



TOWN OF NORTHBOROUGH PLANNING BOARD

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Approved 11/19/12

Planning Board Meeting Minutes September 18, 2012

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

Others Present: Kathy Joubert, Town Planner; Brian Smith, Lisa Maselli, Amy Jo White

Chairman Leif opened the meeting at 7 pm.

Continued Discussion RE: Mixed-use and Commercial Zoning

Ms. Joubert distributed information on the development at 318 Main Street and noted the Sea Dog restaurant is located there. She stated that, to date, she has distributed the similar information to the board for the developments at 290 West Main Street, 269 West Main Street, and 277 Main Street. She explained the development at 318 Main Street was permitted under prior to the zoning changes in 2009. The lot is split by two zoning districts and, at the time, the developer could carry over whatever district he wanted to use and could go 50 feet into the other zone. The developer of 318 Main Street used Business B zoning. There were no open space requirements, and no maximum or minimum lot coverage requirements at the time, and the front setback conforms to the Business B district. In general, the parcel is a little over 6 acres, with commercial space on the first floor and a small area on the second floor. There is 34,604 square feet of commercial space, 35% lot coverage and 65% open space. The site is located in Groundwater Protection Overlay District Area 3. There is 35% impervious cover on the site, and 40% is allowed. Floor Area Ratio (FAR) was not in use at the time, but calculations (34,604 square-foot building ÷ 272,701 square-foot lot) result in a FAR of .13, and in the Business East district, the maximum allowed FAR is .85. She stated original plans were for a bank on the site, and the back right corner of the building, as seen from Main Street, is set up for drive-through service. The number of parking spaces provided is 205, but Ms. Joubert didn't have information on what the parking requirements would be under current zoning. In order to better develop changes to the present bylaw she asked the members to describe the features of the site that are appealing to them.

Mr. Leif stated he visited the site and walked the property, which he said was nicely done. The building is about 100 feet from the street; there is nice landscaping in the front and a lot of good landscaping around the building. He stated, with the landscaping in the front, the building is disguised from the street, as is the Northborough Police Station at 211 Main Street and Trombetta's Farm at 277 Main Street. He noted the Skribbles building at 348 Main Street is at least as far from the street as the building at 318 Main Street, but it has an entirely different feel to it because there is no landscaping in front of it. Mr. Leif stated the setback is important, but it is also important to include in the zoning what they expect for landscaping in the setback.

Mr. Leif stated he compared the developments at 269 West Main Street and 318 Main Street and his impression is that everything is set up and developed around the single building at 318 Main Street,

which is the same as the building at 290 West Main Street. He stated the design of the 269 West Main Street development attracts the eye to the pavement rather than the buildings. He questioned whether they will see more horizontal mixed use developments with buildings around the perimeter of the site, and paved parking and driving areas in the center of the site.

Regarding the pros and cons of horizontal mixed use, Mr. Leif stated retail and residential uses can be done in single buildings, and he is leaning towards more vertical development than horizontal. In addition, he would like to see setbacks in the Business East and West districts that result in buildings located further from the street, and wording that would expect more than just grass between the front of the building and the street. He stated he would like to see the 15-foot setback increased to 100 feet, like the 318 Main Street building. If it could work with a 50-foot setback, that would be good.

Regarding Skribbles, Mr. Leif asked how they ended up with all of the parking in the front. Ms. Joubert replied the developer designed it that way. She explained they could have had the building up front without any parking in the front. She stated Tony Abu consistently points out at Design Review Committee meetings that developers want parking in the front.

Mr. Leif asked if the developer could have put the building 500 feet back and all the parking in the front. Ms. Joubert responded they could have done that at the time, but not under current zoning.

Mr. Leif asked if changing the minimum front setback from 15 feet to 50 feet, and the maximum front setback to 100 feet, would restrict how much space there is for parking. Ms. Joubert stated with a 100-foot setback, all the parking could be in the front. She stated if they wanted to mimic 318 Main Street they could do that with text in the bylaw. She added if they wanted side and rear parking with limited parking in front, they could add text to that affect under site design.

