

**TOWN OF GREAT BARRINGTON
BOARD OF SELECTMEN
MINUTES
MONUMENT MOUNTAIN REGIONAL HIGH SCHOOL
January 20, 2016**

PRESENT:

SELECTBOARD

SEAN STANTON
STEPHEN C. BANNON
DANIEL BAILLY
ED ABRAHAMS
BILL COOKE

TOWN MANAGER JENNIFER TABAKIN
TOWN PLANNER CHRIS REMBOLD
TOWN COUNSEL DAVID DANESKI

1. CALL TO ORDER:

Mr. Stanton called the meeting to order at 7:02 p.m. He said the public hearing on the application of **79 Bridge Street Realty, LLC**, 247 Stockbridge Road, Great Barrington, for a hotel use in a B3 zone; more than 45 hotel rooms; redevelopment in excess of 20,000 square feet in the B3 zone; work in the Floodplain Overlay District; and work in the Water Quality Protection Overlay District Zone II, in accordance with Sections 3.1.4, C(8), 7.10.2, 9.4.9, 9.1, and 9.2.12, respectively, and Section 10.4 of the Great Barrington Zoning Bylaw, at 79 Bridge Street, Great Barrington, had convened Nov. 8, 2015, was continued to Dec. 16, 2015, and was continued again to this date.

On a motion by Mr. Bannon, seconded by Mr. Bailly and voted unanimously by the Selectboard, the chairman reopened the public hearing at 7:04 p.m.

Mr. Stanton said the applicant has submitted revised plans. He said the Planning Board and Conservation Commission will review the new submissions and the Selectboard plans to continue the hearing to a date and place certain.

2. APPLICANT'S PRESENTATION

Applicant Vijay Mahida said the main school building will remain as part of the new project. Applicant Chrystal Mahida said The Berkshire hotel will be a community asset. Mr. Mahida said the hotel will be upscale and independent and successful.

James M. Scalise II of S.K. Design Group said the plan now is to keep the Searles High School footprint, and as that leaves 11 feet more of frontage, there will be additional green space. The Alphonso Gymnasium and the annex will be razed. He said there will be less roof space. Zoning will require fewer parking spaces, based on 88 guest rooms instead of 95. There will be five accessible parking spaces. More trees will be retained along River Walk. The same stormwater management system will be installed as was described previously. There will be less impervious area, but the runoff plan will be the same. Attention has been paid to the protected zone along the river. Landscaping and lighting will reflect that done with the former Bryant School. Five additional trees will be retained.

Kathleen M. McCormick of McCormick, Murtagh & Marcus said the applicant will appear before the Conservation Commission on Jan. 27 and the Planning Board on Jan. 28.

David Carpenter of 79 Bridge Street Realty said the school will be adaptively reused, with interior design by William Caligari of Great Barrington. He said the Mahidas are establishing a competition scholarship around the history of the river, working with Monument Mountain Regional High School.

He said the hotel will be a gathering place and will be accessible to local people for, as examples, art displays or meetings. There will be a farm-to-table restaurant and a River View library and talks are going on with the Parks Department regarding Memorial Field.

Rolf K. Biggers of BMA Architectural Group said a new rendering and plan revisions submitted that evening meet the intent of the bylaw. The plan now has the approval of Jane Iredale and Robert Montgomery. He said Searles School's brick quoins will be retained, as will main entry surrounds and pilaster, pediments and cornices, the arched chimney, head, sill and belt course treatments and the dolomite base. People from the early 20th century would recognize the building. Some changes will restore features removed during earlier modifications, he said. He said the latest plan showed a change in windows in the hyphens — the build-outs between the center of the building and the ends. He said windows would have nine-panel treatments and would be wood clad. He said the interior will be gutted and floors reinstalled. The basement will become a first floor, and some windows on that level will change. The awning over the front entrance extension will be removed with construction of a long porch. He said the Historical Commission understood it would be a challenge to keep the gym building.

Mr. Biggers said reuse of the building changed the density of the project. He said the Mahidas heard the audience from the previous hearing. He said the buildings to replace the gym and annex will be slightly larger.

Ms. McCormick reminded the board there are five special permits under consideration. She said deviations requested are only one loading space and allowing 40 off-premises employee parking and valet spaces. She said 88 on-site spaces are now specified for the hotel. She said even with fewer rooms, the projection of \$450,000 annual revenues to the town remains.

3. SELECTBOARD COMMENTS

Selectman Abrahams asked about the impact on the neighbors north of the school. Mr. Biggers said there would be two trash removals per week, possibly more. Mr. Abrahams asked how cars leaving the parking lot would be guided. Mr. Scalise said directional signs will aim drivers to Bridge Street. Mr. Bannon asked if there would be signs on the building. Mr. Mahida said there would only be a "The Barrington" sign on the lawn.

Mr. Abrahams asked if the traffic study could be extrapolated into summer traffic. Jon Dietrich, Fuss & O'Neill, said the study was made in May and the town was experiencing traffic 6 percent higher than average. He said August traffic is usually 11 percent higher than average. Mr. Bannon asked what guarantee there was the hotel would always have the 40 off-premises sites. Mr. Scalise said the bylaw requires 88, a lease agreement adds the 40 spaces.

Mr. Stanton asked if other businesses were using those same 40 spaces now, would they be guaranteed, would they be controlled, would the removal of those spaces from

present use increase pressure on downtown parking? Ms. McCormick said the 40 spaces would be designated for the hotel only. She said the lease agreement could be terminated by either party with notice. If there is termination, the hotel would look at other options. Mr. Stanton said parking spaces in the old Searles/Bryant parking lot are used by townspeople now, so there would be at least impact. He again asked, if the parking spaces aren't controlled, would townspeople likely use them.

Ms. McCormick said the design team was working with River Walk and would designate five spaces there, more for special cleanups or events. The applicants realize it is an issue, she said. Mr. Stanton wondered about on-street parking, perhaps on the south side of Bridge Street. Ms. McCormick said the Mahidas weren't asking for that, and said cars parked there might be subject to foul balls from the ballfield.

In answer to a question from Mr. Bannon, Mr. Mahida described how school floors would be changed to comply with Americans with Disabilities Act requirements.

4. PUBLIC COMMENTS

John VanWagner, 1 Newsboy Memorial Lane, said he appreciates the Mahidas and believes the increased tax income will help the town.

Sharon Gregory, 50 Hollenbeck Ave., said the proposal was greatly improved but the size and scale in the village remained a concern. She said the town could help with the traffic and parking issues. She urged working together to get the best community development.

Peter Dillon, 215 Long Pond Road, said the town needs thoughtful economic growth.

Elizabeth Orenstein, 116 West Ave., said a hotel downtown may be a good idea but the selectmen should not lose site of its size and scale. Don't be blinded by tax dollars, she said. She suggested improvements be made to the sidewalks. She asked about the external treatments of the buildings including those that would replace the gym and annex. Mr. Mahida said in the main building hyphens, the bricks would be matched. Siding for the other buildings would be clapboards made of cement and recycled material and would resemble wood.

Eve Schatz, 4 Pleasant Court, said she was happy to see the way the project was going but expressed concern about the neighborhood to the north. What would be business hours? Would there be soundproofing for the generator? The HVAC? Swimming pool filters? Would photometrics be the same as Main Street? Would there be household shields on the lights? She expressed regret the Historical Commission didn't take a stronger position on the gym. Mr. Stanton said the applicant would need a common victualler's and other licenses, at which time hours would be determined. He said the Planning Board in its site plan review would look at lighting. Mr. Mahida said the restaurant and bar would maintain public hours. He said the meeting room would be used some evenings. He said he and his wife were cognizant of neighborhood issues, and the closest neighbors were Ms. Iredale and Mr. Montgomery. Mr. Scalise said the generator would only operate if power went out, and would be located in a depressed area on the west parking lot on the Bridge Street side. He said HVAC would not be noisy. He said swimming pool filters would not be noisy. He said photometrics would match those at the Bryant School. He said lighting would be shielding, "dark sky" compliant, and would have cutoffs. He said there would be no night glare.

Christine Ward, 29 Castle Hill Ave., speaking on behalf of herself and Rachel Fletcher — representing Great Barrington Land Conservancy and River Walk — read a letter saying concerns about River Walk had been addressed by the Mahida team. She said they were appreciative for the focus on mitigation work that enhanced River Walk, even though it was more costly.

William Caligari, 85 Main St., said interior design is a challenge for “five-diamond” properties. He said there will be additional expense in adapting the existing building, with revenues diminished with fewer rooms. He said the Mahidas are dedicated to a boutique hotel.

Anne Fredericks, Seekonk Cross Road, said a town study found no need for more hotel rooms, and a town bylaw limited new hotels to 45 rooms to control the proliferation of chains and too-large projects. She said the neighborhood will be penned in by traffic. She said the town didn’t do good due diligence on a previous developer. She said no independent research has been done on the viability of the hotel. She said tax numbers seem inflated. She said hotels typically discount room rates to attract groups to use meeting rooms. She said the hotel will hurt small businesses. She said there is too much traffic on Bridge Street already. She said there are too few parking spaces. She said the Mahidas will have a virtual monopoly on hotels in town.

Walter Atwood III, 370 Maple Ave., said his grandfathers and his parents and he graduated from Searles High School, and he hopes the architects don’t put back the same windows that were in the building then, as they were drafty. He noted there are 29,000 acres of land in town, 9,000 of which pay no taxes and 10,000 of which are conservation lands, leaving one-third of the town to carry town costs.

Patricia Melluzzo, 1 Squaw Peak Road, mentioned changes in Main Street businesses in the 40 years she has lived here. She said it is a very different town and she is proud of how the Selectboard has managed growth in town. She said she is dismayed at the sad state of the Searles building. She said the hotel is a profitable and viable project and she respects the Mahidas.

Maia Conty, 219 North Plain Road, said the hotel won’t be the end of the world and she appreciates the spirit the Mahidas bring to the project, but it is very big and will make Great Barrington a bigger town, and could alienate people. She said the town needs to deal with unemployment, poverty and drug abuse and direct projects such as this to help meet these problems.

Carl Pratt, Leavenworth Street, Pittsfield, listed his credentials in the hospitality field and said 40 to 50 percent of revenues from hotels such as this go to meet payroll. He said high school and college students working for a hotel have a chance to earn money and move up the staff scale. He said the project is viable. He said room rates generally go up 25 to 30 percent in summer, with rooms \$400 a night and a three-night minimum, and demand will be there. He said hotels such as the ones in Lenox on former great estates have the added attraction of history.

Carol Diehl, Housatonic, said she was glad the building would be preserved, but it seems oversized and could change the town’s small-town character. She suggested buildings that replace the gym and annex should be of distinct design, radically different for the original school. She said the porch should not look like it came with the building. She said there should be more green space. And she questioned the need for a swimming pool. She asked if the windows would open, so occupants could benefit from the

Berkshire air. Mr. Mahida said the windows will open and a swimming pool is a key to attracting many customers.

Marc Festeau, 77 Seekonk Cross Road, said the project has to work economically and the town as an investor should get a fully independent study to see if it will work. He said 88 rooms was too many to be a boutique hotel. He said there was no guarantee rates would be high.

Steve McAlister, 3 Warren Ave., said the Mahidas have listened to the community, the main building will be preserved, he doesn't have the same reservations he had before. He said he doesn't believe it will fail.

Bruce Dunn, Lenox, who is in the hospitality trade, said there are 2,800 hotel rooms in the Berkshires, more than half of them in the "economy" scale. He said the county needs an upgrade in the quality of its hotel stock. He said two hotels, with 140 rooms, were added last year, the Hilton Garden and Hotel on North, and are necessary to compete with Hartford, Springfield and other areas.

Stephen Donaldson, 1 Cypress St., said the town needs employment relief. He said a boutique hotel is not defined by the number of rooms, but by the experience there. He said many in town have worked with or for the Mahidas. He said the town will gain tax dollars. He said those staying at the hotel will walk up to Main Street to spend money. He said that when Searles and Bryant were schools, and buses and cars were coming and going all the time, no one complained.

Andy Moro, 251 North Plain Road, said he supports the project; change is inevitable; and Railroad Street was once considered too dangerous a place for young people go to in the evening. He said the Mahidas have met the criteria and serve the special permits. He said they will do the project without tax deductions, state or community preservation money.

Malcolm Fick, 1 Maplewood Ave., said the Mahidas had addressed the building issues, though the parking matter still needed to be resolved. He said the Historical Commission's role was only in decided whether the school building was historical. He said that board wrote a report that provided guidance to the Selectboard. He said the gym is an example of WEPA-era architecture and should be kept.

Barbara Cooperine, Pine Street, said she was concerned about traffic and congestion. She said she hoped something could be done about traffic, especially in summer. Referring to a comment from another speaker, she said school was closed during the heaviest traffic time, summer. She wondered if the hotel would work with 60 rooms.

George Cain, Monterey, said he once took an option to purchase land near the Barrington fairgrounds, when a hotel proposal was in the works there. That proposal floundered, and he managed to back out of the purchase. Today, he said, the fairgrounds is an eyesore. He said Berkshire County is losing population. Its economy is based largely on the service industry, and there are few jobs for young people. This project, he said, will bring some quality jobs.

Michele Miller, Crissey Road, said everyone wants the best outcome. She advocated for preserving the gym, as a new structure would be closer to the road and could block the view of the mountains from further up Bridge Street. She said traffic is an issue.

5. VOTE TO CONTINUE HEARING

Discussion ended at 9:10 p.m. On a motion by Mr. Bannon, seconded by Mr. Bailly and approved by all on the Selectboard, the hearing was continued to February 22, 2016, at 6 p.m. at Monument Mountain Regional High School.

6. ADJOURNMENT:

The meeting adjourned at 9:14 p.m. on a motion by Mr. Bannon, seconded by Mr. Bailly and voted without dissent.

The board as of Jan. 19 had received communications from the following (with date of time stamp):

Mickey Friedman, 32 Rosseter St., Jan. 13, 2016
Jonathan Hankin, Chairman, Great Barrington Planning Board, Jan. 11, 2016
Christine Ward & Rachel Fletcher, Great Barrington Land Conservancy & River Walk, Jan. 6, 2016
Laurily Epstein, no address, Jan. 6, 2016
Steve McAlister, Warren Avenue, Jan. 6, 2016
Nick Stanton, Great Barrington, no date
Beth Carlson, Stockbridge, Jan. 6, 2016
Sharon Gregory, Great Barrington, no date
Ruth Heuberger, Oak Street, Jan. 6, 2016
Sharon Gregory, Great Barrington, no date
Carol Diehl, Housatonic, Jan. 6, 2016
Anni Crofut, Housatonic, Jan. 6, 2016
Carol Diehl, Housatonic, Jan. 6, 2016
Clare and Richard Proctor, Briarcliff Motel, Jan. 6, 2016
Bobby Houston, Stockbridge, Jan. 6, 2016
Eric Shamie, Humphrey Street, Jan. 6, 2016
Steve McAlister, Warren Street, Jan. 6, 2016
Debbie U. Opperman, Great Barrington Historical Society, Jan.6, 2016
Laurily Epstein, no address, Jan. 6, 2016
Carol Diehl (sic), no address, Jan. 6, 2016
Roselle K. Chartock, Great Barrington, Jan. 6, 2016
Eve Schatz, Great Barrington Neighborhood Group, Jan. 6, 2016
Paul W. Ivory, Great Barrington Historical Commission, Jan.6, 2016
Ann Merz, 49 Pearl St., Dec. 31, 2015
George Blair Scribner, 140 North Plain Road, Jan. 4, 2016
Beth Carlson, Stockbridge, Jan. 4, 2016
Robert Silman, 317 Blue Hill Road, Dec. 30, 2015
Anne Fredericks, 77 Seekonk Cross Road, Dec. 24, 2015
Michele Miller and listing 58 businesses, Dec. 17, 2015
Beth Carlson, Stockbridge, Dec. 17, 2015
Eric Shamie, 27 Humphrey St., Dec. 17, 2015
Roselle K. Chartock, 51 Hollenbeck Ave., Dec. 17, 2015
Colin H. Smith, Smith/Watson, Dec. 17, 2015
Anne Fredericks, no address, Dec. 17, 2015

Marc Fasteau, 77 Seekonk Crossroad, Dec. 17, 2015
Steve McAlister, 3 Warren Ave., Dec. 21, 2015
Steve McAlister, 3 Warren Ave., Dec. 21, 2015
Molly Sheriff, no address, Dec. 17, 2015
Jeremia A. Pollard, Hannon Learner, Dec. 17, 2015
Harriette Joffe, Great Barrington Neighbor Group, Dec. 18, 2015
Andy and Peggy Matlow, 8 Knob Hill, Dec. 18, 2015
Dana and Anthony Dapolito, no address, Dec. 18, 2015
Eve Schatz, Great Barrington Neighborhood Group, Dec. 18, 2015
Alice Myers, 9 Oak St., Dec. 21, 2015
Joy Myers, 9 Oak St., Dec. 21, 2015
Rachel Fletcher, 113 Division St., Jan. 19, 2016
Craig Okerstrom Lang, 17 Bridge St., Jan. 19, 2015
Michael Marcus, 17 Railroad St., Jan. 19, 2016
Stephen Marshall and eight others, Body & Soul, 184 Maple Ave., Jan. 19, 2016
Great Barrington Fire Department, 20 names, Jan. 19, 2016
Edward J. Domaney and three names, Domaney's, 66 Main St., Jan. 19, 2016
Diane and John Meskill, 20 Copper Beech Lane, Jan. 19, 2016
Patrick Fennell, 154 Main St., Jan. 19, 2016
Barbara Schulman, 43 West Sheffield Road, Jan. 19, 2016
Walter Atwood, 370 Maple Ave., Jan. 19, 2016
Andrew Moro, 259 North Plain Road, Jan. 19, 2016
Saiid Daemi, 317 Main St., Jan. 19, 2016
Martha Klay, 115 East St., Jan. 19, 2016
William Caligari, 85 Main St., Jan. 19, 2016
Patricia Ryan, 14 Oak St., Jan. 19, 2016
Maia Conty, no address, Jan. 19, 2016
Stephen G. Donaldson, 1 Cypress St., Jan. 19, 2016
Terence R. Flynn, 11 Hemlock Hill Road, Jan. 15, 2016
Walter McTeigue and Tim McClelland, 454 Main St., and eight others, Jan. 15, 2016
Janet Walcott, 899 Main St., Jan. 15, 2016

Bernard A. Drew

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Recording Secretary