



PLANNING BOARD

Linda K. Hamlin, Chairman
Steven A. Heikin, Clerk
Robert Cook
Blair Hines
Sergio Modigliani
Matthew Oudens
Mark J. Zarrillo

Town of Brookline Massachusetts

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BROOKLINE PLANNING BOARD MEETING MINUTES
Room 111, First Floor, Brookline Town Hall
March 10, 2016 – 7:30 p.m.

Board Present: Linda Hamlin, Steven Heikin, Robert Cook, Sergio Modigliani,
Matthew Oudens, and Mark Zarrillo

Staff Present: Polly Selkoe, Maria Morelli

Chair Linda Hamlin called the meeting to order at 7:35 pm.

BOARD OF APPEALS CASES

19 Denny Road – construct an attached garage and addition requiring front and side yard setback relief (3/17)
Pct. 13

Polly Selkoe described the relief requested.

Applicant Richard Corn and his architect Deborah Pierce presented the project, an oversized garage and interior ramp with regraded driveway for accessibility. The current driveway has a non-compliant 17% decline and retaining wall with no guardrail.

Mark Zarrillo asked if the garage could be moved further back and to the left to increase the front setback. That configuration would not be possible because of the location of the curb cut, which cannot change (it is next to a mature oak street tree).

Linda Hamlin stated that the basement floor plan was confusing because it is superimposed on the layout of the first floor. She recommended that plans be redrawn to separate the basement plan from the first floor plan.

Sergio Modigliani asked if demolishing the existing garage was considered decommissioning. Ms. Selkoe responded that demolition of nonhabitable space is not considered decommissioning and therefore does not affect floor area ratio.

Mr. Modigliani asked if a roof plan was available. He wanted to know how the roof of the addition would meet that of the house; he also wanted to know where snow and water would collect or run off. The architect presented a conceptual sketch, which clarified this matter. He recommended that a roof plan be provided with the plans, however.

Matthew Oudens asked if the location of the lift could be moved to shorten the length of the garage. The applicant clarified that a ramp not a lift is proposed. The vehicle is a rear-entry not side-entry model, which explains the location of the ramp.

Ms. Hamlin questioned the proportions of the garage opening. A 6'-9" high door appears too low. The architect said she would specify a taller door, which can be accommodated.

The Board also discussed other interior configurations of the garage to reduce its size and length, but generally agreed that the proposed configuration and dimensions would probably best meet the owners' needs and no changes were recommended.

Linda Hamlin motioned to recommend approval.

Robert Cook seconded the motion.

Voted (6-0): Therefore the Planning Board recommends approval of the site plan submitted by Bruce Bradford, dated 1/27/16, and plans by Pierce Lamb Architects, dated 1/21/2016, subject to the following conditions:

1. Prior to the issuance of a building permit, the applicant shall submit a final site plan, clarified floor plans and elevations with garage door details and a roof plan, subject to the review and approval of the Assistant Director of Regulatory Planning.
2. Prior to the issuance of a building permit, the applicant shall submit a final landscaping plan indicating all counterbalancing amenities, subject to the review and approval of the Assistant Director of Regulatory Planning.
3. Prior to the issuance of a building permit, the applicant shall submit to the Building Commissioner for review and approval for conformance to the Board of Appeals decision: 1) a final site plan stamped and signed by a registered engineer or land surveyor; 2) final floor plans and elevations stamped and signed by a registered architect; and 3) evidence that the Board of Appeals decision has been recorded at the Registry of Deeds.

808 COMMONWEALTH AVENUE/0 DUMMER STREET (Boston University) – Preliminary presentation for a major impact project by Boston University to construct a “black box” theatre on a parking lot next to 808 Commonwealth Ave., and a building with production support space on Dummer Street, for B.U. students Pct. 1

Polly Selkoe, Assistant Director for Regulatory Planning, stated that the purpose of the meeting was a discussion of the proposal and a possible vote on the appointment of the Design Advisory Team members. Board members would not be voting on an approval of the design at this time.

George Cole, Stantec Consultants (project management), introduced the project team:

- Boston University: Walter Meissner, Associate VP of Operations
- Architect: Howard Elkus, Elkus Manfredi
- Landscape Architect: Mikyoung Kim
- Transportation Engineer: Giles Ham, Vanasse Engineering
- Real Estate Attorney: Marilyn Sticklor, Goulston & Storrs

Members of the project team presented the components of the plan.

