



TOWN HALL
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DESIGN REVIEW BOARD
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October 20, 2014

DRB Memorandum

Memo to: Rob Morra, Building Commissioner
Jonathan Tucker, Planning Director
From: Christine Brestrup, Senior Planner
Subject: DRB Meeting – September 30, 2014

The Tuesday, September 30, 2014, meeting of the Design Review Board began at approximately 6:35 p.m. in the First Floor Meeting Room/Library, Town Hall.

Design Review Board members Kathleen Ford, Michael Hanke, Ted Harvey and Jonathan Salvon were present. Also present was Select Board liaison, Jim Wald.

Board member, Derek Noble, was unable to attend the meeting, but submitted comments in writing. His comments were distributed and read at the meeting.

Also present were Nate Malloy, Senior Planner, for Town of Amherst, Joe Bowman for Fratelli's Restaurant, Kyle Wilson and Dave Williams for One East Pleasant Street and Michael Ben-Chaim for 20 Shays Street.

DRB 2015 – 00008 – Shalini Milne for Downtown Mindfulness – 67 North Pleasant Street – Review of sign

Recommended approval with conditions

Ms. Milne was not able to attend the meeting. Ms. Brestrup presented the application.

The sign will be PVC and will be 4 feet wide by 22.5 inches tall. The colors were chosen to be compatible with existing colors on the building. The size of the sign plus existing signs for the Monkey Bar/Bistro 63 are within 10% of the building wall as measured by the applicant.

The sign will be mounted above the door on the brick wall of the building that houses the Monkey Bar and Bistro 63. Ms. Ford commented that the sign had a lot of words but she was ready to approve it if it met the guidelines as to size.

Mr. Noble's comments were read.

After discussion Board members recommended approval with the following conditions/recommendations:

Conditions/Recommendations

- 1) Eliminate some of the words on the sign;
- 2) Use fewer fonts;
- 3) Use lower case letters in the lines that have only upper case;
- 4) Use a less heavy version of the letters on the bottom line.

DRB 2015-00009 – Town of Amherst – Wentworth Farm Conservation Area – Review site improvements

Recommended approval without conditions

Mr. Malloy presented the application. He apologized on behalf of the Department of Conservation and Development for having installed the improvements prior to seeking review by the Design Review Board.

The Town has made improvements at Wentworth Farm Conservation Area to control vehicular and pedestrian circulation. There is a new parking lot with 12” of gravel, a new split rail fence, a new sidewalk. There is also a kiosk that was donated by WMECO. This kiosk was a requirement of the DEP as part of the project. It is larger than the typical kiosks installed by the Town.

Ms. Ford asked that the Town bring future kiosks to the DRB for approval prior to installing them.

Mr. Malloy noted that the kiosk at Puffer’s Pond is the template for kiosks that the Town typically installs. That one was reviewed by the DRB.

DRB 2015-00011 – Town of Amherst – Amethyst Brook Conservation Area – Review drainage and site improvements

Recommended approval without conditions

Mr. Malloy presented the application.

The improvements at Amethyst Brook include drainage, fencing, reseeding, installing a kiosk, adding gravel. Many of these improvements were done in order to control circulation.

Ms. Ford recommended that all the kiosks in the Conservation Areas be of the same type so that the Conservation Areas could be easily identified.

DRB 2015-00005 – PVP Holdings for Fratelli’s – 30 Boltwood Walk – Review of proposed shed (“walk-under” awning and associated signs were reviewed at September 9th DRB meeting)

Recommended approval without conditions

The DRB had not been able to review the shed at the September 9th meeting because there had been no information about its proposed location.

Mr. Bowman presented information about the proposed shed. He showed the location and the drawing of the shed and noted that it had been approved by the ZBA and the Local Historic District Commission. It would have clapboard siding.

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

No recommendation – the Board asked to see a revised design at future meeting

Mr. Wilson and Mr. Williams presented the application. The Board acknowledged receipt of comments from Board member, Mr. Noble, as well as from citizens, Paige Wilder and Janet Keller.

