

TOWN OF BELMONT
PLANNING BOARD

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MEETING MINUTES
JANUARY 6, 2010

INFORMAL DISCUSSION REGARDING CUSHING SQUARE VILLAGE

7:05 p.m. Meeting called to order.

Attendance: Jenny Fallon, Chair; Karl Haglund; Andres Rojas; Carla Moynihan; and Jeffrey Wheeler, Staff.

Jenny Fallon introduced the evening and laid out the ground rules for how the subsequent meetings were going to proceed. She made it very clear that the Board was not going to address issues regarding the RFP, since that was for the Board of Selectmen to decide, and was going to discuss this project in general terms since a formal application had not yet been submitted.

Gwen Noyes, of Oak Tree Development and representing the applicant, introduced the development team and explained that Oak Tree was committed to green/sustainable design, mixed use, and transit oriented development and explained that this project captures all three of these goals. She showed pictures of their other projects and stated that they were committed to working with the Planning Board and community and was optimistic that this process could lead to something good. She reviewed the existing site conditions and explained that significant topographic issues exist - Belmont Street is 21' higher than Trapelo Road. She explained that the existing traffic counts (Trapelo Road: 10,000; Common Street: 12,000; Belmont Street: 25,000) were significant enough to generate retailer interest. She also explained that the S.S. Pierce Building would not be saved for several reasons: 1) contamination under the building; 2) the building is functionally obsolete; and 3) the building is structurally flawed.

Ms. Noyes reviewed the program and what was allowed under current zoning. She compared what is allowed with what was originally proposed in 2008. Gwen reviewed the current concept plan: pedestrian level retail/commercial - 38,000 sf (half of what is allowed); housing - 152,000 sf (120 housing units at 1,275 sf per unit); parking - 10,000 sf on grade with 1 level of parking underground (264 parking spaces); FAR - 2.35. She further explained that this development would generate \$858,000 in tax revenues.

Ms. Noyes explained the phasing for the development: phase 1 would include constructing on the parking lot, remediating the contamination and constructing parking on top. Phases 2 and 3 would include constructing from Trapelo Road to Belmont Street. She stated that hopefully phase 2 and 3 could be done at the same time.

Ms. Noyes then showed schematic plans - she emphasized that these were concept sketches and massing studies. She stated that they are open for discussion on how to deal with Horne Road. She also mentioned that the corner of Trapelo Road and Common Street was an opportunity for some kind of iconic symbol - it is a prominent location and deserves special attention. The developers suggested placing a wind mill, a double helix, at that corner. She explained that the

development would take full advantage of wind and solar. She explained that residential traffic would come off of Williston Road and business traffic off of Trapelo Road and Common Street.

Comments from the Audience

1. Al Smith – 11 Poplar Street – mentioned that the success of retail is the ability to walk around. He argued that the retail stores across Trapelo Road will be choked off because of the traffic on Trapelo Road - no one will walk across the street.

Response:

Chris Starr – responded that the buildings were designed for people to walk around. He expressed his desire for businesses that encourage walk in and walk out. He sees the project as a draw to bring people to frequent stores in the Square.

Karl Haglund – acknowledged that there is a balance between pedestrian traffic with vehicular traffic. He also explained that some of this has to do with timing of the traffic light.

Dan LeClerc – mentioned that Trapelo Road will be reconstructed to be more pedestrian friendly. He stated that Trapelo Road is at the 75% design phase.

2. Michael Smith – Chair of the Historic District Commission, argued for the preservation of the S.S. Pierce building.
3. Doug Koplow – 18 Oak Avenue – wanted to see pictures of other buildings in Belmont, or from other communities, that are similar to this.

Response:

Gwen Noyes – agreed to come back next time with photos of similar projects.

Chris Starr – this project creates density for people to live, shop and dine. He stated that this project is a fundamental change. He is trying to create a center of life.

4. Chris McVay – 109 Brookside Avenue, stated that she loved this concept and believed that the project meets the guidelines of the by-law.
5. John Mattleman – 17 Poplar Street, wanted more information about the sequencing of the development.

Response:

Gwen Noyes – explained that they were dealing with financing limitations. She stated that the parking lot is vacant now and therefore easier to develop.

Chris Starr – mentioned that phasing is the appropriate approach to handle the environmental cleanup – 1st phase would be the parking lot, cleaning up 495 Common Street and paving for parking; 2nd and 3rd phases (hopefully done in one phase) would be building from Trapelo Road to Belmont Street. He hoped to have construction begin by the end of 2010 – 1st phase would take approximately 14 months to build; the 2nd and 3rd phases would take 16 months.

