

Meeting Minutes
September 25, 2018 Planning Board Meeting
7:00 P.M. | Engineering Conference Room, Woburn City Hall

Chair Dave Edmonds called the meeting to order at 7:00 pm. and asked Planner Dan Orr to call the roll.

ROLL CALL OF MEMBERS

Ms. Claudia Bolgen, Mr. Bob Doherty, Mr. Jim Callahan, Ms. Carolyn Turner and Chair Dave Edmonds were present; Mr. Kevin Donovan and Mr. Michael Ventresca were absent. Also present was Planning Director Tina Cassidy and City Planner/Grant Writer Dan Orr.

Edmonds stated that this meeting is being recorded (audio only).

Edmonds asked if there are any Approval Not Required (ANR) applications before the Board this evening. Cassidy responded that there are two ANR applications for the Board's consideration.

283-299 LEXINGTON STREET ANR PLAN (Shannon Farm Development LLC)

Cassidy provided an overview of the ANR plan, which is intended to formalize the conveyance of an open space parcel to the City's Conservation Commission in connection with the Shannon Farm townhome project. An identical ANR plan had been endorsed by the Chair during the Board's summer recess but it was damaged before recordation so the plan is before the full Board this evening for consideration.

Cassidy stated that she recommended endorsement of the plan as one not requiring approval under Subdivision Control Law.

Motion to endorse the ANR plan, made by Doherty;
Seconded by Bolgen;
Motion carried, 5-0-0.

1 INGALLS STREET ANR PLAN (John and Susan Nee)

Cassidy provided an overview of the ANR plan intended to create a one new buildable lot. Of note to the Board is the fact that the applicants have been granted a variance from the Board of Appeals to allow the newly-created lot to have only 75' of street frontage (Lot #2). No additional zoning non-conformities would result.

Cassidy stated that, with a variance having been granted, she recommends endorsement of the plan as one not requiring approval under Subdivision Control Law.

Motion to endorse the ANR plan, made by Doherty;
Seconded by Bolgen;
Motion carried, 5-0-0.

Turner asked the Board to consider allowing the matter of the Downs Court Definitive Subdivision to be heard out of order from the meeting agenda. The Board granted the request by general assent.

DOWNNS COURT DEFINITIVE SUBDIVISION: EXTENSION OF CONSTRUCTION COMPLETION DATE (Mr. Fred Cialdea)

Cassidy stated that since the last meeting, staff spoke with the developer to obtain greater clarity on remaining home and roadway construction activities. A revised completion date extension request letter from the developer has been provided to the Board this evening for members' consideration.

Mr. Fred Cialdea, 19 Crossman Road, approached the Board to provide an explanation of his proposed timeline for finishing construction of the subdivision. He explained that he is nearly finished construction of the first home, intends to complete construction of the second one by May 2019, and expects to have all work completed (all home construction, roadway work and as-built plan filings by August). The utilities for the roadway are completed. However, gas servicing/hookups for the newly constructed homes has resulted in delays of about a year.

Bolgen inquired about the specific timing of remaining home and roadway construction. Cialdea confirmed that binder work will be complete by the end of November and the second house foundation will be completed prior to the end of the calendar year so that work can continue through the winter season. He is also investigating the possible use of propane as an alternative to gas, given the delays already encountered waiting for the utility to respond.

Cassidy stated that, based on the subdivision work that remains to be completed and the project timeline, she would recommend a continuance of the completion date to September 30, 2019.

Motion to extend the Downs Court subdivision completion date to September 30, 2019, made by Bolgen;
Seconded by Doherty;
Motion carried, 5-0-0.

PROPOSED ZONING TEXT AND MAP AMENDMENTS TO (i) ADD NEW SECTION 30 TO ZONING ORDINANCE ENTITLED SMART GROWTH OVERLAY DISTRICTS; (ii) REVISE THE ZONING MAP BY APPLYING THE SMART GROWTH OVERLAY DISTRICT TO 300 MISHAWUM ROAD (MAP 20, BLOCK 1, LOT 1); AND (iii) DESIGN STANDARDS APPLICABLE TO PROJECTS UNDERTAKEN IN A SMART GROWTH DISTRICT (City Council President Richard Haggerty)

Cassidy addressed the Board, saying that the State has reviewed the draft zoning ordinance to ensure that the wording sufficiently satisfies statutory requirements for 40R Districts. Feedback from the Board on the zoning text change and design standards documents after having reviewed these draft documents is welcomed.

Cassidy further explained that there is a desire by the State to encourage denser kinds of development, with abundant affordable housing, located in areas that are great candidates for redevelopment in that they are near areas of public transit, or existing concentrated development and have the infrastructure needed to support the new growth. There are several benefits to the City in creating a 40R District, including creating more affordable housing, more strictly controlling the aesthetics of the development via design standards, and incentive payments to the community based on the number of housing units permitted by the zoning ordinance. She noted that the developers of the Mall have agreed to provide 25% of the units as affordable, which is more than the 20% set aside required by the 40R Regulations. As a result of having 25% of the units designated as affordable, all units in the project will count toward the City's Subsidized Housing Inventory.

