



TOWN OF SWAMPSCOTT

OFFICE OF THE PLANNING BOARD

ELIHU THOMSON ADMINISTRATION BUILDING
22 MONUMENT AVENUE, SWAMPSCOTT, MA 01907

MEMBERS

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ANGELA IPPOLITO, VICE CHAIR
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HELEN KENNEDY, SECRETARY
S. PETER KANE, TOWN PLANNER

SEPTEMBER 24, 2012 MEETING MINUTES

Time: 7:10 – 10:20 pm

Location: Swampscott Senior Center

Members Present: P. Jones, A. Ippolito, S. Belkin, J. Blonder, G. Potts

Others Present: Pete Kane (Town Planner), William DiMento (attorney for petitioner), Tom Groom (petitioner), James Velleco (architect), William Bergeron (engineer), James Emmanuel (landscape architect), Kenneth Shutzer (attorney for abutters), 16+ residents (see attached sign-in sheets)

Meeting called to order at 7:10 pm by Patrick Jones, Chair.

SITE PLAN REVIEW

Chair Jones opened the meeting by stating that this was a special meeting of the Planning Board to continue the review of 12SPR-2 (71 Greenwood Ave), continued from the August Planning Board meeting. P. Jones then opened up the review of the site plan application for this project.

12SPR-2 – 71 GREENWOOD AVENUE

The proposal calls for the demolition of the old middle school and construction of a new 41-unit condominium building, two three-car garages, underground parking and parking lot.

P. Jones provided a brief review of prior meetings which included concerns about traffic, entrance/egress from Greenwood Ave., proposed parking proximity to existing neighbors (Greenwood Terrace), concerns about radius and turning of fire equipment entering property. Attorney DiMento told the Board an alternate plan is being submitted dealing with the parking issue. He distributed copies of the by-laws on regulations pertaining to Planned Development Districts (PDDs). Mr. DiMento briefly reviewed sections 4.5.0.0, 4.5.1.0 through 4.5.4.0.

Mr. DiMento reviewed the “Table of PDD Dimensional Regulations” for the four PDD locations approved by Town Meeting. He explained those are beyond the scope of site plan review for which the Planning Board has no oversight. Mr. DiMento stated the structure meets every requirement of the PDD.

Architect Velleco was introduced who reviewed the changes in the alternate plan. He and Town Planner Kane coordinated in reviewing documents on projector screen and paper plans. Mr. Velleco stated that they came up with a revised site plan based on the request from the Planning Board to move the surface garages. He then explained that the building has been centered on the site in such a way as to make it more interesting by placing parking on

the north end and reducing mass of building on the street side. Underground parking for 41 spaces which then allowed surface parking in proposed two four-car garages at the north property line (motioned to new location of garages). Number of parking spaces in the alternate plan has been reduced from 87 to 82 which frees up more permeable area for drainage and still meets the two-cars-per-dwelling-unit requirement. Garage doors have been changed to belt-driven which are much quieter than conventional, chain garage doors. There is an option to make the garages three-car instead of four-car (and placing two standard parking spaces between the two three-car garages). All garage openings would be toward the proposed building. Bicycle racks will be included in the lower-right corner of the northern parking lot as well as in the underground parking.

P. Jones asked about availability of handicapped spaces and was told they have the required amount and that all parking spaces on the site are 9' x 20', exceeding the minimum dimension required for this site. At the request of the Health Department, a recycling dumpster has been included alongside the trash dumpster. Snow will be removed from the parking lot (privately) and snow storage areas were highlighted. Dumpsters will be enclosed on three sides by a 6' fence. All reductions in parking spaces will increase permeable area for drainage. Landscaping changes will include lower or ornamental plants to increase visual interest. Dumpster pick-up will be augmented during high seasonal needs (e.g. Christmas tree removal etc.). On Greenwood Ave property line, stone wall sections will be retained at the north and south sides, separated by landscaping. Developer will put in new granite curbing for the closed curb cuts and will be asking Town for permission to replace sidewalks in front of property.