Mr. Leif said he would like combination of a minimum and a maximum front setback.

Ms. Harrison said it also depends on the depth of the property and what some of the unintended consequences have been, including what is happening on the corner of Gladwalt Road and Main Street, with the parking in the back and the front of the building in the back. She stated she has heard this from residents – not so much that the building is too close to the street, but about the parking orientation. What they are seeing is everything being focused in the rear, when parking is on the rear and sides. People said they didn't want the front to be in the rear.

Ms. Gillespie stated the other building similar to the 318 Main Street building is the Central One Credit Union building on the corner of Main Street and Maple Street, with a drive-through on the side and landscaping in the front. She noted the Business East district back up to residential use and the building at 318 Main Street is heavily attended.

Mr. Leif stated 318 Main Street is an example to hold up and to use to try to get zoning requirements to encourage things to look like it in the Business East and West districts.

Ms. Joubert stated the entire Business West district is bordered by residential use.

Ms. Gillespie stated the Design Review Committee can play an important part in working out the details but the zoning needs to be adjusted.

Ms. Joubert stated 318 Main Street is set back 50 feet from the lot line. There's grass between the lot line and Route 20. The 50-foot space allowed the developer to do what he did.

Mr. Pember stated the reasoning behind parking behind buildings was to have people walking in the front of the buildings and he doesn't think that is working out.

Ms. Joubert stated we really don't know if it isn't working yet, because there has been only two buildings built that way so far. It's too early to know. The bigger discussion to have is about parking. Parking drove the setback and that needs to be a discussion tonight. She asked the board if they want parking on the sides, in the rear or in the front of buildings. Once that's decided, they can manage the rest.

Ms. Harrison stated she does not want to have any buildings with the front of the building in the rear.

Mr. Leif said Business East and West should be designed differently than the Downtown Business district, by setting the buildings back from the street and talking about parking. He suggested they need to concentrate on the visual effect of these projects and what impact it has.

Ms. Gillespie suggested looking at the number of stories, and stated she thinks two stories are sufficient. However, the two-story buildings at 269 West Main Street are too big, and questioned how they transition buildings to fit into neighborhoods.

Ms. Joubert stated the building at 290 West Main Street is across the street and has three stories, and everyone likes that building. The issue with the development at Westbrook Road is the topography. Perhaps it wouldn't look so large if the topography was different. The buildings loom large because of it.

Mr. Leif stated the building at 290 West Main Street is much further away from the street than the 269 West Main Street buildings, so it doesn't jump out. He stated the buildings he likes in the Business East and West districts are further from the street and are also well landscaped. He explained he does not like the look of the Skribbles building with no landscaping in the front.

Ms. Gillespie explained the developer of the Skribbles building said it was the only place he could put the parking. She stated landscaping is great, but then there's a question of who maintains it. Enforcing landscaping maintenance is difficult, and if it's not kept up, and it's for privacy, it might be better to put up a fence. Regarding CVS in the downtown district, the board looked at it as a focal point and wanted nice landscaping. Now it's a burden on the town to say who is going to police it. CVS cut the trees because they blocked the sign. The question is who will police landscaping.

Mr. Leif stated he doesn't disagree, but they shouldn't avoid beefing up the zoning just because businesses don't maintain landscaping. He's talking about buffering between districts and buffering between the streets and buildings. He stated some of these things can be discussed by the Design Review Committee, but some require changes to zoning, including parking and minimum and maximum front setbacks. He stated FAR bothers him as far as its potential. Projects are being built quite a bit under the maximum allowed, but that doesn't mean a developer couldn't come in and build a huge project. The board needs to talk about lot sizes, multi-acre lots and FAR, with parking and open space managing it down. He stated the impact of FAR is not clear to him and what the thinking was behind it. In the downtown area they were trying to allow FAR on small lot sizes to develop more of the property with parking underneath the building. Regarding the Business East and West districts, Mr. Leif stated he is concerned about the .85 FAR. He asked Ms. Joubert to explain FAR to them again.

