



Town of Reading Meeting Minutes

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Board - Committee - Commission - Council:

Community Planning and Development Commission

Date: 2023-12-4

Time: 7:30 PM

Building: Town Hall

Location: Hybrid Meeting – Zoom and Town Hall Conference Room

Address: 16 Lowell Street

Session: Open Session

Purpose: Hybrid Meeting

Version: Final

Attendees: **Members In person:** John Weston, Chair; Tony D'Arezzo, Vice Chair; Hillary Mateev; Tom Armstrong; Mark Wetzel

Members not present: Heather Clish

Others Present in person: Community Development Director Andrew MacNichol; Senior Planner Mary Benedetto, Town Counsel Ethan Dively, Jesse Schomer, Lisa Johnson, Bruce Johnson, Robert Johnson, Giuseppe G. Fodera, Giuseppe Fodera, Gaetano Manganiello

Remote Participants: Giovanni Fodera, Cheryl Surette, Eric Zachrison, Gregg

Minutes Respectfully Submitted By: Mary Benedetto

Topics of Discussion:

MEETING HELD IN THE SELECT BOARD ROOM AND REMOTELY VIA ZOOM

Mr. Weston called the meeting to order at 7:30 PM.

Mr. MacNichol covered the hybrid meeting procedures.

Public Hearing, Downtown Smart Growth District Application Major Plan Change 459 Main St, G.C. Fodera Contracting, Inc.

Mr. D'Arezzo read the public hearing notice into the record.

Mr. Jesse Schomer, the applicant's legal counsel spoke on behalf of the applicant. He provided a history of the application and the history of the litigation and discussions since with the Town to reach a settlement, which had brought the major plan change back to CPDC for a vote.

Mr. Schomer provided a high-level overview of the changes made between the original and current design. The proposal was revised from 12 units down to 10 units, all will be 2-bedroom condos. The building was reduced from 4 to 3 stories and the roof deck has been eliminated. The ground floor space remains as originally proposed for office/retail use. The rear parking garage was revised and now there is an area of open parking at the rear of the site, with 18 spaces proposed for the residents and commercial tenants, including 2 ADA spaces. The proposal includes a solar-ready rooftop, EV-ready garage, and remains focused on promoting the transit-oriented nature of this development.

Mr. Weston asked for a walkthrough of the plans. Mr. Eric Zachrison, the architect for the project redesign presented from Zoom and began providing a walkthrough of the plans. Mr.



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Zachrison and Mr. Schomer highlighted the new setback from the abutting residential neighbors to the east. Mr. Zachrison reviewed the elevations with the Commission. Mr. Schomer compared the current proposal to the previous design elevations for the Commission.

Mr. Armstrong asked if the retail space was directly accessible from the parking garage. Mr. Zachrison indicated that at the moment the primary access point is just outside the parking garage at the main retail entrance. They had left a potential direct access door inside the garage, but that would depend on the tenant to decide if they wanted to use it as an ingress. Mr. Armstrong asked where the garbage would be stored and accessed by a garbage truck? Mr. Schomer indicated that the trash is proposed to be stored in the far northeastern corner of the lot, with garbage pickup to be coordinated with private pickup. Mr. Armstrong asked about the speed of the garage door onto Main St, wanting to make sure that it would be of a speed so that cars wouldn't be backed up on Main St waiting to get in. Mr. Robert Johnson, in person from the applicant team, indicated that the garage was set back enough from the street so that a car could pull off Main St and wait for the garage door to open without stopping traffic. The applicant team stated that the door had not yet been designed, but they intended to install a high-speed door. Mr. D'Arezzo asked if the heat provided to the building will be via heat pumps. Mr. Giuseppe Fodera confirmed yes.

Mr. Schomer covered the revised shadow studies and noted that the shadow impacts are reduced on the neighbors, given the removal of the fourth floor. He stated that the change in design is an improvement in terms of shadows over the original.

