

PLANNING BOARD MEETING

Minutes, February 25, 2003

Members present: Joseph Barrell, Deborah Emello, Karl Haglund, James Heigham, Andrew McClurg

Also present: Tim Higgins, Senior Planner
Jeffrey Wheeler, Planning Coordinator

7:00 p.m. All being present, the Chairman called the meeting to order.

- The minutes of January 28 and February 13 were unanimously approved (5:0).

7:10 p.m. Public Hearing to rezone the “Kendall Property” from GR to LBIII

James Heigham moved to continue the Public Hearing to March 25, 2003 at 7:10 p.m. in the Board of Selectmen’s Meeting Room, Belmont Town Hall. The motion passed unanimously.

7:15 p.m. Informal discussion on proposed development of the “Kendall Property”

Roberta Sydney presented an overview of the limitations of the by-right development.

Hans Straugh, architect for the property owner, reviewed the plans. He stated that the program would consist of a retail building and would be constructed within the 130’ commercial district. It would be a one story, 20,000 +/- square foot building, not more than a 10% increase over the existing total building area. The style of the building would be based on the buildings along the corridor and would have an appropriate human scale. It would promote and create a pedestrian environment. There would be 137 parking spaces on-site - originally the property contained in excess of 200 spaces. Mr. Straugh noted that the property owner allowed the rear abutters to place fences on his property a number of years ago and he would not seek to reclaim that property as landscape buffer.

Comments from the audience:

- 1) Sue Bass stated that the proposal looked attractive. She indicated that she would like to see more landscape buffer at the rear and encouraged the property owner to look at mixed-use development.
- 2) Roy Esptein asked several questions: what was the proposed the use and tenants; was this the highest and best use; would a zoning change allow better retail tenants; and, what will happen to the two-family house. Ms. Sydney responded that there would be 2 or 3 retail tenants; retail use is the best for this market (office use is dead); current zoning allows acceptable uses; and the two-family will remain.
- 3) Katharine McPhail inquired about other uses. Ms. Sydney indicated that retail was the only use under consideration.

4) Andrea Masciari indicated that she did not want this to become a strip mall. She also questioned the status of the fire station. Ms. Sydney stated that she did not know about the fire station and would need to contact the Board of Selectmen's office.

5) Carolyn Bishop asked about the status of Walgreens. Ms Sydney stated that the proposed building is not conducive to Walgreens and that they were no longer in discussion with them.

Questions from the Planning Board:

1) Karl Haglund stated that Design and Site Plan Review will be required for this project. Ms. Sydney agreed but reinforced that no special permit would be needed.

2) Andrew McClurg stated that this was a much improved plan, but clarified that treatment and details would be further reviewed under Site Plan Review. He would like to look at a new zoning definition for the area that would allow 2nd and 3rd floor development and asked that the developers keep their options open and make appropriate structural modifications to allow future expansion of the building. He added that the front setback is also a problem – 12'-0" setback and if the street is narrowed, the building could be 35' from the sidewalk. He also would like to relax the requirement of staying within 10% and would like to see a longer building. He questioned the need for all of the parking and the economic feasibility of the development.

Ms. Sydney stated that customers of abutting commercial uses will utilize the parking (unless they enforce otherwise).

4) James Heigham expressed concerns about Town Meeting accepting mixed use zoning.

7:45 p.m. Informal discussion on Revised Inclusionary Zoning By-Law

Roger Colton, Chairman of the Fair Housing Committee, provided an overview of the revised By-Law. He presented a memo to the Planning Board outlining the changes between last year's proposal and this proposal. He approached the changes in two (2) sections: one for Inclusionary Zoning and the other for changes to the existing Zoning By-Laws. He deleted all sections relating to increasing intensity and densities of non-residential development as they seemed too controversial; however, mixed use development was still being proposed. The By-Law would apply to all three commercial zoning districts. He mentioned that he anticipated public building conversions to apply to fire stations. At the conclusion of his statements, Mr. Colton requested a public hearing and Planning Board endorsement of the proposed amendments.

