

MINUTES OF THE DESIGN WORKING SESSION
SUDBURY BOARD OF APPEALS
Thursday, June 9, 2011

In Attendance:

Elizabeth Quirk, Zoning Board of Appeals
Stephen Garanin, Zoning Board of Appeals
Jody Kablack, Planning and Community Development
Beth Rust, Sudbury Housing Trust
Larry O'Brien, Board of Selectmen
Susan Gittelman, Executive Director of B'nai B'rith Housing New England
Holly Grace, Senior Project Manager, B'nai B'rith Housing New England
Michael Liu, Project Architect, The Architectural Team
Jim Koningisor, Development Consultant, Koningisor Associates
Joe Peznola, Civil Engineer, Hancock Associates
Mike Jacobs, Financing Consultant with HMJ Associates
Joshua M. Fox, Attorney, Rollins, Rollins & Fox

Jody Kablack, Sudbury's Director of Planning and Community Development began the discussion by reminding the applicants that at the May 16th public hearing a major point raised by the ZBA was the height and massing of the building.

She said that she had written a memo to the Board dated June 2, 2011 in which she point out some other minor issues.

She reported that the applicant's project team had attended a meeting with the Sudbury Planning Board which enthusiastically supported the project. The Planning Board suggested that the project was an appropriate use for the property. They have dealt with many developers over the years who have wanted to utilize the site.

Architect Michael Liu showed the group a draft site plan. He note a few basic strategies developed for reducing the presence of the building from the public way. Rather than one large building the new treatment has given it a sense of a collection of buildings.

As a reminder, the siting of the building was originally thirty-one feet from Boston Post Road. Emergency access went around the rear of the building. However, the north building along Boston Post Road was moved back to attain a forty-one foot setback from the front property line.

Joe Peznola went over the grading plan. The rear setback measures thirty-eight feet. There is a flared emergency access at rear. The side yard setback to Landham road is sixty-seven feet.

Michael Liu provided building elevations. The ridge height is 41 feet with three stories. His preference is that of a twelve pitch colonial style gable. He said that the original plan was L-shaped and rectangular but they have since re-thought the connection between the two buildings. The connector is now essentially an atrium, which makes two separate buildings and offers an interesting roof profile and view from the intersection.

Mr. Liu then discussed the variety of options for architectural treatments ranging from gambrel style to cottage style or a combination of both. Exterior cladding also could vary from clapboard to shingles. Also discussed were alternate paint color options to distinguish the buildings.

Mr. O'Brien said that he liked the barn look of the gambrel.

Ms. Quirk said that in order to lower the height of the roof she does not mind the gambrel.

Mr. Garanin said the he liked the two different styles of the buildings. He did say, however, that he thought it would be more palatable if the building along Boston Post Road were reduced by one level. He had no issues with the height of the back building. He said that sixty-four units was a fairly dense project. And he talked about the ZBA's preference for a sixty-foot front yard setback.

Ms. Kablack asked the project team about reducing the north building to two stories.

Mike Jacobs said that reducing the structure would lead to issues with the pro forma. He said that taking out a story would take away at least 9 units and fewer units means fewer funds with which to manage the building and pay the resident services coordinator.

Ms. Gittelman added that it was not feasible to reduce units because then the project would be unfundable.

Ms. Quirk also noted that reducing the project by nine units would lower the Town's affordable housing stock. She said that she hoped that working with the architectural styles would help alleviate the height concerns without the need to reduce the number of units.

Mr. O'Brien suggested Lincoln-Sudbury High School as a similar example of a multi-story building that was set within the grade of the landscape.

Ms. Kablack questioned whether two and four stories might work within the design. Michael Liu said that it might work but the balance would not be as charming.

The buildings currently have a ten foot difference at height with the south building being lower.

Mr. O'Brien commented that from Landham Road the only view is the building face rather than its depth and there would be landscaping around it.

Ms. Grace said that the abutting neighbor, Chad Blair (272 Landham Road), is at present comfortable with the plan, however he did express concerns about raising the height and the impact from his perspective.

Ms. Kablack asked whether any consideration was given to lowering the grade of the property to lessen the height from Boston Post Road. Ms. Grace said that they had not yet investigated this idea. A total of three or four feet was discussed.

Mr. Peznola said that there may be septic system considerations to factor into the grading as well.

Mr. O'Brien questioned whether an additional height of ten feet from the abutter's perspective would look any different if there were screening. He felt that the right presentation might make it look less tall. He also noted that there was an old rail bed in between the abutter and the proposed building wing so it would not be too close to the abutter.

Ms. Gittleman was concerned about the potential loss of five or six units within the connector should the stories be altered.

The question then was raised about whether or not the Fire Chief would approve a four-story building. The building would have sprinklers and fire alarms, but it was suggested that the Fire Chief weigh in on the number of stories. Another concern would be how to evacuate elderly residents in the event of an emergency. Ms. Quirk agreed that the resident population would be vulnerable.

Ms. Quirk asked whether enough design changes had been proposed to alleviate concerns about grading and roof lines. She said that she would not want the applicants to have to go back to square one with engineering.

Ms. Kablack said that she has met with the Fire Chief several times and he has said that he is comfortable with the current proposal.

Mr. Garanin asked whether the buildings could simply be pushed eastward.

Mr. Peznola said that the idea could be investigated. The septic system, stormwater plan, and emergency access would have to be reviewed and perhaps altered. The parking arrangement would also be altered and it was questioned whether many spaces would be too far from the building's entrance.

Mr. Garanin also felt that the pine trees around the driveway should be taken down. He said that perhaps parking could be located in their place.

Ms. Kablack said that moving the development's entrance farther away from the intersection of Landham Road and Boston Post Road would not be an issue. Mr. O'Brien suggested that moving it so that it was not opposite the proposed Landham Crossing site could be a safer alternative. Mr. Peznola said that the septic system needs to be at an elevation of 156 feet. Moving the entrance east does help that situation but there would be a lot more grading to be done in the area.

Ms. Kablack asked Mr. Koningisor whether or not the applicants were comfortable with discussions with National Heritage and Conservation to date. Mr. Koningisor said that they were trying to stay out of the 100 foot wetlands buffer zone.

Mr. Koningisor asked attendees whether moving the development's entrance was preferred. Ms. Kablack said that it would be good to hear from the traffic engineer about whether moving the entrance was safer. She also said that it would not be a good idea to situate the entrance opposite the neighbor's driveway.

Mr. O'Brien questioned whether or not the proposed rain garden would mean additional maintenance.

Ms. Kablack reminded B'nai B'rith about obtaining a tree report for the entire property. She noted that in particular there were some mature trees located near the intersection of Landham Crossing and Boston Post Road and obtaining information about their health would be worthwhile.

In summary, Ms. Kablack listed the discussion points brought up during the meeting. For the next meeting with the Zoning Board the project team should develop alternative roof styles, lower the grade at the front of the development slightly if possible, move the location of the entrance eastward but not opposite the abutting neighbor, create a landscape plan, provide alternate paint color schemes, and obtain a tree report. She noted that much work had been done since the initial hearing and she was pleased to see the positive feedback from all of the attendees of the working session.

The next public meeting of the Zoning Board of Appeals was scheduled for Wednesday, June 22, 2011.