Mr. Wetzel asked if all the comments from the original Engineering Memo from the original decision have been addressed so far and he and Mr. MacNichol discussed a few of the standard Engineering comments that would be addressed as the project moves forward towards construction. Mr. Wetzel asked about the improvements to the accessible curbing noted in the decision and Mr. MacNichol indicated that the intersection area is also being coordinated with the ongoing work at Chase Bank across the street. Mr. Wetzel requested if something more ornamental than steel bollards could be used on the corner, and a condition was added to the decision on this point. He also noted that the mast for the traffic light is situated on that corner and he asked what the plan was for relocating or dealing with that on the corner, which didn't appear to have been addressed in the original discussions and Mr. MacNichol noted it for review with Engineering. Mr. Wetzel noted concerns with the infiltration system. He noted some specific improvements that could be made to the construction management plan and provided those notes to staff for future review and revision. Mr. Weston brought up that the Police Chief had included a memo for CPDC that indicated that traffic management for construction is solely within the purview of RPD, and thus any detailed conditions on traffic management during construction should be struck from this and future decisions. Mr. MacNichol indicated CPDC can still include language that staff would review the construction management plan or more generally about minimizing impacts, just not more specific limitations.

Mr. Wetzel asked if the cement board would be pre-colored and the applicant team responded that it could be pre-painted hardie board or colored hardie board, they were still finalizing the materials. Ms. Mateev asked about the location of signage on the building and if anything had been suggested as the location for the retail tenant. Mr. Weston indicated that CPDC would like to know roughly the size, location, and lighting so they have confidence that the signage is being planned with the façade of the building and not shoe-horned in after. The applicant team stated they could put together a sample board for the exterior and they could submit locations and materials for the signs and submit those at



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that time, as they would have that information at that point in their design detail and this was agreeable to the CPDC members.

Mr. Armstrong asked about the front doors on Main St. and stated that he thought that they would need more than one door for the retail operation, but that he would leave it up to staff and the Fire Department to decide where. Mr. Armstrong asked about the useful life of the planters and how long to expect them to survive. Mr. Schomer said he wasn't sure, but that details were included in the plan set. Mr. Weston noted that the planters were steel so they should have a good lifespan. Mr. Armstrong noted that there may be space for a tree on Washington St to be included, such as a dwarf tree.

Ms. Mateev asked about the closeness of the building between this and their neighbor. Mr. MacNichol stated that there were no comments from the Fire Department at this time and staff saw no issue with it conceptually, but that they would anticipate the Fire Department and Building Commissioner working through it with the applicant when they get to permit set level of plan detail.

Mr. MacNichol indicated that in the prior discussion with CPDC that there had been a note for additional landscaping against the brick wall with the utility room behind. Mr. Schomer and the applicant agreed that would not be an issue for them and that if it was preferred they could put a false window into that wall.

Mr. MacNichol noted for the discussion that there were slight changes to the stormwater system made because of the change from open to closed parking, but that it was signed off on by the Town Engineer. Mr. Schomer clarified that to Mr. Wetzel's point earlier in the discussion about the Engineering memo requests that the test pits are required and will be done before construction starts. The applicant team members in person clarified that there might be minor changes to the stormwater system after they do the test pits but that it should be workable.

Mr. Weston opened it up for public comment.

Ms. Lisa Johnson from 166 Washington St. (the direct abutter) spoke in person. She indicated her disappointment with the final plans and noted for the Commission members that the proposed plan changes ultimately don't meet all the needs of what was addressed in the original meetings with the largest unsolved factor being traffic and parking. She summarized some of the traffic concerns and accident info for the Washington and Main St intersection. She stated that removing two units and some height doesn't solve any of the traffic issues and the concerns of the right-turn only. She brought up that she has seen up to 17 cars queueing at the light on Washington waiting to get to Main St on a normal afternoon. Ms. Johnson reviewed the density waivers that the building was asking for and stated that all of the previous buildings in Town with similar approved density waivers were in locations with parking in front of the development and were adjacent to low traffic streets where there are more parking opportunities than this site.

Ms. Johnson asked what the Police Department's comments were on the latest plans. The memo originally written by the Chief that did not support the plans was discussed, but Mr. MacNichol noted that there had been no comments written by the Police on the revised plans other than the memo on the management of construction traffic being within the purview of RPD.