Cassidy elaborated on the distinction between "developable area" and "substantially developed area," which would dictate the level of density permitted on the site and thus the allowable number of residential units.

Edmonds inquired about the permitted height, pedestrian connections between different sections of the site and the parking elements that are envisioned. Cassidy and Kuschel collectively responded that the design elements including height and density are driven by the statutory requirements for a 40R District. These elements will also produce greater walkability and connectivity consideration for pedestrians. Parking on the site will be at least partially structured.

Cassidy stated that there is another independent effort with regard to environmental mitigation-related funding in the City that could be pursued to enhance pedestrian connectivity in the Commerce Way area.

Callahan asked about the envisioned number of cars that would be at the site. Kuschel responded that approximately 1.5 cars per unit is being used as the estimate for the residential component.

Callahan expressed concern with the number of cars that are envisioned to be on the site as a result of the scale of the development and his sense of a lack of traffic planning. Cassidy responded that conversations and analysis regarding traffic planning are currently in progress via City Council discussions that will likely result in amendments to the zoning text on that subject. Moreover, the Mayor secured funding from the City Council to hire a consultant to work with the City Engineer to proactively identify traffic-related issues existing and potentially concerns resulting from the proposed development. The consultant is expected to not only review the traffic information eventually submitted by the Mall redevelopment proponents but also review pedestrian mobility issues in the area, and to make recommendations for mitigating any negative traffic or circulation impacts.

Callahan stated that the amount of existing traffic generated by the existing businesses in combination with the proposed residential units does not present a good scenario.

Doherty asked for clarification on the plan approval process and what it entails and elaboration on the design standards. Cassidy provided an overview of what is in the purview of the Board and what is in the purview of the Council (Plan Approval authority will rest with the Council). Kuschel added that the design standards are formalized and binding guidelines for a proposed development to adhere to relative to building materials, pedestrian connectivity, and structural orientation.

Callahan stated that the Planning Board should provide some recommendations for the types of specific design standards for City to adoption to ensure higher quality of building materials. Kuschel clarified that the design standards are specific to the site plan for the Woburn Mall; if a 40R District is created for another parcel of land in the City, a set of design standards applicable to that project would have to be created.

Bolgen asked for clarification on the background behind the design standards. Kuschel responded that the design standards have been guided by feedback received at the public forum held in February on the broader eTOD study, as well as best practices for encouraging a more “main street,” pedestrian-oriented type of development. A range of higher-quality of materials is encouraged to accommodate the needs of various buildings on the site. Additionally, there is a general DHCD provision disallowing design standards that would or could render a project to be financial infeasible.

Callahan stated that bike path leading to the site should be kept in consideration, along with sufficient interior walkways and roadways that integrate well with Commerce Way. Bolgen added that she is pleased to see that there is an effort being made to integrate bike improvements into the site but stated that there is a lot that can be done to improve the biking/alternative transportation (i.e., ride-sharing) and pedestrian conditions around and to the site. It is important for the Council take this broader-picture view of impacts into consideration with actual planning mechanisms and dedicated funding, and the Planning Board’s role should be to ensure that this occurs.

Kuschel stated that there is only so much that can only be done to improve the area around the site and that broader improvements must be undertaken at the City-wide level via zoning ordinances that could establish potential local funding streams.

Callahan stated that he would like to recommend that the developer take into consideration a shuttle service to provide a direct connection to Mishawum Station.

Bolgen stated that it may be worth considering providing a recommendation prohibiting nightly apartment rental activity such as Airbnb. Cassidy responded that although these units are envisioned to be rental, as opposed to for-sale units, the subletting for nightly rentals is not impossible and it would be appropriate for the Planning Board to consider forming a recommendation to the Council to restrict that activity.

Doherty stated that for the 120 Commerce Way project at the former Fitzgerald Tile site, the developer was more specific in his approach, and he does not think that the proposed Mall Design Standards reflects that level of detail.

Bolgen stated that she would appreciate an answer to the concern as to what extent a developer would have to follow design standards and what discretion the City would have to deny certain design elements of a proposal or to deny a proposal based on an objectionable design element. Cassidy stated that she would follow up to the Board with more clarity on this point.

Members inquired about the possibility of a developer claiming that a requested design modification during the plan review process would make a project financially infeasible. Kuschel responded that it is prudent to suggest changes to the design standards now for DHCD review so that they can assist in determining potential financial feasibility challenges.

Edmonds opened this matter for a public hearing and asked any members of the audience who would like to step forward to address the Board to please do so.

PUBLIC HEARING

Mr. Keith Hague, representing the Woburn Mall property owner, Edens, approached the Board. He stated they originally planned to work with the existing zoning ordinance but were asked to consider a 40R development approach and agreed to do so because of the benefits to the City in terms of revitalizing the property and adding substantial affordable housing to the site.

Hague further stated that Edens cannot submit a specific site plan until the zoning amendment is finalized although he assures the Board that building materials chosen will be of high quality and comparable to their other developments (specifically, South Bay in Boston).

Cassidy stated that it would be beneficial if the developer would make an effort to try to narrow the potential range of materials to be used, to give a better sense of the eventual look of the development.

