

TOWN OF BELMONT
PLANNING BOARD
MEETING MINUTES
March 14, 2023

RECEIVED
TOWN CLERK
BELMONT, MA

DATE: April 19, 2023
TIME: 2:15 PM

Present: Matt Lowrie, Chair; Thayer Donham; Jeff Birenbaum; Karl Haglund, Carol Berberian

Absent: Renee Guo

Staff: Ara Yogurtian, Assistant Director, Offices of Community Development

This meeting was held remotely using Zoom video conferencing technology, as permitted by the Massachusetts Act Relative to Extending Certain State of Emergency Accommodations, which became effective July 16, 2022.

Mr. Lowrie introduced Planning Board members and reviewed a summary of the items that were on the agenda.

1. Meeting Called to Order at 7:00 PM

2. Continued Cases:

a) Case No. 23-04 - Design and Site Plan Review 350 Prospect Street – Belmont Hill School

Applicant requests Design and Site Plan Review approval to construct a new 7,000 sq. ft. facilities building, construction of parking lot for staff and visitors and other associated site improvements at 283, 301, 305, 315 Prospect Street and 12 & 20 Park Avenue located in a Single residence A (SRA) zoning district.

Mr. Lowrie noted they would begin by reviewing the peer review for stormwater.

Dominic Rinaldi, BSC Group, said they had provided an initial letter with 20 or so comments to the Applicant and the Applicant's team came back with changes to the design. In the end, they have adequately responded to all the comments, and he is comfortable that the stormwater design meets the local and state requirements. He also noted that there was a maintenance plan for the porous asphalt surfaces and he said that they would need to maintain the surface after a storm event. Mr. Rinaldi said that he had a chance to review the downhill neighbor's stormwater report and he felt that the information was not needed to do his review. He noted that he had looked at the snow removal plan and he was comfortable with it.

Ms. Berberian asked if the annual maintenance report might be submitted quarterly or more than one time per year. Mr. Rinaldi noted that this was generally an annual requirement but there was nothing that said that they could not do it more than once per.

Mr. Birenbaum asked for further clarification regarding the percentage of water that would run through the porous surface versus the runoff. Mr. Rinaldi explained that it would depend on the intensity of the storm and that most of the water would go through the filtration system.

Jane Lavin, address not stated, sent a message through the chat room, asking if there was a drain embedded for runoff.

Frank Holmes, Langan Engineering, presented a slide showing the design of the infiltration tank. He noted that there is a non-woven geotech-style fabric that allows water to filter through it. He noted that the chamber system treats stormwater from the maintenance lot, and it is also treating the water that is from the roof of the maintenance yard as well. It goes to a catch basin and is directed into the chambers.

Ms. Donham asked for an explanation on the space between the edge of the asphalt and the storage building and also the area outside of the area that was not managed. She asked how this parking lot would be plowed. She wanted to make sure the snow was staying within the property boundaries.

Mr. Holmes noted that the snow maintenance for the storage building would be removed to one of the snow management areas or it could be removed from the site. Mr. Rinaldi said that he felt that this was a sufficient plan.

Ms. Berberian asked if there was any concern about the snow being pushed into the sensitive area and the impact it may have on the abutters. Mr. Holmes noted that the snow will melt and infiltrate into the soil and there was adequate space and distance for this.

Mr. Rinaldi mentioned that the Board could condition that de-icing products are not chloride-based.

Mr. Holmes noted that the snow in the maintenance area and the storage facility had grassy areas and the snow would infiltrate into the ground.

Fred Paulsen, a Belmont resident, called into the meeting and mentioned that he was concerned that the peer review does not satisfy the requirements of the Town By-Laws. He noted that the Planning Board should wait until the stormwater permit result was conclusive as they will need this information from this permit.

Mr. Holmes noted that the stormwater report addresses compliance with the Town's requirements for stormwater and erosion control rules and regulations.

Mr. Rinaldi confirmed that the project will comply with the Stormwater By-Law checklist.

Ralph Jones, Precinct 3, Town Meeting Member, a former Chair of the Stormwater Management Committee, a former Select Board member and a former consultant to EPA water division. He noted the Belmont Hill school should hire a qualified person to inspect the pavement and other systems after storms and every month or more frequently to avoid risk. He is very concerned about the base of the hill and said the Board should take a look at some of the basements in the Winn Brook area as the stormwater will be coming down a very steep hill.

Mr. Holmes noted that the porous pavement is pitched at the edges towards the middle to a swale, if the pavement was clogged there would be a crushed stone trench at the edge with highly

permeable soil at the surface so that the water would drain down into that trench and it is designed to provide a safeguard should there be an issue with the porous pavement.

Mr. Yogurtian suggested a schedule to inspect the porous pavement four times per year based on the rain and snow seasons.

Courtney Sturgeon, address was not stated, noted that the EPA is proposing a national primary drinking water regulation to establish legally enforceable levels of maximum contaminant levels for six PFA's in drinking water. She explained that there is already snow from the football field that will end up in the water and the container is made of plastic and the geofabric will break down. The woods are a natural filtration system and nature is already doing its job of filtering water runoff. These are new laws, and the school should look to see that they are completely in compliance.

