



TOWN OF NORTHBOROUGH PLANNING BOARD

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Approved 8/14/12

Planning Board Meeting Minutes July 17, 2012

Members Present: Leslie Harrison, Theresa Capobianco, Rick Leif, George Pember, Michelle Gillespie

Others Present: Kathy Joubert, Town Planner, Brian Smith, Amy White, Brad Petrishen

Chairman Leif opened the meeting at 7 pm.

Continued discussion RE: mixed use and multifamily zoning regulations

Mr. Leif stated board members had commented at the last meeting that they find the projects at 290 West Main Street and 277 Main Street to be more attractive than the 269-273 West Main Street mixed-use development. Ms. Joubert distributed sheets with information on these projects, as follows:

290 West Main Street

Commercial Development

Site details:

- 127,690 sf parcel
- 19,140 sf building (15% coverage)
- 63,285 sf pavement (50% coverage)
- Total impervious (lot coverage) = 82,425 sf = 65% (building + pavement)
- Former zoning district Business B (20,000 sf) and Residential C (20,000 sf), currently Business West zoning district (20,000 sf)
- Groundwater Area 3
- No required open space in BB
- Provided open space = 35%
- Required parking spaces = 113
- Provided parking spaces = 113

FAR for Commercial Space:

- 19,140 sf building
- Floor area ratio (FAR): the ratio of gross floor area in square feet to the total area of the lot in square feet; total building square footage divided by total parcel square footage
- Per bylaw, maximum FAR of .85
- Example ~ 40,000 sf parcel with .85 FAR = 34,000 sf of building
- Example ~ FAR of 2.0 is total floor area of building is two times the gross area of the parcel (20,000 sf building on 10,000 sf lot)

- Example ~ FAR of 1.0 is total floor area of building equals total gross area of lot (10,000 sf building on 10,000 sf lot)
- Example ~ FAR of .50 is total floor area of building is half of area of parcel (5000 sf building on 10,000 sf lot)
- Site is 127,690 sf parcel with 19,140 sf building = .15

Page 6, 7-02-040 FAR definition

Page 43, footnote 10, 7-05-030 retail store

Ms. Joubert summarized this information, stating the 290 West Main Street parcel is almost 128,000 square feet in size and the building is 19,140 square feet, including some unoccupied (“dummy”) space that makes up a second floor. The building covers 15% of the lot, the pavement covers 50% of the lot and 35% of the lot is open space. She noted there were landscape requirements when the project was developed, but no open space requirements. The FAR of .15 is low because the site is large and the building is small.

**277 Main Street
Commercial Development**

Site details:

- 34,534 sf parcel
- 2298 sf building (6% coverage)
- 14,215 sf pavement (41% coverage)
- Total impervious = 47% (building + pavement)
- Business East zoning district (20,000 sf required)
- Groundwater Areas 2 & 3
- Required open space = 6907 sf (20%)
- Provided open space = 18,021 sf (53%)
- Required parking spaces = 7
- Provided parking spaces = 26

FAR for Commercial Space:

- 2298 sf building
- Floor area ratio (FAR): the ratio of gross floor area in square feet to the total area of the lot in square feet; total building square footage divided by total parcel square footage
- Per bylaw, maximum FAR of .85
- Example ~ 40,000 sf parcel with .85 FAR = 34,000 sf of building
- Example ~ FAR of 2.0 is total floor area of building is two times the gross area of the parcel (20,000 sf building on 10,000 sf lot)
- Example ~ FAR of 1.0 is total floor area of building equals total gross area of lot (10,000 sf building on 10,000 sf lot)
- Example ~ FAR of .50 is total floor area of building is half of area of parcel (5000 sf building on 10,000 sf lot)
- Site is 34,534 sf parcel with 2298 sf building = .07

Page 6, 7-02-040 FAR definition

Page 43, footnote 10, 7-05-030 retail store

Ms. Joubert noted 277 Main Street is the site of Trombetta's Farm. The site is 34,534 square feet, the building is almost 2300 square feet, and covers 6% of the site. There is 4,215 square feet of pavement covering 41% of the site, and the total amount of impervious cover is 47%. She stated the 34,604 square foot building at 318 Main Street, which is the site of the Sea Dog restaurant, is on a 6-acre of land and the lot coverage is 45%. She noted the developments are all fairly similar, and compared the total impervious cover of the four sites, as follows:

- 269-273 West Main Street – 54% impervious cover
- 290 West Main Street – 65% impervious cover
- 277 Main Street – 47% impervious cover
- 318 Main Street – 45% impervious cover

Ms. Joubert stated the 269-273 West Main Street development is the only one of the four with multiple buildings on the site.

Ms. Gillespie joined the meeting at 7:10 pm.

