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DESIGN REVIEW BOARD
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May 20, 2016

DRB MEMORANDUM

Memo to: Rob Morra, Building Commissioner
David Ziomek, Asst. Town Manager
Christine Brestrup, Planning Director
Jennifer Gannett, Permit Administrator
Ruth Taylor, Administrative Assistant

From: Jonathan Tucker, Senior Planner

Subject: DRB Meeting – May 19, 2016

The Thursday, May 19, 2016 meeting of the Design Review Board began at 7:15 p.m. in the Second Floor Conference Room/Library, Amherst Town Hall.

Design Review Board members Jan Marquardt, Derek Noble, Catherine Porter, and Jonathan Salvon were present.

Staff present included Senior Planner Jonathan Tucker.

Applicants present included Jeffrey Squires of Berkshire Design Group, Ron Bohonowicz (Director of Facilities), Clifford Laraway (Subway), Heather Sunderland (Londonwest), Joel Greenbaum (16 McClellan), Kyle Wilson and David Williams (Kendrick Place) .

Applications

DRB 2016-00016, Crocker Farm Elementary School – 280 West Street – New kindergarten play area.

Recommend approval as proposed.

Mr. Squires presented site plans and photographs and described the features of the proposed new playground to be located at the southwest corner of the Crocker Farm School building.

Ms. Porter asked if the playground was specifically designed for the very young. Mr. Squires said that it was, and included features, such as water play, that new research had shown were appropriate for children at that developmental stage. It said it would be an enhancement over what was there.

Mr. Bohonowicz noted that funding for this project included capital funds, CPA funds, and funds raised privately. The improvements will also make the playground handicapped accessible and remove

structures and features that were no longer legal for such playgrounds under Massachusetts regulations. Amherst did not have other playgrounds for children in this age group, and that the playground would be open to the public during non-school hours.

There was discussion of the water features. Mr. Squires noted that the water was controlled through the use of a specialized key and did not recirculate. In response to a question, he said that Berkshire Design group increasing designed playgrounds with these features.

Ms. Marquardt asked if the existing trees could be saved. Mr. Squires replied that the grade of the site needed to be altered in ways that would not allow the root systems of those trees to survive. New trees (one river birch, two honeylocust) would be planted to replace the existing trees and fabric structures would be added to increase shade.

Ms. Porter asked about the capacity of the playground. Mr. Squires said that it was designed to safely accommodate 60 children.

Ms. Noble said it was much better than what had been there. The Board unanimously (4-0) recommended approval of the playground design as proposed.

DRB2016-00017, Fort River Elementary School – 70 South East Street - New boundary fence.

Recommend approval as proposed, with one recommendation.

Mr. Bohonowicz presented photographs of the site, existing conditions, and a sample of the proposed new stockade fence, which is intended to screen view of the Fort River School storage barn from adjacent residential neighbors. He described recent improvements to the storage barn, which had been facilitated by the willingness of the abutting neighbor to allow Town forces to use the rear of the property for access to sections of the barn. There was a series of older, broken-down fences along the boundary, and there had been a row of screening arbor vitae, which had to be removed to gain access to the rear wall of the barn.

The Town was proposing to replace all of the old fence sections with a 6 foot tall plastic stockade fence. Ms. Porter asked about fence colors. It was noted that darker colors tended to be less visible in the landscape.

After further discussion, the Board unanimously (4-0) recommended approval of the fence design as proposed, with the recommendation that a dark green color be considered.

DRB2016-00018, Subway – 4 Main Street - New exterior signs.

The applicant agreed to prepare accurate, scaled renderings of the proposed contour signs for further review at a subsequent meeting.

Mr. Cliff Laraway presented specification sheets and hand-altered black and white photocopies of photographs of the building exterior, showing where proposed new main interior-lit ‘contour’ signs and an exterior ‘reader board’ for the display of changing specials would be located.

Ms. Marquardt indicated that on behalf of the Historical Commission, she was opposed to the ‘reader panel’ and to any overly large new signs in association with the business, as being incompatible with the historical architectural character of the building. There was a consensus in agreement.

There was extended discussion of the proposed scale of the contour signs, with Mr. Laraway urging the approval of signs 30” tall or greater, to better enable competition and equity with other businesses in the same block to the north. Members of the Board favored sign heights of no more than 24”, in the context of the size of the existing wooden panel signs. Mr. Laraway cited the zoning maximums in terms of sign coverage. Board members explained that design review evaluated each building on the basis of its own characteristics, and the zoning dimensions were meant to be understood as maximums not to be exceeded. Mr. Tucker read sections of the design review guidelines applying to signs.

Ms. Marquardt and Ms. Porter preferred signs 22” tall, with a maximum of 24”, while Mr. Salvon and Mr. Noble supported 24” tall signs. Mr. Noble also supported the design of the contour signs, saying they would be an improvement over the existing signs. He spent some time trying to scale the proposed signs, using the size of bricks on the building face as a rough measure.

Board members and staff also discussed with Mr. Laraway other ways he could market the sandwich shop, given that he occupied the most prominent store location in downtown Amherst. This included the potential to allow use of the interior walls for changeable art displays. He responded that he had to abide by the strictures of Subway’s corporate policies, but described the ways in which he had pushed Subway to allow variations on interior presentation of the store for that purpose, including a community bulletin board.

Board members were uncertain as to whether the application materials accurately portrayed the size of the signs Mr. Laraway was proposing. It was agreed that Mr. Laraway would prepare more accurate, scaled renderings showing the building and several of the sign sizes in color—Photoshop was recommended as a method—and would return to a subsequent meeting for further review.

DRB-20019, Londonwest – 35 South Pleasant Street - New store façade color scheme, main panel sign, and planters.

Mr. Salvon recused himself from review of the application, citing a conflict of interest.

Recommend approval as proposed.

Heather Sutherland presented a photo-rendering and samples of paint color chips, sign material, and tiles to be used in the proposed changes to the façade and entry of her new restaurant. She described each in turn, noting that the sign would be a maximum of 16” in height.

Ms. Porter asked what the planters were made of. Ms. Sutherland said they were plastic. She was advised to put something heavy in the bottom to keep them from being removed.

After further discussion, the Board unanimously (3-0) recommended approval of the design of the façade changes, as proposed.

Mr. Salvon rejoined the Board.

DRB-2016-00020, 16 McClellan Street – Expansion of an existing dormer.

Recommend approval as proposed.

Mr. Joel Greenbaum presented the proposed alteration to the southwest corner of a dormer on an existing rental property in the Limited Business (B-L) district. Mr. Tucker contributed some historical information about the house. The proposed expansion will be minimally visible from the street.

After further discussion, the Board agreed unanimously (4-0) to recommend the design of the expansion to the dormer, as proposed.

Mr. Tucker noted that the Design Review Board had the option under Section 3.2003 of the Zoning Bylaw to waive review of any application that it deemed did not constitute substantial alteration to the form or appearance of a building or site. Because this application was an unusual circumstance—review of a residential use in the business district—staff had not recommended that option.

DRB-2016, Kendrick Place - 37 East Pleasant Street – New signs for the building, MassMutual, and ZipCar.

Recommend approval as proposed.

Mr. Kyle Wilson and Mr. David Williams presented plans, elevations, and sign renderings for new signs for the Kendrick Place building and its current business tenants.

Mr. Wilson and Mr. Tucker noted that the Planning Board had already approved this sign plan for the building, contingent on Design Review Board review and approval.

Ms. Marquardt asked about the size of the large, circular proposed ZipCar signs, which filled two display windows facing Triangle Street. Mr. Wilson said that the circular green backgrounds were just under 6 feet in diameter, and were aimed at passing drivers. He described each of the proposed signs in turn. He and Mr. Williams answered Board members' questions about future site and landscape features and furnishings, noting that DPW had first to bury overhead utilities during this construction season.

Ms. Porter said she very much liked the signs. Ms. Marquardt said that they fit with the design of the building. Ms. Porter noted that she had not noticed how ugly the overhead utilities were until they were obscuring the attractive architecture of the new building.

After further discussion, the Board unanimously (4-0) recommended approval of the sign plan designs, as proposed.

The Design Review Board set its next meeting for Thursday, June 2.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:40 p.m.