Ms. Joubert stated she agrees with what Mr. Leif said regarding FAR and the Downtown Business district. It was a way to encourage 2- and 3-story buildings with apartments upstairs in the downtown area. Old maps of the downtown area show it was very dense. FAR is a way to manage bulk downtown and allow for parking, encouraging underground parking. Realistically the value isn't there today to afford to construct underground parking, but at some point, maybe someone would look at underground parking. FAR is just a way to manage business districts. It's something common in cities, and some towns use it. She stated doing away with FAR will not negatively alter what the town will look like. She noted the examples of developments she gave to the board were without FAR and if the district did use FAR, they didn't approach it the maximum.

Mr. Leif said he is leaning towards deleting it from zoning. It seems to open up the opportunity for someone to build something very big. Other regulations for zoning allowed the board to manage size and place of buildings, and it would be good to take it out.

Ms. Joubert stated when the board talked about it, it was a discussion about the future of Northborough, and not necessarily what members would see during their time on the board. She stated she is leaning towards dropping the column from the table.

Mr. Pember asked if they should delete it or modify it.

Mr. Leif said he isn't sure at this point in the discussion what to delete or modify and he thinks the board needs to have more meetings to discuss it.

Ms. Gillespie said it first came into discussion when Tony Abu was designing his building at 290 West Main Street.

Mr. Leif talked about landscaping and referred to page 83 of the Zoning Bylaw. The thought was to change the Business West abutting uses and the front set back in the Business East and West districts. He stated he'd like to require landscape buffering in front of the building.

Ms. Harrison asked if he was referring to mixed use.

Mr. Leif stated another part of that section refers to those circumstances.

Ms. Joubert stated that should be on pages 94 and 95. The section being referenced now requires definitive landscaping between uses and districts. On page 94-95, it says what the board wants to see on the site – separating parking areas from abutting streets, where trees and shrubs should be planted, etc.

Amy Jo White, 23 Brigham Street, stated maybe the word "maintained" needs to be added in there.

Mr. Leif stated he wants to see provisions for providing screening and landscaping between the building and the street.

Ms. Joubert stated the last thing a developer wants to do is block his building from being seen. The board has the ability to do it through the site plan process. She stated she doesn't think the board needs extra wording, but if they do, she suggested they look at pages 82-83, open space landscaping.

Mr. Leif suggested minimizing the building size for developments in the Business West district.

Ms. Joubert stated that is also a part of the site design standards, which is what is reviewed by the board through the site plan process.

Mr. Leif stated typically developers will try to create buffers between their properties and other properties, but landscaping is not always nicely done. He would like that to be clearer. He asked the members to look at pages 82-83 and 94-95, focusing on the Business East and West districts. Some things can be changed with zoning and others can be done by doing a better job with site plan review.

Ms. Gillespie stated she will talk to Dave Veron and ask him what he would like to do – if there's a regulation that would help him from his perspective.

Ms. Joubert stated Dave is a great member of the Design Review Committee. He redesigned the project at 269 West Main Street. All the landscaping was his suggestion and there is so much, he had to put in irrigation that became part of the site plan. She stated she will call out the various section of the bylaw that they're talking about, but don't use all the time. The answers to the board's questions are in there. She will send this information to the board before their next meeting.

Mr. Leif stated there have been only 2 horizontal mixed-use projects so far.

Ms. Joubert stated Tim Shay's proposed project at 130 Main Street has one residential building, one commercial building and one mixed residential/commercial.

Mr. Leif stated he prefers one building on the lot, rather than multiple.

Ms. Harrison stated part of the down side of the 269 West Main Street development is the unusual placement of the buildings.

Ms. Joubert questioned whether the members don't like the multiple buildings or their placement on the lot. She noted it is a huge change from the design of Maney's Plaza. The developer was conforming to the bylaw when he designed it – to what the board said they wanted through zoning. She noted zoning always did allow more than one commercial building on a lot.

