

FALMOUTH PLANNING BOARD MEETING MINUTES

TUESDAY, MARCH 1, 2011, 6:30 P.M.

FALMOUTH TOWN HALL, COUNCIL CHAMBERS

MEMBERS PRESENT: Bill Lunt (Chair), Bernard Pender, Becca Casey, William Brogan, Walter Arsenault (Alternate), Kermit Stanley (Alternate)

MEMBERS ABSENT: Heddy Snyder

STAFF PRESENT: Ethan Croce (Senior Planner)

The meeting was called to order at 6:36 pm.

Walter Arsenault was appointed as a voting member.

1. Approval of February meeting minutes

Bill Brogan moved to approve the meeting minutes; Bernie Pender seconded. Motion carried 4-0 (Casey abstained).

Administrative Action Item

2. ACE Hardware – 215 US Route 1 – Request for approval of new site signage. Tax Sheet 320; Map-Lot U11-035-A. Zoned SB-1 & VCO.

Ethan Croce explained that this is a new tenant at Bangor Savings Plaza, 215 Route 1. They are applying for three signs: two wall signs and one tenant panel on the freestanding sign along Route 1. All three signs appear to comply with all ordinances and the design guidelines.

Becca Casey moved to approve the application; Bill Brogan seconded. Motion carried 5-0.

Agenda Items

3. Falmouth School Department – 74 Woodville Rd. – Request for a site plan amendment to revise traffic circulation. Tax Sheet 300; Map-Lot R05-020. Zoned Farm and Forest & RCZO.

Ethan Croce said this applicant was before the Board in December of last year, asking to convert the most southerly access drive to the campus from a one-way drive to a two-way drive. The application was tabled in order for the applicant to gather more information regarding this request. They have submitted new information to better describe the flow of vehicular and pedestrian traffic during the school day. The applicant has also submitted additional material from their traffic engineer in order to show how many cars would use that drive if it were converted to two-way. There is occasional visitor use of this drive, perhaps 20 visitor vehicles per day; it is primarily used by staff. The town engineer was concerned about the height of a culvert in that area, and whether it should be lowered. The DEP and DOT have both consented to this change and the additional pavement required.

Jacques Gagnon said the box cut and culvert elevation is an existing condition. The culvert does get into the cross section by 3-4 inches for a small portion of the driveway. He has asked the school department whether they are considering replacing that culvert; they don't know at this point. If they do replace the culvert, they can lower it. He indicated the location of the culvert on the plans. They have a little bit of room, perhaps 6 inches, to lower it.

Bill Lunt asked how old it is. Mr. Gagnon said it is probably pretty old.

Bill Lunt asked if public works commented on the age of the culvert. Ethan Croce said no.

Bill Lunt wondered if, due to the age of the culvert, the responsibility for replacing it would be the Town's. He would like to see it replaced.

Mr. Gagnon agreed to replace the culvert. It would require a permit by rule from the DEP. Regarding the dimensions listed on sheet CW102; he said they can update that if the Board wants.

Bill Lunt said if the planning office is requesting it, the Board would support that request.

Becca Casey asked what width he was referring to. Mr. Gagnon said the width at the 40 feet indicator. It will taper to 24 feet, and then finally 20 feet.

Becca Casey said the peer review letter refers to the width as 45 feet.

Mr. Gagnon said originally they had it at 45 feet; they reduced it to 40 feet to comply with zoning. It tapers from 40 feet to 24 in order to allow school busses to navigate the turn properly.

Bill Lunt thought the driveway issue is an enforcement issue and not an actual problem. The reason to have it as a one-way was to reduce the number of curb cuts coming out onto Woodville Road. He was a little concerned when he read the summary of merits submitted by the applicant that said the kids play in the roadway in the back. The bulk of the people using this area are staff, and he felt it should be pretty easy to train them in how to use it properly.

Bernie Pender agreed with Bill Lunt; the site isn't fully operational yet. All the time and effort they put into showing it one way and then a couple things happen and they go back to the drawing board and redo the whole thing. He would like to see how it works once the construction is done.

Mr. Gagnon said it wasn't really fully understood about the need to bring the students from the middle school across the drive to the playground when the road was converted to a one-way. That would require the drive behind the school to be closed during the day.

Bernie Pender said they had many revisions on the parking and vehicle flow because these issues came up during the initial approval. They all agreed that it was a maze of roadways in there and needed to be fixed, and the original plan was the plan they asked the Planning Board to approve.

Topper West, Facilities and Grounds Director for Falmouth Schools, said the big problem with enforcement is the question of who is there to enforce it. He felt drivers will come up that road the same way they always have, otherwise they have to turn right and go all the way to the High School to turn out onto Woodville.

Bill Lunt still believed that the project should fit the ordinance. The number of curb cuts on this project is already greater than it would be on a normal project.

Mr. West said there is no more than there was before. That cut is there now.

Bill Lunt said a curb cut going into the site is different than one going out.

Mr. West said vehicles can't go up front because there are more people than ever picking up their kids. They are supposed to turn right and drive into the campus, right where the busses, makeup busses, staff and kids are. It made sense to him to send them up that short driveway and out onto the road.

Bernie Pender asked about any signage on the property that directs traffic the right way.

Mr. West said there is a "do not enter" sign at the exit of the parking lot as well as on the drive.

Bernie Pender said all the issues that Mr. West touched on were brought up and addressed in the original approval.

Mr. West asked why make it this way if they know it isn't going to be safe. If you don't have to send them out there behind the elementary school, why send them there.