Mr. Holmes stated that the products did not contain those chemicals and the standards met the Town and State stormwater regulations.

Mr. Lowrie stated that they would next cover traffic issues.

Jeffery Dirk, Vanasse & Associates, was available to answer questions regarding traffic issues. He noted that there were three issues that they were waiting on to close out the traffic discussion with BSC. BSC has indicated that they were satisfied with how the issues were addressed. The three issues were 1. The addition of pedestrian crossing with warning signs, 2. Lighting to be installed at those crossings and 3. Identification of sight lines at the driveways on the campus. All the items have been closed out with respect to BSC's review.

Mr. Stephen Siragusa, BSC Group, noted that the items that were requested and the issues had been satisfied.

Mr. Lowrie asked if there was anything that could be done to make pedestrian or vehicle traffic safer for this project.

Mr. Siragusa noted that alternative traffic calming measures like the speed signs and the new striping in the roundabout will do a lot to reduce the speeds. Given what it is proposed, he is comfortable that the speeds can be reduced, and it will be safer for vehicles and pedestrians.

Mr. Lowrie asked if the situation at the roundabout will be less safe or safer at the roundabout. Mr. Siragusa said that he felt it was overall safer as it was more intuitive for drivers.

Mr. Lowrie asked for more clarification regarding the two driveways that were close to each other. How would they work after the lots are merged into a single lot?

Mr. Siragusa noted that this will work as the sight distances will be improved by cutting back the vegetation and they can prevent conflicts at that driveway. He said that it would be beneficial for the plans to show the double yellow center lines as perpendicular and the stop line to be parallel to the roadway.

Margaret Barsam, 83 Village Hill Road, called to discuss the intersection of Village Hill Road and Park Avenue. She explained this is a three-way unsignalized intersection and will become a four-way intersection with the addition of this lot. Over the past five years, three children have been struck by cars while riding their bikes attempting to cross Park Avenue. It is a very difficult intersection to navigate with traffic from the rotary, traffic from Prospect, traffic from Park Avenue and traffic from Hinkley Road/Park Road intersection. Also, traffic coming from Rutledge Road and Village Hill Road with cars coming at different angles at different speeds. Adding this fourth element to the entrance of this proposed parking lot makes this intersection more dangerous. She noted that the Vanesse and Associate's report stated that this intersection was dangerous. She would like to recommend adding sidewalks on both sides of Park Avenue coming from Route 2, close to Village Hill Road on that side of Park Ave. and to also add a crosswalk between Rutledge Road and Village Hill Road across Park Ave. as recommended in 2019.

Mr. Dirk noted that they are planning to do some improvements and radar speed feedback signs will be installed. This would be effective at reducing speeds. The improvements to the rotary will slow the traffic as it goes through. They are trying to reduce speeds so that people have more time to react.

Mr. Siragusa noted that the speed-calming measures will help and safety will be increased. The extra crosswalks and sidewalks would be the purview of the Town to recommend.

Mr. Birenbaum said that he said this had everything to do with adding a sidewalk and a crosswalk to make it safer.

Ms. Cardoza noted that the school was not willing to put a sidewalk on that side of Park Avenue.

MOTION that the Board ask Belmont Hill School to add a sidewalk and a crosswalk on the other side of Park Avenue was made by Mr. Birenbaum and seconded by Mr. Haglund. Motion was withdrawn by Mr. Birenbaum. A new motion was made by Mr. Birenbaum to suspend or dismiss this application, to ask the Belmont Hill School to relook at the entire design of the parking lot taking into consideration what Karl had mentioned last week and to add a sidewalk including a crosswalk on the other side of Park Avenue. There was no timely second and the Chair dismissed it.

Mr. Jon Biotti, Belmont Hill School Trustee, noted that the 2019 rotary project was declined by the State because of complaints that were called into the State by the neighbors.

Sun Hong, 6 Cumberland Road, said she agreed with Ms. Barsam. The proposed entryway for the driveway was in the wrong location as it is a very chaotic location. She noted that there was a lot of cut-through traffic due to the Waze App and that many more people were coming through this area in a hurry. The rush hour is very tough and the traffic is very backed up. The cars are backed up to during rush hour to the location of the new entrance. It is very chaotic trying to make a right turn off Village Hill Road and you can't make a left turn into Village Hill Road because you have to wait a very long time. Her son was hit by a car while he was on his

bike in this area. This entrance to the new lot is being proposed in the worst place possible. Could it be moved to another location?

Mr. Siragusa noted that there was not a feasible area for an alternative location for the second entry.

Ms. Donham asked if the turn onto Park Avenue could be made a right turn only.

Mr. Siragusa noted that right turns are inherently safer than left turns.

Mr. Dirk noted that the driveway could not be relocated as it is where it needs to be to operate safely. There were turn restrictions put in place before 2019 to reduce the cut-through traffic. There has been no professional that has come forward to say that this was an unsafe intersection.