James Heigham complemented Mr. Colton and the Fair Housing Committee on amending the most controversial components of the proposal.

Joseph Barrell questioned the two (2) year limitation on repetitive petitions. Tim Higgins explained that the Board is required to reconsider the amendments and noted that there seemed to be substantive changes in these new amendments.

Formal public hearings, both on the reconsideration and zoning amendments, will be scheduled for the Board's meeting on Tuesday, March 25, 2003.

8:30 p.m. Trapelo Road/Belmont Street Corridor Study

Andy McClurg introduced Ken Buckland from the Cecil Group who presented a detailed power point presentation of the Trapelo Road/Belmont Street corridor. Mr Buckland made the following points:

- He identified the decisions the Town must make to improve the corridor, i.e., parking, streetscape, public place creation, image and identity, circulation strategies, mixed use, and promotion of the completed plan.
- He presented various traffic calming techniques and pedestrian safety improvements. He indicated that the pavement width of the roads is excessive and allows for two lanes in each direction where only one (1) lane should be employed.
- He discussed creating design guidelines – defining façade elements, signs, banners and awning treatments and proposed three (3) steps to accomplish this: creating, adopting and applying the design guidelines.
- He recommended streetscape improvements.
- He presented suggestions for parking improvements, including developing air rights over the MBTA station at Waverley Square.
- He discussed the need for new eating establishments that would increase pedestrian activity and help create a “sense of place”. He also talked about courtyards and how they add to a “sense of place”.
- He recommended mixed use development with the first floor of buildings being commercial/public and residential on second and third floors.

Mr. Buckland ended the presentation by asking “where does Belmont want to go?”. Residents present (17) offered the following comments:

- Consider angled parking as a way to increase parking and promote traffic calming;
- Design traffic calming measures; consider truck and bus turning radii in these plans;
- Place islands and medians in the street but consider the option of widening the sidewalk instead;
- Provide bicycle access as done elsewhere in the town;
- Use a combination of islands and road narrowing to slow traffic;
- Use lane markers and striping as an immediate measure for improvement;
- Design traffic signals to be pedestrian focused;
- Build attractive parking structures;

- Concentrate shops at nodes of commercial/business areas;
- Bury the overhead utility lines;
- Build wider sidewalks;
- Promote a mix of uses in the commercial areas;
- Improve the permitting process, particularly with alcohol licenses so that more restaurants will come;
- Add more food-related uses to improve activity levels;
- Allow nonconforming uses to continue and grow;
- Try to get more awnings constructed;
- Create a different theme for each node or commercial center;
- Improve historic landmark buildings (How do you improve/maintain them?);
- Define gateways for the Town so people know when they are entering the Town and various squares;
- Establish unified design guidelines for buildings and signs;
- Consider impacts on the MBTA when designing traffic calming measures (Tim Higgins noted that he contacted the MBTA planning office and notified them of this study. No requirements were identified at this time.);
- Address the parking concerns;
- Allow no more than three story buildings but only where the parking concerns can be addressed; and,
- More uniformity and architectural amenities to entice shoppers

Mr. Buckland asked the audience how they feel about mixed use and taller buildings. He stated that at least two stories of residential are required above the commercial for it to be financially feasible (a total of three-stories). There was a general reluctance from the audience to go above three (3) stories. The concern of where do occupants of the building park their vehicles was a primary concern.

The discussion ended with Jeffrey Wheeler asking the audience to attend future meetings, visit the website, and fill out the comment form.

Miscellaneous Business:

- Tim Higgins distributed a copy of a new MHD policy that favors community input on roadway reconstruction.
- The dog kennel issue was discussed briefly. The Board was not comfortable with going to the Annual Town Meeting; however, they agreed to discuss it in April.

9:45 On a motion by James Heigham, seconded by Joe Barrell, the Planning Board unanimously voted (5-0) to enter into Executive Session with Selectman Will Brownsberger to discuss pending litigation and not to return to open session.