Ms. Johnson noted that in the revised plans there is a 6ft wooden stock fence in the rear instead of an 8ft fence and asked why the dumpster location had been moved from under the building into the rear against the fence. Mr. D'Arezzo asked the applicant team if they



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could change the fence from 6ft to 8ft and Mr. Schomer confirmed that was possible. Ms. Johnson asked about the location of the trash and Mr. Schomer confirmed that it was moved due to relocating the utility room. The applicant team in person indicated they could swap the location of the dumpster and the transformer room without any issues and have an open air transformer and an indoor trash room. The applicant team clarified that they are planning to use totes onsite, not a dumpster, so it would be possible to put them in a room and have them rolled out for trash pickup. Mr. Bruce Johnson indicated that they are concerned with trash pickups with the location in the rear. Mr. Weston indicated he thought the trash could be picked up easier by the door than in the rear. Ms. Johnson stated she preferred the original design, with the transformer in the rear and the trash away from the fence. Mr. Wetzel indicated he would prefer having an open-air transformer.

Mr. Bruce Johnson spoke in person, noting that they had just seen the new plans on Thursday as the public isn't part of the Executive Sessions for the litigation discussion. He said it seemed like a lot of aspects of the concerns will be handled by staff afterwards, and he has concerns about the pace of it being handled and seeing delays on the site. Mr. Weston asked a clarifying question about the delays and Mr. Johnson clarified that those items listed as being handled afterward by staff and if there are delays with staff the construction will be held up and run on for a long time.

Mr. Weston summarized that there will be traffic impacts; that there will be inconveniences to people traveling through downtown during construction, but that the role of staff and the construction schedule discussion is to minimize those to the extent possible. Mr. Weston reiterated that traffic closures are under the purview of the Chief of Police. Ms. Johnson indicated that the draft document states that lanes won't be closed, and Mr. MacNichol clarified that the Police are in charge of scheduling lane closures and that condition would be taken out from the final decision. Mr. Robert Johnson from the applicant team stated that they would prefer to mobilize fewer times and get more done rather than close a bunch of time for small periods. Mr. Wetzel stated that his biggest concern is with the police and DPW accurately communicating with the residents and letting people know about ongoing work projects.

The Johnsons brought up the design guidelines and the fact that the building is in a transitional zone and that the rear is now proposed as a plain building without articulated changes. Mr. Weston stated that the changes in articulation are required for a blank wall, and with the balconies it isn't just a plain flat wall. He also noted that the material changes from the first floor to the second and third, but the first floor is hidden from the neighbors with the wall. He summarized that the members felt the building still had visual interest and changes, even if it doesn't meet the exact letter of the requirements.

Mr. Wetzel asked for clarification on how many new vehicle trips were proposed in the original plan and it was discussed that the original analysis stated that 138 new vehicle trips would be created daily from the building. The applicant team brought up that the 138 number wasn't net new from what is in operation today, just trips generated. Mr. Schomer discussed that trips are just one car action, so a car coming and going is 2 trips. Mr. Weston stated that from his perspective it isn't the traffic generated, but the turning movements and impacts to traffic. There was a discussion amongst the group about the current business and level of traffic at the site.

Ms. Johnson stated that it seemed like CPDC had already made up their mind and that it seemed like they were going to approve it so they should just get on with it. Mr. Schomer spoke in response and stated that the process to work with the board over the last year was a thoughtful and iterative process to arrive at this final proposal and that they had worked with the abutters like the Johnsons to craft a proposal that responded to many of their



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concerns with the original design. Ms. Johnson clarified that there are items they talk about as abutters and while they are decently happy as abutters, the traffic issues are really issues for the town as a whole and about the absurdity of having the exit from the building so close to Washington St.

Cheryl Surette, from 177 County Rd, spoke from Zoom, and stated that her concern is the traffic in the intersection itself and that the Washington and Main intersection is one of the worst in the Town. She discussed the original use of the site and that under the current and prior use of the site, there wasn't much traffic headed out onto Washington St. She is extremely concerned about seeing this type of development on the corner there and brought up concerns about pedestrians at that intersection. She questioned where the commercial tenants would be parking.

