

Town of



AMHERST

Massachusetts

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DESIGN REVIEW BOARD
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June 3, 2016

June 8, 2016 – Corrected Version

DRB MEMORANDUM

Memo to: Rob Morra, Building Commissioner
David Ziomek, Asst. Town Manager
Christine Brestrup, Planning Director
Jeffrey Bagg, Senior Planner
Jennifer Gannett, Permit Administrator
Ruth Taylor, Administrative Assistant
From: Jonathan Tucker, Senior Planner
Subject: DRB Meeting – June 2, 2016

The Thursday, May 19, 2016 meeting of the Design Review Board began at 7:48 p.m. in the First Floor Meeting Room, Amherst Town Hall.

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

Staff present included Senior Planner Jonathan Tucker.

Applicants present included Linda Muerle (designer/developer) and her lawyer Thomas Reidy. Others present includes Select Board liaison Jim Wald, and neighbor Richard Bentley (24 North Prospect).

Applications

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

The applicant had not responded to earlier communications and did not appear.

DRB 2016-00022, 32 North Prospect Street – Proposed converted dwelling (existing residence), alterations to barn and garage, and new four-unit condominium building.

Recommend approval as proposed.

Mr. Tucker introduced the project, noting that this was a prospective review of a property not ordinarily in the Design Review Board's jurisdiction. It was being undertaken in anticipation that the Zoning Board of Appeals (ZBA) would seek the Design Review Board's recommendations with respect to the

ZBA's obligation to apply the Zoning Bylaw's design review standards (Sections 3.2040 and 3.2041) under the Special Permits required for the project.

Mr. Tucker also reviewed some of the history of the property, noting that the house had been built in 1870-71 by John L. Lovell, a well-known early Amherst photographer, and that its Victorian Gothic Cottage style was unique in Amherst. Ms. Muerle said it was unique anywhere.

Ms. Muerle said she was buying the property from the Hastings family. It was noted that the property had been in that family for several generations, for 96 years. Ms. Muerle presented each of the aspects of her project in turn, beginning with proposed alterations to the existing house and the two outbuildings (a small 19th century stable/barn and a 20th century garage), and the design of the proposed new townhouse condominium building along the western edge of the property. She described the design elements of each, and highlighted the degree to which she was attempting to preserve and use, or replicate, existing historical design features. She said she was trying very hard to keep the appearance of the property the same from the street.

Ms. Muerle said that the house was lovely and that its interior was very sound—much more so than she would have expected for a house its age. The interior was very grand and formal, and very symmetrically arranged.

She was planning on converting the first floor to a single dwelling unit, and the second and third floors into a second unit. This would involve adding a second entrance door on the front porch, just to the right of the existing entrance, connecting to the interior stair for the upstairs unit. Ms. Porter asked if a new side entrance had been considered instead, to avoid altering the symmetry of the front of the building. Ms. Muerle responded that she had explored that option, but the layout of interior rooms made it too difficult. It was later noted that the porch, which runs across the entire front of the house, is not original, and the initial porch on the house had been much smaller.

Ms. Muerle noted that she was proposing to remove an out-of-period shed addition on the back of the house, to be replaced with an architecturally appropriate garage with space for 2 cars. She would replace all of the windows in the house in kind, to match existing windows, in order to meet energy code requirements. There was discussion of the window's materials, and proportions, with the Board expressing concern that the new windows not be smaller or different in proportion than the existing windows.

It was noted that there was a widespread movement among historic preservationists to try to retain existing historic windows when they were sound, and using measures like internal storm windows in order to create fewer environmental impacts and avoid inappropriate design changes. Ms. Muerle said most of the existing windows were in good shape and she had no objection to keeping as many of the existing windows as she could if that were possible. The challenge was meeting the requirements of the energy code, which was not very flexible and was getting less so.

Ms. Muerle said she needed to remove and abate the existing asbestos roof singling, and was considering the use of an architectural asphalt shingle to replicate the patterns. Mr. Tucker asked if the ridge detailing of the current roof sections could be replicated. She said she would explore whether it could with the new material. She said she was also exploring whether the almost flat central section of the roof could accommodate PV solar panels.

Ms. Muerle said she was proposing to use a warm cream paint color for the body of the house, with white trim and a warm grey color for the roof shingles. Mr. Salvon said that was a good choice, and other Board members agreed. Ms. Marquardt favored the new red doors shown on the outbuildings.

A side addition would be removed from the west side of the stable/barn and it would be refurbished with new doors, for use as a garage. The 20th century garage would be similarly refurbished, and the existing heavy horizontally-sliding doors, which are attractive but impractical, would be removed as used as fence sections for enclosures associated with the townhouse building. A new rear entry/exit door would be added to the garage.

The two-story townhouse building at the west end of the property would replicate many of the architectural forms and details of the 1871 house. It would be set back at least 20 feet from the western property boundary and would sit a minimum of 40 feet from the Marsh House condominiums on the adjacent property.

Additional open-air parking spaces would be distributed around the edges of the central circulation drive, which would be paved with bituminous asphalt. The entrance driveway would be moved 10 feet to the north, to pull it away from the southern property line and provide room for some screening plantings. No paved paths were proposed for the townhouses, just stepping stones. Subsequent condominium owners might install what they wished.

Photographs of proposed exterior building lighting fixtures were presented, including a night-time photo to demonstrate the degree to which the lighting was downcast. Ms. Muerle said there would be no site lighting on poles.

Ms. Muerle said that an engineer was working on a plan for dealing with site drainage. At this point, the plan included a central rain garden southwest of the house and a drainage retention swale running north-south just west of the townhouse building.

Plantings included arbor vitae along the southern property boundary to screen the relocated driveway, rain garden plantings, and a few entry plantings near the front doorways of the townhouse units. The rest of the site was well landscaped. Ms. Muerle indicated that she might move and replant some of the nicer ornamental specimens on-site. Two trees will have to be removed—a large hemlock immediately south of the garage, and a large sugar maple just east of the old stable/barn, where needed regrading would kill the tree if it remained in place. Otherwise, the site is well supplied with large mature trees and landscape plantings. Each townhouse units would have space for a flower or vegetable garden.

Ms. Porter asked about accessibility. Ms. Muerle replied that while none of the six units are being designed to have exterior accessible entrances, the floor level of all four townhouse units would be quite close to the outside grade—a difference of only about a single step—and owners could raise the outside grade of walkways to make the units accessible if they desired. Each of those four units will have a master bedroom on the first floor and will meet modern codes that accommodate interior accessibility.

After further discussion of design details, Mr. Salvon moved and Ms. Marquardt seconded a recommendation that the design of the project be approved as proposed.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:44 p.m.