Mr. Meissner explained that the purpose of the black box theater would be to consolidate the theater program facilities by creating a multifunctional teaching lab. By physically locating the theater program at the center of the campus (“art at the heart”), the university would emphasize its commitment to its highly regarded theater program.

Architects Howard Elkus and Ross Cameron described the site plan and proposed materials. The main building at about 59 feet tall would feature a web like scrim (a ceramic-like material as strong as steel) to lighten the effect of the boxlike massing of the theater space and to create a semi-transparent boundary between the indoor lobby and outdoor arts plaza. An arts plaza is proposed in the area that front Commonwealth Avenue. One possibility is for the Commonwealth Avenue façade of the main building to be operable to open the lobby and connect it to the outdoor arts plaza, accommodating outdoor performances and about 300 seats. Smaller buildings, which would house the theater production program, would front the single-family Dummer Street neighborhood. To relate to the architecture and scale of the residential district, wood or wood-composite siding would be used. The height of these buildings would range from 25 feet to 38 feet high, as well.

Landscape architect Mikyoung Kim stated that the design would incorporate greenstreet principles to soften the edges of the development and to manage stormwater runoff. The arts plaza on the Commonwealth Avenue boundary would feature steps that could serve as amphitheater-style seating. To buffer the site from the Dummer-Essex Street single-family neighborhood, street trees spaced 35 feet apart are proposed along with a wider, 13-foot verge. In addition, the pedestrian circulation on the site would be configured to discourage access to the single-family neighborhood.

Engineer Giles Ham, Traffic Engineer, stated that the current site circulation would change so that all cars would enter on Essex Street and exit on Dummer Street. The site currently has 305 parking spaces and proposes 311 (about 218 spaces would be below grade). Mr. Ham reviewed the trip generation summary and stated that no material impact to bicycle, pedestrian, or vehicular traffic was expected. The loading dock would be located at the corner of Essex and Dummer Streets.

Attorney Marilyn Sticklor of Goulston & Storrs presented the zoning analysis. The site has three front yards and two rear yards. The dimensional requirements from which the project will need relief are height, rear yard setback, minimum number of required parking spaces, and loading regulations.

The Board asked technical questions:

Robert Cook asked how the building at 808 Commonwealth is currently used and if changes to this building were being considered. BU’s Associate Director of Operations, Walter Meissner, responded that although the building is not fully utilized, no changes are planned. The opera, culinary arts, and Metropolitan College computer science programs are housed there.

Steven Heikin asked if the Huntington Theater would be moved. Mr. Meissner responded that moving the location of the Theater is not planned. The black box theater is considered a teaching lab, and moving Huntington Theater to this block of the campus would not be practical. Mr. Heikin also asked about the parking for evening events and bike racks. Mr. Meissner responded that the attendants would be used to manage traffic flow. The architect responded that the bike racks are planned on Level 1 in the basement.

Mr. Heikin also asked about the location of trash compactors and loading docks. The architect responded that they are sited on the corner of Essex and Dummer Streets.

Overall, Mr. Heikin thought the design was bold yet elegant.

Mark Zarrillo also complimented the project team. He stated that the landscaping should be enhanced at the loading dock area at the intersection of Amory and Dummer and the boundary between the arts plaza and the building at 830-848 Commonwealth Avenue. He felt that the streetscape of 808 Commonwealth could be softened further.

Sergio Modigliani asked if BU owned any properties on Dummer Street. Mr. Meissner responded that BU did not own any properties on the block of Dummer Street abutting the project site. Mr. Modigliani felt that a shadow study was needed. The landscape architect stated that she would provide one to the Design Advisory Team. The Board noted that because the single-family neighborhood is to the south of the site, shadows would not be an issue for residents; shade is an issue for Commonwealth Avenue portion of the site, the area proposed for the arts plaza.

Matthew Oudens was concerned about vehicular circulation on the site.