Mr. Weston brought up the MassDOT crash statistics for the Washington and Main intersection and that this intersection isn't in the top 5 in Reading. Ms. Johnson clarified that it isn't the accidents at the intersection that makes it problematic, it's the consistent backup.

Mr. D'Arezzo brought up to the Johnsons that the Board does have limitations in what they ask for and what can happen during the site plan review process. He stated that the applicant has rights just as the abutters do, and CPDC's job is to try to get the best proposal for the Town, within the confines of what is possible.

Mr. Armstrong asked if all material storage would be on-site during construction and the applicant team confirmed that it would be. They anticipated doing material staging and there was a discussion that they have even more constraints at their current construction site at 18 Woburn St where the building footprint is a larger proportion of the site.

Mr. MacNichol reviewed the draft decision with the Board. He explained that per the 40R section it was clear that the changes would come through as a Major Plan Change, which is why they have a new decision and not the original decision redlined. In reviewing the changes made as a result of the discussion during the meeting the applicant team reiterated they were fine with an 8ft fence and moving the transformer outside. Mr. Schomer asked about Page 3, south and west setbacks and Mr. MacNichol made changes.

Mr. D'Arezzo made a motion to close the public hearing for 459 Main St. Ms. Mateev seconded the motion and it was approved 5-0-0.

Mr. D'Arezzo made a motion to approve the waiver for the project density in order to allow a site density of 42.6 units/acre. Mr. Wetzel seconded and it was approved 5-0-0.

Mr. D'Arezzo made a motion to approve the waiver from design guidelines section 7.5.5 requiring a change in plane to the north façade. Ms. Mateev seconded the motion and it was approved 5-0-0.

Mr. D'Arezzo made a motion to approve the Major Plan Change Decision for 459 Main St, as amended. Ms. Mateev seconded the motion, and it was approved 5-0-0.



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Other Business

MBTA Communities Update – Staff summarized that the public hearings are scheduled starting December 18 and provided an overall update on recent public input and public events.

Staff re-presented the proposed dimensional controls and discussed the questions they've been receiving from the public. Mr. D'Arezzo and Mr. Weston advised staff to give an example neighborhood or a short corridor of setbacks like taking Temple St for example, so that people could understand setbacks on a series of lots that they might know. Mr. Armstrong asked about how non-conforming setbacks would be handled within the proposed zoning changes. Mr. MacNichol summarized that it would remain handled the same way it is now.

There was a discussion around the proposed development rates and build-out scenarios that staff had put together. The members found them to be reasonable.

Mr. Weston stated that the green of the open space is too close to the blue of the zoning map. The members advised to actually make the open space layer clear to make it pop out of the map.

Mr. Wetzel asked about the split-zoned lots along S Main St and there was a discussion about un-split-zoning Business A in the future and that the request to leave it as-is for now came from staff discussions with Mr. Weston and the idea that the discussion around that deserved its own separate process.

Mr. Armstrong argued for cutting out the Woburn St historic district that is currently included in the proposed map. There was a discussion about local vs. national historic districts and how many historic properties are included in the district and staff's future steps with the Historic Commissions to discuss this. The members generally discussed the map and all agreed that the scope of the map was very reasonable to them. Mr. Weston said he would have included Deering and he would have not included Woodward or would have included the other side of the street. CPDC members as a whole stated that they were in support of the district at the size it is now.

Mr. Armstrong suggested 40% lot coverage max instead of 50% in relation to the affordable housing proposed language. Mr. Weston said that this new incentive based affordable housing proposal has a messaging issue and it was suggested that this specific aspect be discussed with the public, to see if they want to make the tradeoff of additional deed-restricted affordable units in exchange for larger buildings.

Mr. D'Arezzo asked about shared driveways and the Commission members discussed driveway regulations and front and back houses and potential concerns. Staff indicated this was already on their list and they had opened discussions with the Fire Dept and Engineering.

Adjournment

Mr. Wetzel made a motion to adjourn at 10:53 PM. Ms. Mateev seconded and it was approved 5-0-0.

Documents Reviewed at the Meeting:

- 459 Main St Major Plan Change Decision
 - Settlement Agreement Plan Set, dated 9/14/23
 - Draft Decision, dated 12/4/23
- MBTA Communities Materials