Brian Smith, 97 Main Street, stated his objection is buildings that look like apartment complexes.

Mr. Pember stated he's heard from a lot of people who like the buildings at 269 West Main Street.

Ms. Joubert stated she did an informal poll within the Town Hall, and people responding loved what the developer did. People think it looks like a village community where they can drive in, park once and have the opportunity to go to the different stores and offices there. Referring to the kitchen store across from the Beezer's site, she said a lot of people like it. There's no parking in the front, parking is on the side and an apartment on the second floor.

Ms. Harrison stated a lot has to do with the style of the building, like the 168 East Main Street building. Ms. Joubert noted a lot of the parking is in the front of the building and off the main road.

Ms. Harrison stated a lot of the issue is the architecture.

Ms. White stated it's also where it's placed. Some buildings compliment their environment and some don't. She asked the board if they were looking at zoning changes for Town Meeting that have a couple

of tweaks to landscaping, parking and setbacks, or are they looking for more. She asked if they are talking about changes that would stop another 269 West Main Street development.

Mr. Leif stated the goal is to decide what zoning is producing, what the members are concerned about and what they don't like. He stated he feels they should maintain the zoning in the Downtown district, but not in Business East and West. He would like to see buildings further from the street in those districts, with better landscaping, with some limited parking in the front allowed that's screened and done properly. He stated he would like to eliminate FAR, and his personal preference is mixed use in one building rather than multiple buildings.

Ms. Gillespie asked if a building built in the vacant lot across from 77 West Main Street would have to be located right up to the street with current zoning.

Ms. Joubert reminded her that current zoning says in the Downtown Business, Business East and Business West districts, parking will be behind and beside the principle structure, with a leeway that with a special permit, the developer can locate up to 15% of proposed parking in front of the principle structure.

Ms. Gillespie mentioned the project at 75-83 West Main Street, the site of Boost Fitness.

Ms. Joubert stated the developer originally had the building sited in the back of the lot at the time the board was working on the zoning change that would require the building to be up front. He came to the board and the board asked him to look at the new zoning and consider it. The developer agreed, but staff had told him in-house not to do what he eventually did.

The board discussed having to meeting in October on this subject.

Ms. Joubert asked the members about the United Bank building under construction and if they had any comments.

Ms. Harrison stated it seems like it is too close to the street, but it's too early to tell.

Mr. Smith stated it makes the street look more like an alley.

Lisa Maselli, 13 Maple Street, stated it's a huge-scale building in a small spot. The credit union building next to her property is at a good scale for the lot. She noted the backs of buildings are rarely seen in Sudbury.

The next meeting of the board will be on October 2nd. Ms. Joubert noted that there are two public hearing scheduled for that meeting.

Approval of Minutes: The minutes of the July 23rd meeting were approved as amended.

WCF Bylaw Consultant: Ms. Joubert stated David Maxson will be speaking to the board at their October 16th meeting.

Sign Bylaw: Ms. Joubert stated the Town Administrator asked her to work on amendments to the sign bylaw, specifically, how it relates to town events.

Alternative Energy Committee: Members of the former Wind Committee are interested in pursuing this subject and Ms. Joubert will contact them about a solar bylaw.

Retirement of Bill Farnsworth: Ms. Joubert reminded the Board that the Building Inspector, Bill Farnsworth, is retiring on Friday and they have all been invited to a reception for him from 4 pm – 6 pm at Juniper Hill Golf Course.

ANR: The board signed an ANR plan for Ball Street submitted by Frank Bissett and prepared by Guerard Survey.

Update on Indian Meadows Golf Course/New England Baseball Enterprises ZBA application: Ms. Joubert stated the ZBA denied the special permit; a decision has been drafted and is being reviewed by the board members. It should be filed by the Town Clerk's office in a few days. An appeal period of 20 days will follow, in which anyone may appeal.

The meeting adjourned at 9 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Debbie Grampietro
Board Secretary