

TOWN OF BELMONT
PLANNING BOARD

MEETING MINUTES
March 13, 2012

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7:00 p.m. Meeting called to order.

Attendance: Sami Baghdady, Chair; Michael Battista; Charles Clark; Karl Haglund; Andres Rojas; Jeffrey Wheeler, Staff

Absent: Joseph DeStefano

7:00 p.m. **Public Hearing Continued: Cushing Village Application**

Mr. Baghdady read an email into the record from Mr. Harry Masakian, owner of a commercial property in Cushing Square, which stated that he was in full support of the proposed development and felt it would have a positive impact on the neighborhood.

Mr. Starr, the developer of the Cushing Village project, gave some background about his team and the project. He stated that his family's business has been serving Belmont for the past 4 generations, and then reiterated his understanding that tonight's public hearing would focus on density, intensity, scale, and height.

Mr. Donohue, representing Mr. Starr, reported the following:

- More than 3 million dollars has been spent cleaning up the property after it was discovered that the soil had been contaminated with dry cleaning solvent.
- Peter Quinn was hired as architect for this project. Mr. Quinn has appeared before both the Planning Board and the Zoning Board of Appeals on past development proposals for Cushing Square.
- Additional grade-level parking was added to the site, which will help revitalize the area and develop more business opportunities.
- That over time they have reduced the scale, height and density of the development, and the buildings integrate with the surrounding properties.

Mr. Quinn gave a short presentation which highlighted the following: 1. the buildings as seen from the street, 2. the buildings as seen from the rear, 3. shadow impacts, and 4. summary of area and volume.

Mr. Quinn addressed "Massing Strategies" (ways to reduce massing) and said that the strategies included vertical layering, change of materials, set backs, central entries, the use of varied materials, such as slate and shingles on roofs, and layering in sidewalk areas such as awnings and flower beds.

Mr. Quinn addressed the impacts on the four abutting neighbors (three on Horne Road and one on Belmont Street).

1. 19 Horne Road (abutting the parking lot) - He indicated that the distance between the proposed building and the house would be large enough space to allow light and give a sense of privacy.

2. 13 Horne Road - He indicated that the distance between the proposed building and the house would be 45-55 feet, and all setbacks far exceed what is required.
3. 16 Horne Road - He indicated that the distance between the proposed building and the house would be over 34 feet and will be highly landscaped with a walk behind the property.
4. 582 Belmont Street - He indicated that the distance between the proposed building and the house would be 20 feet and the building would be stepped back and additional 12-20 feet.

Mr. Quinn addressed the shadow study and said the study looked at the shadows cast at four different times of the year (September, December, March, and June) at various times during the day. He corrected the previously stated FAR and stated that it is now 2.11 with a building volume of 2,096,738 square feet. He concluded by stating that the proposed building is significantly less than that proposed in 2010.

Mr. Starr presented a short video, which gave the viewer a “virtual” tour of the three buildings and of the entire Cushing Village project. He stated that the intent was not only to convey information, but also to convey emotion.

Seeing the Board had no questions, Mr. Baghdady opened the floor to questions from the public.

Audience Comments:

1. Ann O'Donnell, 577 Belmont Street, stated that the buildings were too high, too dense and too massive. She felt the Hyland building was out of character with the rest of the development, since it was a four story building. She expressed concern that the multi-family apartments would have a negative impact on the school system and that taxes will increase as a result. She stated the shadow study was not accurate, since the applicant indicated that the sun was coming from the wrong direction.
2. Douglas Koplou, 18 Oak Avenue, stated that if the developers were excluding certain parts of the buildings from the FAR, that they needed to be transparent about what they are excluding and show how the FAR is calculated. He also commented on the height of the buildings, noting that the scale is higher than what was stated in the presentation.
3. Jon Mattleman, 17 Poplar Street, commented on the shadows created by the buildings, noting that the sidewalks and roads will be in shadow.
4. Don Becker, 35 Horne Road, distributed a position paper from the Cushing Square Neighborhood Association (CSNA) to the Board and the audience and requested that it be entered into the record. He further stated that as an association of abutters, the CSNA is very pleased and enthusiastic about this project, but had concerns that the buildings are not appropriately sized, and are out of character with the Town. He emphasized that the project has to be sensitive to abutting neighborhoods and that these buildings are not sensitive. He added that they are enormous.

5. Mark Kohler, 324 Common Street, Watertown, stated that the proposed buildings are enormous, and expressed concern that the Hyland building gets taller as it goes up the hill towards the intersection of Common and Belmont Streets.
6. Mrs. Gianoukos, 569 Belmont Street, urged the Board to consider the height of the buildings.
7. Karen Sapolsky, 37 Edgemoor Road, commented that the increased density comes at a diminished quality of life for the neighborhood. She also added that adopting the Overlay District was a huge mistake.
8. Al Smith, 11 Poplar Street, suggested a compromise height of 36 feet instead of 48 feet.
9. Devin Brown, 54 Horne Road, stated that he thought that the changes to the massing were disingenuous; the buildings are still too massive. He added that he wanted to see more retail space. He also stated that it was disingenuous to show the shadow studies only at 3 times during the day and wanted to see them throughout the entire day.
10. Carolyn Bishop, 7 Orchard Street, urged the Board not to grant a Special Permit for this development. She felt there was no cohesiveness between any of the buildings, and the buildings are too tall.
11. Bill Dillon, 117 White Street, stated that Belmont needs the commercial tax base that this development will bring, but the development is too massive. He suggested that the applicant provide examples of similar developments in the area so that people can see what such a project might actually look like.
12. Kathy Rushe, 64 Horne Road, agreed that the buildings are too big and too massive and urged the Board and developer to come up with a compromise.

Andre Rojas expressed concerns about the bulk and mass of the development. He commented that the Planning Board had great flexibility and discretion regarding FAR, concerns of the community, etc. He further stated that blind adherence to the By-law's numbers is not quite compliance with the By-law's design standards. He stated that the setbacks are not far enough back, and that the intent of the Overlay District was primarily a development with 3 ½ stories, not 4 stories. He asked for the percentage of building that is 4th story. He felt that the Hyland Building was very problematic, and that stepping up the hill is not the right move. He also questioned whether the step backs were enough to allow sunlight on abutting properties.

Karl Haglund described the history of the Overlay District, and stressed that 4 stories was to be at the corner of Trapelo Road and Common Street.

Sami Baghdady stated that the Hyland Building looked like a 5 story building, and that it felt very urban. He noted the importance of step backs and was disappointed not to see any green space where people could congregate. He also noted that the aisle width for the parking spaces required by the Planning Board's regulations is 24 feet, yet the developer provided only 22 feet on the site plan. He urged the developer to make the development feel more "village" and less "urban."

**Moved by Andres Rojas to continue the Public Hearing to March 27, 2012, at 7:00 pm.
Seconded by Charles Clark.
Motion passed unanimously.**

9:10 Approval of Minutes

**Moved by Andres Rojas to approve the minutes of October 11 and 25, 2011, and November 8, 15 and 29, 2011. Seconded by Charles Clark.
Motion passed unanimously**

Adjournment: 9:15 pm