A. Ippolito expressed concern about cars entering and leaving through a single entrance as proposed which seems problematic compared to the two existing entrances. Engineer Bergeron stated the turning radius for fire equipment has been calculated to be correct. Petitioner Groom told the Board that the single entrance/exit allows stone walls to be kept. P. Jones asked about possibly using some of the brick wall that would be removed at other areas on the property and was reassured that is feasible. Abutter expressed concern about dumpsters only being emptied once a week and was told contents are not food waste (disposals will be in the units), it is intended for ordinary trash. The dumpsters will also be covered.

Susan Munafo of Walker Road pointed out that there are ways that the stone walls can be folded back to improve sightlines and was told sightlines and plantings respect required sightline requirements. An aerial view of the overall building was displayed from the rooftop perspective ("S7 Proposed Aerial"). This is a four-story building with three levels 11' high and full height is 9' lower than the existing building. Renderings were displayed showing entrance to property from Greenwood Avenue, portraying visual sightlines of the entrance from a pedestrian level ("S8 Sketch 1", "S9 Sketch 2", "S10 Sketch 3"). A slide showing the colors and types of material to be used in building exterior was displayed ("S24 Materials and Colors"). The roof will be fiberglass and shingles. J. Blonder asked if developer would go on record verifying only first quality materials would be used and was told they would do so. There was a discussion about including a replica of the cupola from the school roof on top of the proposed building. After an extensive discussion, revealed the cupola would not be visible on the building as it is not at the same height of the existing school.

S. Belkin said she hasn't seen any photos showing the proposed building in relation to the other buildings on the street. Two photos were then displayed of 79 Greenwood Ave (to the north of project site) – same photo: one of existing conditions with school, other with school removed and project site simulated in ("S12 North PL Flat"). Mr. Velleco pointed out the features of the home at 79 Greenwood Ave that have been incorporated into the new building in an attempt to make the development more in keeping with the neighborhood. Mr. Velleco remarked that homes adjacent to the proposed building would be 35' away.

An abutter asked about planting evergreens on some of the sloping land (eastern portion) on the building perimeter however Landscape Architect Emmanuel stated that the sloped land, existing root system, and existing tree growth height would make that very difficult.

Abutters expressed concern about significant problem with ground water on Greenwood Terrace and that the property is nearly total ledge.

Another abutter asked where the air conditioning units would be located. Mr. Velleco answered that the air handlers (units will have central air) will be placed on the flat areas of the roof and invisible from the ground.

P. Jones talked about some concern regarding the top of the building appearing a little flat and suggested a little architectural articulation along the roofline might provide a little visual variation. He also told the developer and team they have done a very good job toward making the building more appealing in the fronting on Greenwood Ave. In response to a question, development team stated that the heating system will be individual warm air systems for each unit. There will be no sheet metal chimneys sticking out; stacks will be placed where they will not be seen. Looking at the roof from ground, you won't see much roof because the roof is shallow.

Ms. Munafo asked about the design guidelines that were part of the RFP process. P. Jones said the original RFP wanted to keep the character of the school building which did not generate interest from developers. Town Meeting voted to lift the requirement of saving a portion of the school building. A. Ippolito stated that there were design guidelines provided for new construction however design guidelines are just that – guidelines, not requirements. She said that responses to the RFP that adhered more closely to the guidelines would be more favorably viewed. Ms. Munafo pointed out that the design is not appropriate for the Olmsted District, but the response was that the school is not located in the Olmsted District. Jeff Sprague (32 Greenwood Terrace) stated that the scale is massive. He doesn't see the translation for a common good for the Town. Any new structure should be in the character of the neighborhood.

P. Jones: "I agree with you 100%. That ship has sailed. It was agreed four years ago; PDDs were developed and incorporated into the by-laws. This 41 unit is allowed by law now. Notices of public meetings were posted. There is a chance that we could come to an agreement." Abutter: "are you telling us that 41 units will not have an effect on our neighborhood?" Jones: "The Town said it is; it voted it into the by-laws to build up to 41 units."

Attorney Shutzer (representing some abutting neighbors): "Important to put things in perspective. The school is not being used. The developer is saying his building will be smaller. When you remove the school, you start from a vacant plot of land. School is not the criteria. Regarding Temple Israel site, developer came to conclusion that it was impossible to build a 42-unit building on that site among neighborhood homes. Developer decided it could not be done. No one is challenging that it is not an attractive building; it is not an attractive building in this neighborhood. The school and dimensions of the school are not where we start. This is going far afield. The Board has to make findings on the site plan review criteria. Builder needs to address the structure itself, if there is any way that the applicant can suggest they can meet the guidelines in the scale of the neighborhood. Just because you can build 41 units does not mean it can be done under site plan criteria. I see nothing in the by-laws that this building is by right allowed. The developer is making no effort whatsoever to scale it down.