Hague stated that there's a lot effort made to try to integrate unique design elements into their developments, using local artists and craftsmen to enhance different aspects. Two primary examples are Middlesex Commons (involving a renovation) and South Bay in Boston (ground-up construction). The South Bay project includes a six-story building and incorporates a hotel and 475 residential units and is not a 40R project. The developer tends to draw from a range of materials for its developments.

Hague further stated that Edens is primarily focused on retail and does not plan to sell its Woburn property. It focuses on enhancing the retail mix at its developments. Although the South Bay property is not a 40R development, this property did incorporate affordable housing units. For this process, they worked with a variety of civic groups and the Boston Redevelopment Authority. Their development partner, Avalon Bay, is focused on the residential component, although they coordinate on consistent design. Additional examples of their recent development can be found on their website.

Brad Dumont, of Edens, addressed the Board and stated that the South Bay property is going to be used as a model for the Woburn Mall site, which will be a “long-term hold” for Edens.

Mr. Chris Owen, Florence Terrace, stated that there is no minimum acreage for the proposed zoning change, which should be incorporated into this site. Additionally, he expressed concerns about ensuring that there is a standard that reflects what is desired by Woburn and that traffic concerns need to be a high priority.

Mr. Tim Swain, 29 Dragon Court, stated that he is concerned with the proposed amount of traffic for the site and that alleviating current traffic levels should be a primary focus of the City prior to initiating new development.

Bolgen stated that answers to the questions raised this evening will assist the Board in making its decision on the proposed zoning text amendment. Cassidy responded by reviewing all of requests for information raised by the Board this evening, including: 1) her inquiry to Burlington to request a copy of their adopted design standards; 2) insertion of draft zoning text language addressing the prohibition of nightly rental activities (such as Airbnb); 3) inquiring for DHCD’s clarification as to the city’s discretion in denying a 40R application on the basis of traffic- and/or design-related concerns; and 4) inquiring to Councilor Mercer-Bruen regarding the zoning text amendments she intends to introduce relative to traffic mitigation measures.

Doherty stated that he would also be interested in the traffic questions being answered prior to the zoning change being adopted and better understand what can be done for traffic mitigation measures. Edmonds agreed that the project will need to be considered in the context of an already heavily-trafficked section of the City.

Cassidy asked the Board how they wished to proceed with this matter for future discussion. Her recommendation would be to continue to this matter until October 23rd, which would allow her sufficient time to address the questions raised by the Board this evening. Members agreed with this approach.

Bolgen asked where this matter stood with the City Council. Cassidy responded that the Council has started its public hearing and referred the matter to one of its committees for in-depth discussion. It is her understanding that the Council’s committee is currently waiting to schedule its discussion of this matter until it receives the Planning Board’s recommendation, or at least an indication as to how long the Board will be considering the matter.

Edmonds suggested staff forward notes/information on this matter in advance of the October 23rd meeting wherever possible, to allow for sufficient time to review the material before the meeting on the 23rd. Cassidy responded that she would do so and would be happy to answer any of the Board’s questions beforehand.

Motion to continue the public hearing on this matter until October 23rd, at 7:00 pm, made by Doherty;
Seconded by Bolgen;
Motion carried, 5-0-0.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES: September 11, 2018 Planning Board meeting

Edmonds stated that approval of the September 11th Board meeting is next on the agenda and asks if a member is prepared to make a motion to approve them.

Motion to approve the September 11, 2018 meeting minutes as submitted, made by Doherty;
Seconded by Callahan;
Motion carried, 5-0-0.

PLANNING BOARD DIRECTOR UPDATE

Cassidy stated that a Pocket Park design workshop is scheduled for this coming Thursday evening from 6:00-8:00 pm on Main Street (next to Gene’s Flatbread Café), and members are encouraged to attend.

Edmonds inquired about the status of the Woburn Loop Bikeway-Greenway project. Cassidy stated that at one point the City had obtained a lease/easement over the former railroad right-of-way for this project, but the lease/easement has since expired and there is currently no active plan for implementation/construction as far as she knows.

Edmonds asked if there was any additional business for the Board to discuss. There was none.

ADJOURNMENT

Seeing no further business, Bolgen made a motion to adjourn at 9:03 pm;
Seconded by Turner;
Motion carried, 4-1-0, with Doherty opposed (apparently no social life).

The meeting was adjourned at approximately 9:03 p.m.

Table of Documents Used and/or Referenced at Meeting

Planning Board Staff Report
Staff Report Attachment: 1 Ingalls Street ANR Plan/Application
Staff Report Attachment: 283-299 Lexington Street (Shannon Farm) ANR Plan/Application
Staff Report Attachment: Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) comments on draft 40R zoning text and design guidelines documents
Staff Report Attachment: Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) comments on proposed 40R document changes requested by developer/property owner
Staff Report Attachment: Revised Downs Court subdivision completion date extension request letter
Draft Meeting Minutes: September 11, 2018

Respectfully submitted,

Dan Orr

Dan Orr
City Planner/Grant Writer

APPROVED