that the existing siding material should not be removed.

Mr. Salvon expressed strong support for the alternative with the connector and the left-hand gable structure being sheathed in the same material.

Mr. Ben-Chaim argued in favor of keeping the existing materials, citing DRB standards and criteria which, he asserted, support preservation of existing materials and features.

Mr. Noble stated that the view of the building is now a “work in progress” and that when the concrete wall is repaired and the landscaping is installed it will look different.

Ms. Kraus presented a photograph of what the buildings looked like before Mr. Ben-Chaim bought the property, asserting that he had already improved the property with the work he had done.

Mr. Noble stated that he liked the alternative with continuous siding, but saw the design intent of the two gable ends flanking a connector of a different material. He did not support putting shake shingles on the connector.

Ms. Brestrup asked if the vinyl siding could be brought down to hide some of the concrete wall. Ms. Kraus stated that this would not work technically.

Board members noted that the concrete wall would weather over time and would not appear white for long.

Mr. Noble and Mr. Salvon agreed that they could recommend approval of the Site Plan but they could not come to an agreement on the issue of the siding.

Board members agreed that they could not vote on their recommendations since they did not have a quorum.

The Board received public comment.

Simon Keochakian Sr. of 76 West Street offered the following comments:

- This project requires a Special Permit because it is a two-family house in a single-family neighborhood;
- Vinyl siding is an “alien product” in this neighborhood;
- The new siding was supposed to be “gray”, with no stark contrast between it and the shingles;
- The issue of the color of the vinyl siding is still unresolved;
- The intent was to minimize the contrast between the siding and the shingles;
- Mr. Ben-Chaim argued that the current proposal retains as much of the original structure as possible, but he has changed the left hand structure by adding new windows;
- The connector should be sheathed in shingles to match the two gable ends;
- Mr. Hanke had preferred the connector to be done in shingles at the last meeting;
- The color issue has not been resolved;
- The DRB should help the ZBA to solve this issue.

Mr. Noble disagreed with sheathing the connector in shingles. He would consider keeping the connector blue and sheathing the end gable in blue siding.

Mr. Salvon stated that the Board should judge the materials that are there now.

Mr. Keochakian stated that this is an important structure since it abuts the Frank Lloyd Wright house.

Mr. Salvon and Mr. Noble agreed to meet to resolve the issue of siding on Tuesday, October 28th, if the Board could achieve a quorum.

Mr. Keochakian noted that the Board had seen a drawing of what was approved in the beginning. What is proposed today doesn't come close to what was approved, he said. The original drawings show care as to how things looked from the street side. Plants will not be able to conceal the building. The soil is poor and will need to be augmented to support plants.

The Board acknowledged that the original site plan was generally better, but that the architect noted that the original site plan showed a larger addition which needed to be treated differently.

Greg Keochakian of 5 Shays Street stated that the intent of the original design was to make this structure cohesive. The tiny shrubs being proposed will take years to reach the bottom of the blue siding, to conceal the concrete wall. He would prefer plants that would screen the disjointed design.

Mr. Ben-Chaim stated that he had changed the design because there were too many conditions on the original Special Permit for the proposed use. Ms. Kraus stated that the smaller building and site design were a response to some of the conditions.

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at approximately 8:30 p.m.

Cc: Dave Waskiewicz & Peter Fein, Building Inspectors
 Jeff Bagg, Senior Planner
 DRB Members
 Planning Board Members
 Kyle Wilson, Applicant
 Michael Ben-Chaim, Applicant
 Mary Kraus, Architect
 Jim Wald, Select Board Liaison