Mr. Wilson stated that Jerry Gates, majority owner of the property, had approached Archipelago Investments about working with him to redevelop the property. The Carriage Shops was built in 1962 and has served the town for 50 years, both as a motel and as a series of shops and offices. Two additional, smaller buildings had been built in the 1980’s, closer to the street.

Mr. Wilson presented a plan of the design for Kendrick Park across the street and noted the extent of the B-G zoning district, the adjacent B-L zoning district and commented on the way that the north end of the downtown had been developed to date, with large surface parking lots and one-story buildings. Tan Brook runs underground throughout this area.

He stated that the proposed building will have residential uses above and retail and commercial uses on the ground floor. The applicants met with the Historical Commission recently to discuss the mural. Mr. Wilson and his partners intend to commission David Fichter, the mural artist, to repaint the mural on the new building.

Mr. Wilson presented plans and elevations of the new building and described the floor plans.

The materials for the exterior are proposed to be similar to the Kendrick Place building. The brick will be Massachusetts made, the same as those used by Amherst College on its new athletic building. The windows will be fiberglass and will be made in Canada. There will be painted steel canopies at the ground floor level. The wooden parts of the façade will be Atlantic White Cedar.

There is a two-foot grade change from the southwest corner of the building to the entry to the garage on the north side.

The applicants intend to "raise the profile of the cemetery and mural" by calling people's attention to them through signs and walkways and the way the building is designed.

The area around the building will be regraded to provide positive drainage away from the building.

Mr. Wilson described the façade of the building and the cut-out on the south side that will mark the upper floor collaboration space and will call people's attention to the back of the building. The windows are cut in so the façade will not read as flat.

Mr. Wilson described the north façade and the green roof over the garage. He described how loading and deliveries will occur within the building. This is why the ground floor will be 18 feet in height. The garage is proposed to be heated which will eliminate the need for a dropped ceiling and insulation. He described the proposed locations of the garage ventilation system and the location of the electrical transformer.

Mr. Wilson stated that the alleyway providing access to the north side of the building and the garage will be designed like a Woonerf – with the drive aisle and pedestrian aisle being paved with different materials but designed to read as an alley and not as a drive.

The asphalt curb and old crabapple trees on the northern property line will be redone to delineate the northern property line. The electrical meters will be on the north side of the building, at the rear.

The building will be an "all-electric building" with "air-source heat pumps".

Mr. Wilson stated that the applicants intend to bring people back into the northern end of the downtown to live.

The building will be a LEED Gold building, like Boltwood Place. The mechanical equipment will be on the roof, behind screens.

Ms. Ford stated that she was sympathetic to the design and liked the inspiration. She liked the breaking down of the massing, but the building reminds her of Kendrick Place. She would like to see more variation. The two buildings together are too institutional and the impact will be "so much greater than one or the other". The building doesn't feel residential. The buildings feel like a campus buildings rather than a downtown residential buildings. She questioned whether downtown would be developed with buildings that all look like this. She appreciates the brick and the detailing but noted that this is a "big building".

Mr. Salvon echoed Ms. Ford's comments. He likes the idea of a walkable downtown. However he finds this building too similar to Kendrick Place. He recommended that the applicants "look at how to articulate the storefront portions" where the use is different from the uses above. The building is "too academic" and would be visually more at home on the UMass campus.

Mr. Hanke noted that he is the Chair of the Historical Commission and therefore has the historical perspective on the project. But he is also a designer and is used to an urban environment. He has looked at places that work and places that don't work and asked why various types of environments are enjoyable for people to be in and why people want to develop things in some towns and not in others. Why are so many of the applications in Amherst for food establishments and not for other uses? Amherst doesn't create an environment that is comfortable to be in all the time. He critiqued the area from the Post Office, going north to Bertucci's, noting that in other towns this area would be thought of as developable. Owners would hold the properties and assemble them in hopes of being able to develop something larger in the future.

Mr. Hanke stated that if you look at the proposed building in context, there really is not a constructed context, except for the new building that is being built at the intersection of Triangle and East Pleasant.