6. Devin Brown – 54 Horne Road, stated that he does not want the arch over Horne Road; he does not want anything over Horne Road. He stated that the arch looks like 5 stories. He did not like that the building was a contiguous 4 story building across the site. He wants the building to step down to 2 stories at the parking lot.

He was surprised that the Planning Board did not ask any questions and stated that this reduces the neighborhoods trust in the process and the Planning Board. He also stated that the phasing does not make any sense. He suggested cleaning up the mess first and then developing the parking lot.

7. Don Becker – 35 Horne Road, stressed that he wanted to see a village concept with 2, 3 and 4 story structures. He stated that much to his horror this building looks like what was shown before and that the design was essentially a warehouse like building. He stated that the building was still a massive, monolithic structure. He felt that the presentation tried to justify such a development. He argued that a 4-story apartment building in Watertown was no way to justify this development. He argued that it was a false premise that the by-law allows 48' throughout the development. This development is not sensitive to the residential neighborhood and will have a devastating impact on the neighborhood. He argued that his neighbors will have to look at 4 story wall. He argued that the scale and detailing should be pedestrian oriented and that the by-law called for moderate scaled structures. The development does not do that – it is an attempt to cut off corners here and there. He requested that the impacts on the Square be carefully considered and suggested that revitalization should not happen at the expense of the Town. He asked the Planning Board to give a message as to what the Town can live with.

Response:

Andy Rojas – stated that the Board has the by-law to go by. He stated that the Board will be reviewing the 4th story, making the step down more gracious to residential, and making the bridge more delicate over Horne Road. He emphasized that just because the Board did not touch on those issues does not mean that the Board will not be dealing with them during the process. Therefore referring to it in pejorative terms is not helpful. He stressed that all things have to be looked at and that the Board will apply the by-law and its history.

Karl Haglund – emphasized that this Board has been committed to listening to the community first, then asking questions.

8. Kathy Rushe – 64 Horne Road, requested that the developer create photo simulations with the current proposal. She also inquired about when the clean-up of the site will be finished.

Response:

Chris Starr – stated that they are trying to clean up the site as expeditiously as possible and that its clean up will be integral to the development of the project. He did indicate that the sooner they can get through the permitting process, the sooner the cleanup can be complete. He also mentioned that DEP is constantly reviewing the site.

9. Jeanne Mooney – 60 Oak Avenue, stated that she liked that the development was creating a sense of vibrancy for the Square. She mentioned that she had four issues – 1) democratic use of open space not just dedicated to a specific restaurant; 2) places for people to gather; 3) more information on snow removal; and 4) plug-in parking spaces for the expected increase in electric vehicles.
10. Steve Carlini – 31 Horne Road, indicated that he did not want Porter Square. He stated that the grade changes pose problems but they could also provide opportunities. He emphasized that the neighborhood is willing to work with the developer.
11. Hernan Jara – 20 Horne Road, expressed concerns regarding rodent control and trash. He inquired about the location of the dumpsters.

Response:

Gwen Noyes – stated that they have begun to look at dumpster locations and pointed out potential locations for dumpsters on the concept plans.

12. Bill Dillon – 137 White Street, questioned the phasing of the development and suggested that the developer should build on the CVS site first to gain credibility and then move on to the parking lot
13. Al Smith – 11 Poplar Street, expressed concern about traffic on Poplar Street and about property values on Williston Road, Horne Road and Poplar Street.
14. Chris McVay – 109 Brookside Avenue, also expressed concern about traffic. She wanted to make sure that egress to the parking was coordinated with the redesign of Trapelo Road.

Jenny Fallon – reviewed the main issues: 1) Visual and massing of development from the neighborhood; 2) Traffic access; 3) Preservation of S.S. Peirce building; 4) Providing ready

access to the parking; 5) Breaking up the buildings; 6) Archway over Horne Road; and, 7) Public open space.

Sami Baghdadi -- indicated that the development was going in the right direction and that he was encouraged by the different architects.

15. Doug Koplow -- 18 Oak Avenue, encouraged the Board to think about trash early and expressed concern about the density and the pressures that would occur on the boundaries of the Zoning District.

Jenny Fallon -- stated that the Town looks favorably at mixed use. She indicated that increased density would be required to achieve this. She stated that the boundary of the Overlay District includes the entire Square and therefore it could be developed accordingly. She emphasized that this would be a change and that it would be something different.

17. Howard Fine -- 88 Bay State Road, stated that he does not think of Cushing Square as an urban area. He said that the plans look like a mall which will change the feeling of the Square.

No further comment was provided.

9:20 p.m. Meeting Adjourned

Next Meeting: Tuesday, January 27, 2010, 7:00 p.m., Art Gallery, 3rd Floor Homer Municipal Building

1/27/2010 Minutes Approved