Mary Moskowitz, 257 Prospect Street, noted that she was concerned that a car would need to back onto the street on Prospect if they accidentally turned into the lot and had to get out.

Mr. Dirk noted that the gate would be visible from the street, and you would not accidentally make the turn in there.

Mr. Siragusa said that a car could turn around in the two-lane area if the gate were closed.

Ms. Cardoza mentioned that the gate would be opened during operating hours and a security guard would check to make sure there are no commuters parking there.

Ms. Moskowitz asked for an explanation of the location of the dynamic speed signs.

Mr. Dirk said that the speed signs would be on Prospect Street at the roundabout, one on Park Avenue and another sign on Marsh Street. The Town will approve where the signs are installed.

Mr. Moskowitz noted that he has great concerns about exiting his driveway because of the speed of the traffic. He was also concerned about the two driveways that are very close to each other, this is dangerous and is a major issue that is going to need to be dealt with in the future.

Mr. Siragusa noted that vegetation would be trimmed, and sightlines would be maintained.

Deran Muckjian, 108 Village Hill Road, said that the cut-through traffic has not been reduced even after the signs were installed. The right-only turn will not work as people will only go down towards Route 2 to make a U-turn. The entry at Village Road is a very dangerous location. They are going to increase the likelihood of accidents and there will be more cut-throughs on Village Hill Road. This plan will be difficult for the neighborhood and terrible for the environment.

Jill Lappin, 39 Amherst Road, noted that she has worked in traffic safety for 39 years. She asked if the report had taken into consideration the impact on air quality specifically at peak hours. The additional vehicles will extend the number of cars stopped in traffic and as a result, it will increase emissions and degrade air quality for the residents who live up along Prospect Street and Park Ave. She noted that additional parking spaces will add extra traffic. Increased traffic

complexity on Park Ave degrades safety for pedestrians and vulnerable road users. The challenge is in safely crossing the street. It is an extraordinarily dangerous road to cross.

Mr. Dirk noted that there was a reduction in motorist delay in vehicle queuing at the rotary and there will be an improvement in the queuing and overall traffic in the area and a reduction on emissions. There is not an air quality analysis, and it is not required.

Mr. Siragusa explained that there would be a redistribution of the trips and a reduction in the queuing.

Russell Mann, his address was not stated, noted that he was in agreement with Ms. Lappin's comments. He asked for clarification as to the increase in the risk of moving from a single carriage to a double carriage pathway.

Mr. Dirk noted that there is no narrowing of Park Avenue and the conflicts are at the rotary and they will deal with the issue of speed there. The residents do not want the narrowing of Park Road.

Mr. Mann asked why they were privileging light pollution concerns for a couple of houses if the safety entering from Park Avenue would be increased by having that entry set perpendicular to increase safety issues.

Mr. Cardoza explained that when the double yellow line and the stop line are placed perpendicular it would be safer.

Elizabeth Dionne, Wellesley Road, noted that her son was hit by a car. She noted that the neighborhood worked with the Belmont Hill School extensively to accommodate plans despite the concerns that they had with cut-through traffic. She did not agree with the right-hand turn only signs, they were pointless. She asked if the second egress could be moved further east. If the school is creating a four-way crosswalk, could they mitigate the effects and provide a signaled crosswalk?

Mr. Dirk noted that the location of the entry had to be at this proposed location as they would offset the interaction and it would not be too close to the rotary. This was the safest design with proper sight lines. Mr. Siragusa agreed that this is the best way to operate an intersection.

Mr. Larry Link, address was not stated, asked for clarification on how someone would take a left turn to go into the parking lot out of Village Hill Road. He felt that they were creating a less safe place for bikers and walkers and more focused on cars and creating more congestion. He asked if Mr. Lowrie had the opportunity to meet with the TAC. Mr. Yogurtian did not know if this was necessary to meet with TAC regarding the 2019 plan that did not go through.

Mr. Lowrie noted that there would be further input.

MOTION to continue to March 21, 2023 was made by Mr. Lowrie and seconded by Ms. Donham. Motion passed.

YES votes-

Matt Lowrie
Thayer Donham
Jeff Birenbaum
Karl Haglund
Carol Berberian

3. Update on Cases, Planning Board Projects and Committee Reports.

Mr. Lowrie noted that he had attended the Select Board meeting and they said to forward their appreciation to the Planning Board members for their hard work.

4. Review and approve Planning Board meeting minutes: January 17, 2023, February 7, 2023

Motion to approve (with minor edits) meeting minutes for January 17, 2023 was made by Lowrie and seconded by Ms. Berberian. Motion passed.

Yes votes-
Matt Lowrie
Thayer Donham
Jeff Birenbaum
Karl Haglund
Carol Berberian

Motion to approve (with minor edits) meeting minutes February 7, 2023 was made by Mr. Lowrie and seconded by Ms. Berberian. Motion passed.

Yes votes-
Matt Lowrie
Thayer Donham
Jeff Birenbaum
Karl Haglund
Carol Berberian

5. Adjourn. 10:34 PM

The Planning Board's next scheduled meeting will be held on Tuesday, March 21, 2023.

