

PLANNING BOARD MEETING

Minutes, May 3, 2005

Members present: Joseph Barrell, Andy McClurg, Karl Haglund, James Heigham

Members absent: Deborah Emello

Also present: Jeffrey Wheeler, Planning Coordinator

7:05 p.m.: There being a quorum, Chairman Joseph Barrell opened the meeting.

1. General Business:

- The Board approved the minutes from 3/29/2005 as amended.
- The Board continued the Northland Performance Guarantee endorsement to May 24.

2. “Our Lady of Mercy” Presented by Belmont Housing Trust

Roger Colton, Chair of the Housing Trust, presented a schematic plan for the development of our Lady of Mercy Church. He stated that the Church will be closed and probably developed as a Chapter 40B affordable housing project. He explained that the church consists of 6 properties: the church, rectory, senior center, parking lot, convent, and a vacant lot for a total of approximately 60,000 square feet, though none of it is contiguous. Mr. Colton expects that the properties will be sold as one unit and not individually. The assessment for this property is \$6.1 million; however, because of the limitations it cannot be developed under the existing zoning and realize the assessed value. The Trust became involved out of concern that developers will seek to maximize their profit and build something unappealing and not appropriate for the neighborhood. The Trust does not want this to be an example of what affordable housing will look like. Mr. Colton explained that the proposed schematic plan is a good alternative to what other developers could propose. The plan includes 27 (9 of them affordable), 2 or 3 bedroom units, about 1,100 square feet with 1 parking space per unit. None of the buildings would be taller than what already exists in the neighborhood – two and half stories.

The Trust has held two meetings with neighbors and two meetings with staff. Mr. Colton mentioned that the Trust will meet with the Board of Selectmen in a couple of weeks. At the meetings, the neighbors spoke about the need for green space and concern about density. The Housing Trust has worked hard to increase green space and has achieved this in several ways - preserving view corridors and encroaching on the front setback along Belmont Street in order to provide more green space at the rear. The architect conducted a density study to help show the neighbors what the reality of density is in the neighborhood. Two development options, however, are still under consideration - preserve the church or demolish it. He added that if there is significant neighborhood opposition to the proposal, the Housing Trust will probably not proceed any further since the Trust does not have the resources to challenge the neighbors.

The Trust has started talking to developers to form a collaboration to put together a friendly 40B application. Mr. Colton stated that the application must be friendly since he does not have the emotional energy to fight the neighborhood. The proposal, as presented, does not have any financial room for negotiation. For the project to work financially, Low-Income Housing Tax Credits will be necessary. These require 30% of the units to be affordable. Mr. Colton added that even with all of the planning and meetings that have already occurred the Trust may not be able to compete with developers.

James Heigham agreed with Mr. Colton's assessment of the proposed development scenario. Under current zoning only 5 single-family homes can be built, but this would not generate sufficient financial return. He concurred that the development of this site will likely be a Chapter 40B project.

Mr. Colton mentioned that he has not yet spoken with the Historic District Commission. If the Church is preserved, green space will be lost and the number of units will be increased. Additionally, he pointed out that the senior center is right in the middle of the neighborhood.

Joe Barrell expressed concern about the proposed parking since this proposal does not include visitor parking. Mr. Colton pointed out there is not enough space to accommodate housing and parking. The option to construct parking underneath the units, though this is not feasible because this will require the buildings to be taller. Additionally, public transportation is provided on Trapelo Road via an MBTA trackless trolley.

Mr. Colton concluded by stating that the Trust will be working over the next few months to develop a competitive proposal so that the Trust does not lose out on this opportunity.

3. Discussion on Next Steps in Economic Development

Andy McClurg stated that zoning and roadway design need to be supportive of each other. He stated that the next task for the Planning Board is to review the zoning for the Corridor. Completing this process as soon as possible will help the design process. Chair Barrell requested that this action be put on the Board's agenda for after Town Meeting. James Heigham pointed out that the bump outs currently under construction on Trapelo Road are separate from this project and was approved by the Traffic Advisory Committee and the Board of Selectmen.

4. Discussion on Citizen's Petition to Prohibit Replacing Single-Family with Two

The Board discussed the proposed by-law and mentioned that the language as currently worded is confusing. The Board stated that the language will be resolved by the public

hearing scheduled for May 24th. Town Counsel is drafting zoning language that should be clearer.

8:35 p.m. There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned.