

PLANNING BOARD
APRIL 14, 2015 at 7:30 PM
TOWN HALL, 41 SOUTH MAIN STREET

In attendance:

Members: Kate Connolly, Judith Esmay (Chair), Joan Garipay, Michael Mayor, Iain Sim; Nancy Carter (Selectboard Representative); **Alternates:** Jon Criswell, Kelly Dent, Brian Edwards

Staff: Vicki Smith

Others: See Attendance Sheet

1. PUBLIC HEARING ON PROPOSED AMENDMENTS TO THE SITE PLAN REVIEW REGULATIONS REGARDING STORMWATER STANDARDS AND BUILDING AND DESIGN STANDARDS FOR THE WEST WHELOCK GATEWAY DISTRICT.

Smith said these amendments were drafted by the West Wheelock Working Group (Group). Adoption of these changes is contingent upon approval of the corresponding zoning amendment.

Smith said Site Plan Regulations (SPR) are administered by the Planning Board and are used for review of residential projects that are more than two units and for institutional, commercial, and other non-residential projects. They look at things like pedestrian and vehicle access, landscaping, lighting, etc. The proposed amendments are a very specific set of building and site design guidelines that will apply only to the West Wheelock Gateway District (WWG). It is anticipated that new buildings in this district will occupy a lot of space on the sites. We want to enable pedestrian flow and vehicle access throughout the district, regardless of ownership or development. We want parking lots to be interconnected to keep cars from having to go out onto West Wheelock Street.

ESMAY noted that these are proposed changes to the Site Plan Regulations, not the Zoning Ordinance. She declared the meeting a public hearing and invited the public to weigh in as the Board reviews the proposed regulations.

- Will these enhance the current SPR or replace them?
 - Smith said both the current standards and these very specific standards will apply to this district. She suggested changing the title to “Additional Building and Site Standards for the West Wheelock Gateway District” to emphasize that these regulations are in addition to all applicable provisions within the SPR.
 - It was agreed to change the title.
- This proposed district has unique zoning characteristics, quite unlike all of the other residential districts. Expanded SPR are necessary.
- 1. Purpose: Smith said it is anticipated that there will be a lot of redevelopment and loss of existing built forms. We agreed that the New England vernacular style is appropriate.

2. Building Location: Smith said we wanted to be sure that the building location is respected, is integrated into the street and makes sense for vehicle and pedestrian access. Pedestrian Orientation: Smith advised of Peter Kulbacki's requests to change "sidewalk" to "crosswalk", where applicable, and to be sure that bump-outs are clearly visible and contain a vertical element of a minimum height of 5'.
- Is it possible to insert a sketch of a bump-out into the regulations?
 - Smith said they do not all look the same; there may be different designs for different situations.
 - Are the "paths" mentioned in 2a(4) for use by pedestrians and bicycles? Is a "path" a "sidewalk"? Is it better to require a certain width rather than say they must have "adequate width"?
 - Smith said not every path has to be designed to accommodate both pedestrians and bicycles. Paths and sidewalks are not the same. Paths are located on the development site; sidewalks are typically located in the right-of-way. Path widths will differ depending on their use.
 - Can we change the text to read "pedestrians and/or bicyclists"?
 - What corner of the building is referenced in 2a(6)?
 - Smith said the corner closest to the intersection of the street.
 - Language will be added for clarification.

Vehicle Access:

- Is 2b(4) saying that you have to have paths from parking lots to buildings so that people don't have to walk through a parking lot to get to a building?
 - Smith said it would be ideal to have a multi-use path connect the backside of all of these buildings, but I don't think we can require it, nor would it work in every circumstance.
- How will these interconnections be accomplished if development occurs piecemeal?
 - Smith said by reserving rights-of-way that might be grassed-over to start, then used later for connectivity.
 - Would the original developer be responsible for financing the subsequent enhancements?
 - Smith said she did not know.
- Do any sort of renovations trigger these standards?
 - Smith said these would apply to all projects in this district that require Site Plan Review.

Street Edge:

- What is meant by "pedestrian and bicyclist accommodations that make the street edge lively are encouraged" in 2c(3)?
 - Smith said places where pedestrians and bicyclists can stop informally to visit with one another.
- Where is the street edge located?
 - Smith said it is where the street and the more-pedestrian oriented space meet.
 - Chris Kennedy, Group member, suggested it would be the right-of-way.
 - SIM suggested it is the space between the roadway and front of a building.
 - Who owns this area?
 - CONNOLLY said ownership begins at the property lines.

- Smith reiterated that sidewalks are typically located in the right-of-way of a road. Most are controlled by easements over private property. The yard space in this district would not be included as the public space.
- It seems like a conflict of interest for owners to be responsible for making the street lively.
 - Smith said it is to the benefit of their residents. It is urban thinking to open up some of your space to the public. There is a more urban environment here.
 - Kennedy said the sidewalk area in front of the South Block development was designed and paid for by the developer but most of it is owned and maintained by the Town.
 - ESMAY said it is very important that we have in these regulations every requirement/standard that we wish to enforce because we can't make it up on the spot during review of a given application.
 - It was agreed to define "street edge" as the area between the curb and the building.

Site and District Enhancement:

- Many of these are very close to design regulation.
 - Smith said Town counsel has confirmed that design standards can be adopted as part of our SPR.

Climate Considerations: Smith said many of these items are encouraged, rather than required.

- "Natural light" comes through windows. Do we really mean "sunlight" in 2e(2)?
 - The Group does mean "natural light".
- Is there anything in 2e(4) that makes snow removal different in this district than others? The SPR already address snow storage and removal.
 - ESMAY said where there is duplication, the more stringent requirements will be binding.
- Is a WWG landowner responsible for complying with the proposed stormwater management standards?
 - Smith said yes.

3. Building Layout:

- Will there be an additional set of building standards for the WWG or is this it?
 - Smith said this is it.
- What is meant by 3b(2)?
 - Smith said there is a section in the Zoning Ordinance regarding building up to the build-to area.

4. Building Massing, Height and Scale: Smith said we have to give some qualitative parameters; we've got an enclosed valley situation. There are opportunities for bigger buildings and higher heights than in other parts of town.

- It will be interesting to see how the Board determines whether this is achieved.
 - Smith said the first large building will probably be the most controversial as there are no other buildings in this area at the scale we are likely to see.

Massing:

- What does "less mass between intersections" mean in 4a(2)?
 - Smith said 4a(1) talks about reinforcing a sense of place established by a built form such as a building massing at street intersections, pedestrian crossings, etc.

To avoid a monolithic look, a sensitive transition area is proposed between these intersections.

Scale: Smith said we don't want people to feel dwarfed by four-story buildings. These are features they can relate to with a pedestrian orientation.

- Is the only mention of "pocketed green space" in 4c(2) and 4c(3).
 - Smith said it is intended to be enclosed space.
 - CARTER said these areas do not necessarily have to be grassed over. Is use of "green" appropriate?
 - CONNOLLY suggested eliminating "pocketed".
 - It was agreed to eliminate "pocketed".

5. Building Design- Firmness, Commodity, and Delight:

- DENT said she found this title to be vague and elitist.
- ESMAY said the quotation is included to shed light on our intent. Its use is as appropriate as that of a picture. She suggested adding a border around, similar to an illustration.

Building Features:

- How does 5a relate to New England vernacular styles?
 - Kennedy said New England vernacular style is an adaptation based on climate, affordability, and practical things. We don't have any rules to eliminate the creation of a totally modern design. This gives us a better chance of having a designer pay more attention to what they are doing.
- The bottom line is that the Planning Board will become an architectural design board.
 - SIM said public comment is always accepted during application reviews.
 - Smith said the Board is legitimately empowered to have those discussions. Whether the Board decides to deny a project because it looks too strange will depend upon the building, the context, and the Board members sitting at the time of the review. The Group considered proposing a set of design standards and an associated checklist from the Laconia SPR. Points are given for use of specific building features on the list. Every project must earn a set amount of points in order to be approved. It adds a quantitative aspect to this kind of review. The Group does not have the time to develop a checklist before Town Meeting. That will be the next step.
- Is development imminent?
 - Kennedy said no.
 - CONNOLLY said we would be derelict in going ahead with the zoning amendment without the equivalent SPR available.

Walls:

- Can "windowless walls" be defined?
 - Smith said there are building code regulations about the amount of wall openings allowed when buildings are located close together. She suggested stating "predominantly windowless...".
 - Kennedy said the Group assumes that buildings will be long along the street. This suggests that the shorter ends not be so blank.