The board members agreed the differences between the 269-273 West Main Street development and the other three developments are the placement of the buildings on the site, the front setbacks, and the landscaping. There is landscaping in front of the buildings at 290 West Main Street, 277 Main Street and 318 Main Street. The members stated the way everything is positioned on the 269-273 West Main Street lot is an issue. It has a crowded look even though it is not radically different.

Brian Smith, 97 Main Street, state the FAR is too high for the area.

Mr. Leif stated part of it has to do with the multi-story buildings on the site that add to the mass of the project. He stated the FAR of the 290 West Main development is smaller because the second floor is empty roof space and can't be used.

Amy Jo White, 23 Brigham Street, stated it's a balance between the site and the buildings, and the 269-273 West Main Street development doesn't seem to be balanced.

Ms. Harrison stated the multiple buildings are not a good visual.

Ms. Joubert noted town zoning has always allowed multiple buildings.

Mr. Leif stated it is really the placement of the buildings on the lot that is the issue with the 269-273 West Main Street development. He stated they need to look at the zoning regarding positioning of buildings on a lot. Mr. Leif stated the board must keep in mind that it's the goal of zoning to encourage smaller residential units by encouraging more than just single-family homes. He said that, after seeing the fact sheet on the 269-273 West Main Street development, he was surprised by how well it conforms to the bylaw, especially the open space requirement. He added it is scary to think more could have been built on the lot and still conform to zoning. The buildings could have had three stories.

Ms. Capobianco stated the building at 318 Main Street is huge. She stated she would like to get a better idea as to how these developments are actually going to look on the lots in the Business East district.

Mr. Pember stated zoning can restrict height so buildings can't be 3 stories.

Ms. Gillespie stated buildings can be 3 stories in Business East and Business West.

Ms. Joubert stated the FARs are set very high because it was the first time they were being used. Part of the purpose was to get more square-footage on the lot, but not spread it out. Parking, open space and landscape requirements make it such that the maximum FAR is generally not attainable. But, in this case, it is not actually the FAR that's the issue, it's what the buildings look like on the site. She asked the board what they don't like and what they want to change.

Regarding the Business East district, Ms. Capobianco and Ms. Gillespie stated they would like to see what could go there, put it on paper and see what makes sense before it actually happens.

Ms. Joubert stated the town doesn't have the software to show what could happen on a lot. With additional funding, they could have done it through the zoning reorganization project.

Mr. Leif asked what horizontal mixed use would enable that vertical mixed use would not.

Ms. Joubert stated the purpose of horizontal mixed-use is to have multiple buildings and, with residential use upstairs, have 24-hour use of the property. She explained that having vertical mixed use on every lot would encourage multiple curb cuts every 100 -200 feet. With multiple buildings on a lot, it avoids the curb-cut issue and allows more use of the property. She stated she will check the building setback from the street for the 318 Main Street site and for the other 3 projects.

Mr. Leif stated he would like members to bring ideas to the next meeting as to what they think reasonable changes would be to make developments in the Business East and Business West districts appear more attractive from the street.

Mr. Smith stated the Business East and Business West districts are different. Business East has more neighborhoods and a different environment than the Business West district, which has fewer residential areas.

Mr. Pember stated putting buildings close to the road in the Business East district does not work for him. He would like to get rid of the maximum setback requirement, or require landscaping in the front of the building. He stated he thought it was a good idea, but now that he's seen it, he doesn't like it.

Ms. Joubert suggested this could apply to both the Business East and West districts.

Mr. Pember stated he is fine with keeping the maximum setback in the Downtown Business and Downtown Neighborhood districts.

Mr. Leif reiterated he would like to have the members suggest ideas for changes to commercial and residential zoning in the Business East and Business West district and have a discussion on it.

Ms. Gillespie asked if they could also look at maps to identify available land.

Mr. Leif stated they don't need to do that as a group. He suggested she could get the maps and come to the next meeting prepared to talk about those parcels.

Ms. Joubert stated they can familiarize themselves with the parking requirements and reminded them they have the authority to change the maximum front setbacks and relocate parking to the front of the lot. It is not a set rule that parking has to be on the side or in the rear of a parcel. She stated they should look at the whole package, not just one aspect of it. Just moving a building is not going to solve the existing problem.

Ms. White stated the public needs to know when property owners are going to put lots together to make one large lot, because residents don't realize the possibilities. Information needs to be available ahead of time.

Mr. Leif stated that's not a zoning issue. By familiarizing themselves with zoning their area, residents would know what could happen if lots were combines.

Mr. Smith stated people should be notified when plans are submitted, not just when a hearing happens.

Mr. Leif stated there is nothing in the process that requires a developer to approach residents about a project prior to filing an application.

Ms. Joubert noted some developers come in ahead of time to discuss their projects and some don't. The town has up to 65 days to hold a hearing, but it's usually held within 30 days. The time period is triggered by the date their application for a hearing is date-stamped by the Town Clerk.