He likes the idea of a building that utilizes the space and is efficient. Amherst needs efficiency in building because there is not much space in the downtown to build anything. Amherst has a lot of sprawl and lacks a nucleus.

Positive comments – He likes how the building is broken up and doesn't mind the mass of the building. The building needs more mass around it. The design has careful articulation. A lot of interest has been paid to the cemetery and to the mural. There are economic factors that most people don't understand, including that the building needs to be a certain size to be economically viable. There are parking issues, but that is a broader problem for the town to confront separately from this project.

Negative comments – The building design does not go far enough. It looks too much like Kendrick Place and looks too much like a dorm. The massing, footprint and layout are fine. The sheathing could have been different, to make it look like a couple of different buildings. It's okay to have a bunch of different buildings together that don't relate at all, like in Northampton, Brattleboro and Burlington.

In conclusion, Mr. Hanke stated that the building looks a lot better than what is there now. The spirit and the volume are great. The height is not an issue. He would like to see more buildings being this efficient and meeting the LEED standards. He would push to make this one big structure that looks like several structures together. This is a well-thought-out, "pretty-well-done piece of architecture". This building will bring in more taxes for the town than the existing building on the site.

Mr. Harvey agreed with these statements and asked that the designers do more to make it different from the other building [Kendrick Place]. He noted that there is a focus on small businesses in the downtown and encouraged the developers to think about retail spaces for small businesses.

Mr. Salvon expressed support for the contrast between the retail and commercial spaces and the residential spaces.

Mr. Wilson stated that the material on the north side of the building, at the garage entry, will be metal. There will be green on the north wall, a "living wall".

There was discussion about the materials on the north side, what the wood would look like in 20 years. It will be facing north and won't be bleached by the sun. Mr. Wilson acknowledged that the wood will need to be maintained and refinished from time to time.

There was discussion about the sidewalk along the building and how it will relate to the rest of town. The Board would like to see benches and other streetscape improvements along the sidewalk.

Mr. Wilson stated that the sidewalk drops along the face of the building. The Amherst Downtown Streetscape design will be taken down the sidewalk, past the building, with streetlights and street trees.

Mr. Hanke noted that the downtown sidewalks look bad after a few years, deteriorated. He also noted that the southwest corner of the building appears to be the main entrance, not the intended main entrance in the middle of the façade. Other Board members agreed that the main entrance needs more articulation.

Mr. Wilson stated that the developers do want to keep the retail small-scale. They are trying to create a pedestrian environment. He added that the green roof will have 6" of soil and will be used for stormwater detention.

Members of the public commented as follows:

Elissa Rubinstein of Fearing Street noted that the green space that is shown on the plans is really the West Cemetery. The cemetery is a small space, with an apartment building on the south. It will feel hemmed in by the new building. A 5-story building will loom over the cemetery and cut out the sunlight. The mural that is on the building now is the right size. The new building will provide "too much mass against a historical treasure". Multi-use buildings are popular in Seattle, but often don't fit in with their neighborhoods of smaller buildings. Amherst is not an urban community.

Melissa Perot of Summer Street referred to the Design Review Board standards and principles, noting that the proposed building was only compatible with Kendrick Place. There is no connection with the houses on the west side of Kendrick Park or with the cemetery. The building is incompatible with its surroundings. She referred to Oxford, England as a model of how new buildings were fit into an old urban fabric.

Hilda Greenbaum of Montague Road referred to the building built by Michael Sissman on Strong Avenue in Northampton as being a new building that fits well with its surroundings. The buildings currently being proposed and built by the developer "don't belong here" and "don't look like Amherst" she said.

Louis Greenbaum of Montague Road read a statement about crowding in the Town Center. It is the same statement that he has submitted to the Planning Board for its review of this project.