Becca Casey was convinced that this is the right fix; she thought people are going to go the way that is intuitive. Traffic on this site is crazy. Ideally the whole thing could have been redone and better integrated than it is. When a site has all these existing conditions and operations, it is going to have to be tweaked as they go. She felt this was a good fix for what is happening on this part of this site.

Mr. West said ideally there shouldn't be any traffic on the road behind the middle school other than busses.

Bill Brogan felt if he was parked in that lot he wouldn't want to go further into the site to get out of the site. He was in favor of the two-lane. He was weighing the safety issue of making an additional curb cut versus pedestrian safety out back. He didn't think there was any enforcement that would prevent people coming out that drive.

Walt Arsenault asked if this is an additional curb cut. Bill Lunt said it was a change; it would go from a one-way in to a two-way, in-and-out cut. It would be a bigger curb cut.

Mr. Gagnon said the exit from the parking lot doesn't become an effective exit if people are forced to exit further into the site. Allowing traffic to come out that southerly drive would alleviate some of the traffic congestion out front.

Mr. West said it was so bad that people were coming out the parking lot and driving across the grass to get to that driveway because there used to be a driveway there. He felt people would come up that driveway no matter what.

Walt Arsenault asked if they have the option of going left or right out of the parking lot. Mr. West said they used to, but it is one-way now so they can only turn right.

Bill Lunt felt the easiest way to fix this was to narrow the drive so people couldn't turn up that drive.

Mr. West said that would only make it more dangerous, because you would have a car going up and a bus going down. People are going to do what they want, and narrowing the drive would not stop them. They were driving across the grass to get to that drive.

Bill Lunt felt this change was something the Board would never allow for a private developer.

Mr. West said another applicant would not be directing traffic through where kids are walking across the road. The kids have to cross the road to get from the middle school to the grade school and to the play areas.

Bernie Pender asked why there is a roadway through the play area.

Mr. West said it is only a play area during construction. However, the only way from the middle school to the elementary school when it is done will be across the road.

Bernie Pender asked who from the middle school is going to be crossing to the elementary school.

Mr. West said music students and visitors. The idea behind putting all the students on one campus was to share resources. Currently they bus students to the elementary school; now they will walk.

Kermit Stanley understood the curb cut issue, but would be concerned with the children moving around the site. He didn't know why this issue of kids moving around the site and crossing the street wasn't brought up initially. He would err on the side of the children's safety.

Mr. Gagnon agreed with Bill Lunt that the existing width does encourage people and lead to the belief that it is two-way, but regarding the suggestion to narrow the drive, he observed that a 20 foot fire lane is typically necessary. The Fire Department might allow it to be 16 feet, but he would have to ask.

Bill Lunt said if this was a private developer, the first thing the Planning Board would do is tell them to move the drive out back if kids are playing in it.

Becca Casey moved to approve the application with the requirement that the culvert be replaced; Bill Brogan seconded.

Public comment period opened.

Dan O'Shea, Finance Director for the School Department, said the concern is that the back road has always been intended for busses only, to separate bus drop-off from parent drop-off. They are just furthering that safety issue with this request. The intent of the campus design was to share as many staff as possible. The music rooms in the elementary school are placed as close to the middle school as possible, in order to make the walk as short as possible. It was the design intent.

Public comment period closed.

Bill Lunt said at no time during the entire process of approving this project was it made clear that kids would be walking across the roadway. It seems like they are changing the rules of the game.

Mr. West felt it was missed; he thought people didn't think of it, until after the fact; that kids would have to cross there to get to the fields. It doesn't make sense to send those cars out there if they don't have to.

Bernie Pender felt they covered that. These were issues that were brought up when it originally came before the Board. The Board was told that kids weren't going to be out there.

Becca Casey said they talked extensively about this issue, and it should have come up before, but she felt they should get it as right as they can. This change will improve safety, whether or not it is ideal. This is what they can do right now to fix it.

Bernie Pender asked what is being done to stop the people from going around out back. He wondered what kind of measures are there to protect the kids' safety.

Mr. West said he didn't know; it would be up to the principals.

Bernie Pender asked if there was a plan. Mr. West said if it was an issue they would come it off.

Bill Lunt asked about the parking lot on the other side of the loop; he wondered how those people get out.

Mr. West said the bus drivers are parked there, and are leaving after the kids get in. The only other people who park in that area are there for sports at night.

Bill Lunt asked if that exit will still be one way. Mr. West said yes.

Bernie Pender identified it as lot 6. Ethan Croce said lot 6 will not be able to exit to the new two-way drive.

Bernie Pender said there would be about 68 cars driving out the back drive, between the two lots.

Walt Arsenault asked how many busses there are. Mr. West said 12.

Mr. Gagnon said that area is blocked off from all traffic during recess.

Mr. West said during recess the teachers come out and make sure there is no traffic until the kids are across and into the field. Any playing on the roadway has only happened after the construction started.

Bernie Pender asked if lots 6 and 7 are used by teachers, and where visitor parking is located.

Mr. West said visitor parking is out front. Those lots are used mainly by teachers and bus drivers, and some kitchen staff. They come before the kids get there and leave after the kids are gone.

Bill Lunt called the question.

Motion carried 4-1 (Lunt).

4. Election of Planning Board Officers (Chair & Vice-Chair)

Bill Brogan nominated Bill Lunt for Chair; Becca Casey seconded. Motion carried 6-0 (Lunt abstained).

Becca Casey nominated Bernie Pender for vice chair; Bill Brogan seconded. Motion carried 6-0 (Pender abstained).

Meeting adjourned 7:29 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Melissa Tryon
Recording Secretary