Mr. Leif asked if the developer has to have ownership of the property prior to filing an application.

Ms. Joubert stated the developer does not have to have ownership, but the owner has to sign the application so the town knows the owner is aware of the project.

Ms. Capobianco confirmed the developer has a conversation with staff and after an application is filed, residents can come in and get the information.

Ms. Joubert confirmed that is the process.

Mr. Smith stated residents can't be responsible for finding out what's going on in their neighborhood.

Ms. White stated the developer of the project proposed at 130 Main Street went to every house to give the residents information and he showed them the whole plan.

Ms. Joubert noted the developer had not filed his application with the town at that time.

Ms. Gillespie stated the boards prefer they don't show sketches and plans to residents before they are finalized and their applications are submitted.

Mr. Leif stated it cannot be expected that developers would go through neighborhoods like that developer chose to do.

Ms. Joubert stated she is uncomfortable with this discussion because there is a current lawsuit involved with that project.

Mr. Smith stated he's fine with the process as long as people are being notified upfront.

Mr. Leif stated he would like each member to present their ideas at the next meeting so they can get a feel for how much they're going in the same direction and how much they're not. He noted they'll have all next year to work on this.

WCF RFP Update

Ms. Joubert stated she received a response to the Wireless Communication Facility (WCF) Bylaw Request For Proposal (RFP) from David Maxson of Isotope. The Town will award the RFP on August 3rd. She asked the board if they want to meet with him to go over his plan of attack before they award the contract or afterward. She noted she would be out of the office the week of July 30th.

Mr. Pember asked if David Maxson is the only respondent, and if so, is it a take-it-or-leave-it situation?

Ms. Joubert reminded the members they liked him, he answered all their questions and responded to the 2 parts of the RFP. She noted the consultant will work with the Planning Board from August through December, according to the way the RFP was set up.

The members agreed it would be good to talk to him personally before the contract was awarded.

Ms. Capobianco was concerned because the actual cost of the last project he did was more than the original contracted amount.

Ms. Joubert replied it was for rewriting the bylaw for the Town of Westford and every project they have worked on has taken them a long time to finish because more and more people get involved with them. She said she will contact the other 2 towns with which he has worked.

The board scheduled this meeting for Tuesday, July 24th, but changed it to Monday, July 23rd so Ms. Gillespie would be able to attend.

Laura Ziton, 1A Pond View Way, asked the members if they had an idea of the direction they would go in, and also if there have been any other cell tower applications submitted at this point.

Mr. Leif said they don't know what direction they'll go in and no cell tower applications have been submitted.

Indian Meadow Golf Course – ZBA Application

Ms. Joubert stated she has received no additional information about this since the ZBA application was filed and nothing has happened. The town is anticipating, but has not received, a corrected purchase and sale agreement. The ZBA hearing starts on Monday, August 5th. She asked the board if they want to put together a memo for the ZBA.

Mr. Leif stated they need to discuss it from their perspective.

Ms. Joubert stated they are applying for a special permit to replace a non-conforming use with another like non-conforming use. The ZBA has to make a determination as to if it is, or is not, a like use and if it does, or does not, cause substantial detriment to the neighborhood.

Mr. Leif stated that's the crux of it, and said his sense is that it is more detrimental. He stated he assumes the density of both uses will be compared by looking at the hours of use as a golf course as opposed to the hours of use of the proposed baseball training facility.

Ms. Joubert agreed, and asked the members if they had any thoughts on this.

The members agreed the use as proposed is not the same type of use as the current use of the golf course on the property, and sited noise from people attending, and participating in, the baseball games, light spill and glare from 80-foot lights, and the hours of the baseball use extending until 10 pm at night, as negative impacts to the neighborhood and would not support approval of the project.

Ms. Joubert noted traffic would not be an issue because access in and out of the site is from Route 9 in Westborough.

Mr. Leif noted the project will require a filing with the Conservation Commission due to wetlands on the site.

Ms. Joubert stated she will draft a letter to the ZBA with the Planning Board's comments.

Design Review Guidelines

Ms. Joubert stated the final draft of the Design Review Guidelines, sent to the members by email last week, reflect changes from the last meeting. Ms. Harrison noted a typographical error on page 7.

Ms. Harrison motioned to approve adoption of the Design Review Guidelines with the amendment, Mr. Pember seconded the motion and the vote was unanimously in favor of adopting the guidelines.

Approval of Minutes

The minutes of the May 1, 2012 and May 15, 2012 meetings were approved.

Alternative Energy – Solar Farms

The board briefly discussed solar farms and the formation of an Alternative Energy Committee. A suggestion was made by Mr. Pember to ask the Selectmen about forming an Alternative Energy Committee and getting a consultant to right a bylaw in time for FY14 Town Meeting.

The meeting adjourned at 8:30 pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Debbie Grampietro
Board Secretary