Quality of Materials:

- 5e(1) calls for use of exterior materials that do not collect dirt. What materials might that include?

- Shannon Purcell, WWG landowner, said his buildings are pressure washed every spring.
 - It was agreed to eliminate “highly” in 5e(2).
- Site Infrastructure: Smith said a lot of this stuff really impacts the pedestrian and is randomly put on the site after a project is approved. This is intended to get things nailed down before approval.
- Where would vegetative screening be located given setback and yard restrictions?
 - Kennedy’s answer was not audible.
 - A suggestion was made to add “sited” to “accessory features must be *sited* and screened...”.
6. Open Spaces:
- Suggestions were made to eliminate “strongly” and change “sitting walls” to “seat walls”.
 - Does this area go right up to the curb?
 - Smith said this is not limited to the front. The goal is to have open spaces wherever possible.
 - Is there room for ten people to gather to wait for Advance Transit? Where could a bus shelter be located if structures are not allowed in the front setback?
 - Smith said it is not uncommon for large groups to gather at neighborhood bus stops, causing temporary congestion. If we are going to have an AT hub here, it would have to be specifically designed.
 - SIM mentioned the bus stop area at the Co-Op and asked whether there is a mechanism whereby landowners could be required to forego some of their land to create room for an AT stop.
 - Smith said it is to the benefit of their tenants to have AT very accessible.
7. Safety and Security:
- Do we want to specify a type of sensor in 7c?
 - SIM said specifying one method would eliminate use of new innovative methods.
 - Smith said the issue is how sensors are used to reduce light pollution.
 - MAYOR suggested changing “sensor” to “a means”.
 - Ruth Lappin suggested changing “sensors” to “technology”.
 - It was agreed to make that change.
 - The current SPR for exterior lighting are more robust than what is proposed in 7d.
 - Smith said DPW suggested adding that it must be energy efficient or LED.
 - It was agreed to add “energy efficient”.
 - It was agreed to eliminate this section from the amendment and propose these changes where they are addressed in the SPR.
8. Parking:
- Should the amount of screening in 8a be specified?
 - Smith said there are very specific landscaping standards for parking lots that are waived all the time in an effort to be reasonable. The same should apply here.
 - A comment was made relative to the impact to snow storage.
 - It was agreed to eliminate this portion of the amendment.

9. Landscaping:

- A suggestion was made to eliminate “incorporate trees, shrubs and groundcover into” and add “is encouraged” at the end of the sentence.

Amendment 2: Replace Article IX Section 5 Water Drainage: Smith said this provides some quantitative measures that are consistent with the State’s requirements. DPW wants “2-, 10-, and 25-year” storm events listed and a summary report submitted for each storm event. Smith said there have been leaps ahead in how we deal with stormwater since the current SPR were updated. Grant funding is available to have a consultant design a stormwater element for the entire street. It may be that future development would be required to work into that overall plan.

- Will every applicant be required to hire a stormwater engineer? The Zoning Ordinance requires the hiring of a wetland scientist and input from the Conservation Commission for review of Wetland Special Exceptions. It might be more appropriate to add this to the Zoning Ordinance.
 - Smith said an Alteration of Terrain Permit would be required for any large project. These would be standards that developers would be held to in that process. She said Kulbacki has the expertise and is willing to work with applicants. He can determine whether a design professional is needed. The Conservation Commission is much more interested in impacts to wetlands.

General Comments:

- Lappin reiterated her comments relative to this being a lot to handle so quickly and giving so many incentives without providing affordable or workforce housing. She asked whether piecemeal development of these properties could qualify for Minor Project Review, rather than being treated as a whole. She said one of the goals was to take back this in-town area that has changed over time to become a transportation corridor. This will still be a transportation corridor no matter how many bump-outs you have. She said the SPR talk about projects of regional impact; this may cause quite a bit of regional problems.
 - Smith said construction of new buildings and additions greater than 1,500 sf require Site Plan approval. The Board makes the determination whether a project is of regional impact.

There being no further comments ESMAY declared the public hearing closed. Smith will revise the text as recommended for presentation at a second public hearing.

2. OTHER BUSINESS: None

3. ADJOURN: The meeting adjourned at 9:57 PM.

Respectfully submitted,
Beth Rivard