Linda Hamlin recommended that the project team consider the implications of the following issues:

- If concrete is proposed for the scrim, how will it weather? Concrete when it becomes dirty and discolored would be unattractive. *(The architect responded that the material is not concrete or an aggregate material; it more like ceramic, which has a shiny surface and does not attract dirt. It has the strength of steel, however.)* Ms. Hamlin responded that the team should provide samples of the ceramic-like materials that are weathered not new.
- The pedestrian passageways on the site extend from the north boundary into “dead-ends” (the landscape architect’s description) as they approach the Dummer Street neighborhood. Ms Hamlin wanted to ensure that the terminal points at Dummer Street would be activated. *(The landscape architect responded that the objective is to discourage pedestrian traffic, primarily BU students, accessing the single-family neighborhood. However, the so-called dead-ends facing the residential district would be designed to be visually appealing.)*
- Because the buildings housing the production facilities would face the residential district, noise and fumes could be impactful.

Steve Heikin asked what materials would be used when the scrim ends. The architect responded that a metal panel is proposed on the right façade.

The public was asked to comment:

Andrew Moulton, Carlton Street, stated that the maximum height of the building should be limited to 45 feet. Granting zoning relief for height would set a negative precedent on Commonwealth Avenue.

Deborah Kaptopoulos, Ivy Street resident, was concerned about the lack of a master plan for the campus. She wanted to know to what extent the so-called center of the campus would be developed. She also was not pleased that the project would be fast-tracked. She recommended that the process not be fast-tracked to enable the community to weigh in fully.

Tommy Vitolo, University Road resident and Town Meeting member, was concerned about the routes traffic approaching the theater from the east would take. He speculated that some residential streets would see increased use. He emphasized the need for a TDM plan that might employ a garage permitting process and perhaps fewer parking spaces.

Lea Cohen, a Brookline Arts Council employee and resident at a condominium complex in the Cottage Farm area, applauded the investment in the arts and urged BU to make their performance spaces accessible to the Brookline arts community. Betsy Frauenthal, also involved in the Brookline arts community, emphasized Ms. Cohen's points.

Ellen Franco, 126 Amory Street, was concerned that the driveway configuration [all cars to enter from Essex and exit on Dummer] would not work well.

Robert Miller, Copley Street in the nearby Crowninshield neighborhood, asked how the redesign of Commonwealth Avenue would dovetail with the theater project. The Board recommended that the plans for the street redesign be shown at the next DAT meeting.

Ben Franco, a Cypress Street resident and member of the Board of Selectmen, was concerned about vehicular circulation and the feasibility and impact of the loading dock. He recommended that the traffic studies include the prospective five or six developments in the area.

Tom Sprague, who has owned a studio production business on Dummer Street for the past 35 years, stated that noise from the production building facing Dummer Street very likely will not be an issue. He used his business as an example of the low impact that can be expected. He recommended adjusting the sharp boundaries at the intersection of Essex and Dummer Street to improve traffic flow.

Judy Paprin, 89 Essex Street, stated the project would be a neighborhood asset; however, she stressed that BU should be asked to provide a master plan. Traffic and site circulation were also her priorities.

Elton Elperin, Preservation Commission member, complimented the design. He wondered if pedestrian passageways could be designed across the site to provide the Dummer Street neighbors access to Commonwealth Avenue. (Several neighbors responded that the converse scenario—BU students accessing the single-family neighborhood—would likely result and would be a negative impact.)

Patrizio Urciuoli, Essex Street, recommended that the landscaping be enhanced on the Essex Street boundary. He also felt that Dummer Street exit should be right turn only (it would be unlikely that vehicles exiting would take a left toward Essex Street).

Susan DeLong felt that the appearance of the smaller buildings fronting Dummer Street created a wall; she considered them too plain and box-like. Even though taller trees would be better, landscape buffering alone will not mitigate the wall-like effect. Matthew Oudens asked how the wood siding would weather. The architect responded that the siding being considered is a durable wood composite material with grays and brown tones. Steven Heikin suggested less block-like forms, especially at the roof line, to better relate to the residential architecture.

Appointment of Design Advisory Team (DAT) members:

Linda Hamlin read the names of the nominated DAT members:

Mark Zarrillo, Planning Board; DAT Chair

Matthew Oudens, Planning Board

Elton Elperin, Preservation Commission

Arjun Mande

Judy Paprin, Essex Street resident

Steve Heikin motioned to recommend the appointment of the Design Advisory Team members.
Robert Cook seconded the motion.

Voted (6-0): The Planning Board recommends the appointment of the Design Advisory Team members.

Meeting adjourned at 10:45 pm.

Materials Reviewed During Meeting: Staff Reports, Site Plans, and Elevations