P. Jones: "Before us is a 41-unit proposed building. Forty-one units are allowed; that doesn't mean I have to accept it or like it." He noted that the developer has shown how they are making the site better, including reducing the drainage issue at the site.

The list of requirements for site plan review (sections 5.4.8.1 – 5.4.8.9) was displayed on the screen and each step/item was read and noted how the petitioner was complying. P. Jones said the size of the project has to be acknowledged.

A. Ippolito: “Break up the monolithic appearance; I would like to see architectural articulation that ties in more closely with the neighborhood.”

Mr. Shutzer: “They by-law says you can put in 41 units, if you can meet site plan criteria. The issue is minimizing the 41 units. It says nothing that each unit has to be ‘x’ square feet. This is the antithesis of what they (abutters) bought into. This could be designed to fit within the neighborhood. This applicant can make a far greater effort to try. This is a beautiful building but in a different location. This process needs to be voted by the decision tonight.”

Mr. DiMento: “Forty-one units are approved (referenced page 77 of the by-laws).”

Petitioner Groom: “I tried to meet the conditions of the RFP to a ‘T.’”

S. Belkin: “You bought a house in a neighborhood you like and suddenly the neighborhood is changed.”

Mr. Groom: “I held a neighborhood meeting and invited abutters to attend.”

S. Belkin: “Can we get a scale model of the proposed building and the neighborhood?”

Project Engineer Bergeron reviewed the steps to mitigate drainage and said the watershed was reduced by 90% in one corner of the property, 30% reduction toward Fuller Avenue, and significantly in two other areas. In response to abutter and Board questions, Mr. Bergeron said DPW and the Town Engineer approved the pipes that had been photographed (existing pipe from site to Fuller Ave).

S. Belkin read from the fiscal impact statement dated June 12, 2012, which was submitted with the petition and said she found the projections unrealistically high. She had a list of condos sold in the past 12 months in Swampscott, 30 units ranging between \$200,000 and \$180,000 (except for one outlier at over \$1,000,000). She remarked that much of what is done in Town is fed by the need to raise revenue. S. Belkin said she found the study to be inaccurate. Mr. DiMento said Mr. Connery (who produced the impact statement) has 40 years of experience and is well-qualified. He said the fiscal impact figures are accurate along with “\$17.99 is the (residential tax) rate today; who knows what it will be in the future?”

Abutter Freddie Philips (57 Greenwood Ave) said he doesn’t see where this project can go. “Is this building going to make my property worth more or less? What will the impact be?”

P. Jones to the Board: “Are you ready to make a motion or do you want to continue it?”

A. Ippolito: “Continue to the next meeting.” She would like to see changes to the scale of the building; scale of the proposed building is too large for the site. She said she would like the petitioner to come back with different massing options, change in massing.

Mr. Groom stated he felt he has met the criteria the Town had put forth in the RFP. “You’re asking me to reduce the mass: these are two-bedroom units that are 1,500 square feet. I don’t understand reducing it.”

S. Belkin: “You can make it 24 units.”

Mr. Groom: "I am not interested in reducing the number of units."

P. Jones said he's wants to see articulation, handling the rooflines, specifically involving the massing.

Mr. Groom: This has become an architectural review.

Mr. Velleco: "I think it is a mistake. We are carving away square feet, upper level; it will have net to no effect down on the land." He doesn't think as a professional architect this is how he wants to spend his life.

Mr. Groom: "Attorney Shutzer is in court; why not let the court decide."

A. Ippolito moved to make favorable action on the site plan, including the revised two four-car garage option, retaining the dismantled portion of the stone wall from the front of the property to be used on other locations of the site, incorporate comments from Fire Deputy Chief Potts, Health Department, and Conservation Commission, increase the buffer zone to the north of the underground parking garage by another 5' - 10'. J Blonder seconded the motion which was approved four votes for, S. Belkin opposed.

Motion to adjourn unanimously approved at 10:20pm.

Helen Kennedy
Planning Board Secretary