Janet Keller of Pulpit Hill Road asked the DRB not to permit this building as currently designed. It doesn't fit the scale and feel of the downtown area. She expressed support for the small shops that have been displaced. She encouraged the DRB to look at its standards and principles, especially the issue of compatibility of function and design. She spoke in support of local business owners, local workers and local customers. The development lacks the "look and feel" of home. It needs a more "Main Street" feel, with more room for neighbors to do things together and to support small businesses. Ms. Keller submitted written comments on the project.

Jack Hirsch of Flat Hills Road noted that the garage has a green roof, but people can't have access to the roof. He noted that parking is not required. The lack of parking may affect the marketability of the apartments and the commercial space.

Mr. Wilson stated that the first floor will be constructed of steel and concrete. Access to the green roof would produce privacy issues for people whose units look out onto the green roof.

With regard to parking issues, Mr. Williams noted that the developers had rented 12 parking spaces in the Boltwood Garage for tenants of Boltwood Place. Only six of the 12 apartments needed these spaces. Tenants walk or take the bus to work. The issuance of licenses to young people is down 20%. People are trending towards public transit, bikes and Zip Cars.

A woman referred to Portland, Oregon, where they are preparing for the future with bikes, mass transit. These buildings do not have a good organic feel, she said. The buildings should be more accessible from the street. We should look at where we want to be in 50 years.

Mr. Wilson noted that Portland, Oregon has established an "urban growth boundary" which limits the area allowed for the development of 5-story mixed-use buildings.

Ms. Ford asked if the second floor, around the green roof, could be used for little shops. There was discussion about this suggestion. Others thought that small retail shops had enough problems on the ground floor.

Barbara Ford of Flat Hills Road stated that the building appears to be very vertical. She would like to see a green area on the sidewalk, a breaking up of the verticality of the building, more similarity with the 19th century buildings in the downtown, especially with regard to lintels over windows. She questioned the use of a green roof.

Mr. Wilson stated that the green roof would have 6" to 8" of soil. Seasonal grasses and blueberries could grow there.

Ms. Ford offered to report on the DRB discussion to the Planning Board on Wednesday.

Ms. Ford left the meeting at 8:15 p.m.

A realtor asked who the potential tenants of the building would be. The applicants stated that it would be the full range of the higher education community, like Boltwood Place.

The realtor stated that downtown real estate is expensive for small retailers, craftspeople and small store owners. The town needs locally owned businesses that can survive here.

Mr. Salvon noted that residential use brings retail. If we want better retail, we need more residential use.

Mr. Wilson noted that the developers plan to charge below market rents for the first floor.

The realtor noted that Williamstown, MA and Hanover, NH have strong local retailers.

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

Jeff Bagg, Senior Planner and staff liaison to the ZBA, presented background information on the proposed two-family dwelling. He explained that the ZBA hoped that the DRB could assist the applicant and the ZBA with the design of this project.

Mr. Ben-Chaim presented his proposal.

After lengthy discussion the Board made the following recommendations and asked Mr. Ben-Chaim to return to a future meeting with a revised design.

- 1) Reduce the number of siding materials on the façade;
- 2) Submit a coherent site plan;
- 3) Submit a planting plan, primarily for the area that is visible from the street, to reduce the visual impact of the building;
- 4) Address the problem of the crumbling foundation wall in a way that is more substantial than lattice; propose something that looks like a solution, not a patch; follow the advice of the Building Commissioner with regard to this foundation wall;
- 5) The manufactured block retaining wall with a capstone is acceptable, if it matches the existing retaining wall; however, the retaining wall may be able to be eliminated by grading the slope; look into grading the slope instead of installing the new retaining wall;
- 6) All drawings (Plans and Details) should be prepared by a registered professional architect and/or landscape architect.

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at approximately 9:15 p.m.

Cc: Dave Waskiewicz & Peter Fein, Building Inspectors
Jeff Bagg, Senior Planner
DRB Members
Planning Board Members
Kyle Wilson, Applicant
Dave Ziomek & Nate Malloy, Applicants
Shalini Milne, Applicant
Joe Bowman, Applicant
Michael Ben-Chaim, Applicant
Mary Kraus, Architect
Lindsey Britt, Permit Administrator
Jim Wald, Select Board Liaison