



TOWN OF SWAMPSCOTT

OFFICE OF THE PLANNING BOARD

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

MEMBERS

ANGELA IPPOLITO, CHAIR
JEFFREY BLONDER, VICE CHAIR
CLINTON BENCH
GEORGE POTTS
JR YOUNG

STAFF

HELEN KENNEDY, SECRETARY
S. PETER KANE, TOWN PLANNER

OCTOBER 14, 2014 MEETING MINUTES

Time: 7:08– 8:45 pm

Location: Swampscott Senior Center, 200 Essex St (rear)

Members Present: A. Ippolito, J. Blonder, C. Bench, G. Potts, JR Young

Members Absent: none

Others Present: Pete Kane (Town Planner), Angela Ansara (petitioner), William DiMento (lawyer), Andrew Rose (petitioner), David Kelly (project engineer)

Meeting called to order at 7:08 pm by Chair Angela Ippolito.

MEETING MINUTES

August 13, September 8 and October 1 meeting minutes were reviewed by the Board. Approved unanimously on a motion by J. Blonder and seconded by JR Young.

PETITION 14-14

Site Plan Special Permit application by Angela Ansara to expand an existing commercial building (at 371 Paradise Road).

Ms. Ansara told the Board there is a desperate need for area to house administrative files and office equipment. The first floor of the addition will have four or five more doors. The second floor will be storage, warehouse, and administrative space.

Town Planner Kane asked what is being done to make the building more attractive. Ms. Ansara said she has been talking to the architect about it but doesn't have anything concrete to bring to the Board right now. The Board then inquired about the interior layout. Ms. Ansara said the floor plans are just a concept; storage space requirements change seasonally. They may add an elevator or a freight elevator. Planner Kane mentioned it would be good to find a way to let more light in. Ms. Ansara said she is totally open to the suggestion but she needs to protect the alcohol from smash-and-grab and proximity to windows. He recommended adding columns or varied brick on the exterior to add detailing.

The Board discussed their concern regarding traffic and access on the property (currently and under the proposed plan). C. Bench highly recommended a traffic study by an engineer to alleviate the current problems rather than make them worse. Also, there should be consideration to relocate the main entrance to the upper northwestern façade, encouraging customers to park further into the lot rather than so close to the traffic intersection. Finding a way to slow down traffic entering to Vinnin Liquors and Whole Foods is critical due to the density in this congested area. Ms. Ansara said a traffic sign would be put up saying “turn right on red.”

J. Blonder asked about the number of parking spaces and asked if a parking variance is being requested. Planner Kane told the meeting parking requirements are one space per each 200 square feet including storage area. So required parking would be a total of 110 spaces. The applicant is applying for parking relief and a dimensional variance.

C. Bench asked the Chair what is the action that is needed from the Planning Board, exactly what are they voting on? Chair Ippolito said what is needed is a site plan review because the Planning Board is not the permit-granting authority. In this case, the Board would be evaluating the plan, based on all site plan criteria and especially in this case – the biggest issue she saw is the traffic, traffic flow, the pedestrian flow, and the walkway issues. The Chair stated that she felt there is going to be a big problem with the traffic because it is really very congested with traffic turning. She wasn't sure whether there are some elements that can be put in place to ameliorate that.

C. Bench said with all due respect, the building was built forty years ago and “we” made a lot of mistakes forty years ago. “It isn't your fault that you have a building that is too close to the intersection of Paradise Road, that the intersection to your parking lot is directly across from your front door. You're sort of in the worst kind of position you can be in, wanting to do any kind of expansion.” He noted that the proposal calls for expanding the building towards the street by 20 feet and widening it by 8 feet.

C. Bench: The issue right now is that from a traffic management point of view, that this is completely substandard and horribly unsafe. What really needs to happen is what would be safe. Have a traffic engineer look at the parking lot and understand how the cars are moving in and out. Making absolutely no accommodation for pedestrians is something we did not even bother thinking about 40 years ago. It's really a problematic place, from my perspective, any kind of forward expansion of the building; I simply can't support it without understanding the traffic management. I feel bad that you're in this position that you're trying to build your business and you have a landscape there that is working against you. From my perspective, and I am only one voice, I would not be comfortable with any positive recommendation until we understood what is happening in that entire parking lot, how is Whole Foods interacting with Vinnin Liquors traffic? What kind of parking is actually needed overall and can some of your parking be accommodated in the Whole Foods section of the property? Right off the top of my head, there is and should not be any parking spaces in front of your front door. There needs to be more. Moving away from the intersection is a good start but we need to be able to move the traffic better. We need to be thinking about directional in and out markings. I'm not saying it couldn't work, but my guess is that the only way to make it safe is to have less parking.

Chair Ippolito interjected and pointed out that there will be 184 new housing units going in across the street (at the former JRC site) adjacent to the proposed project. She agreed that further attention needs to be made about the location of the front door, channeling for the cars to be able to fit into the parking spaces, and probably some additional signalization and signage beyond the “Do Not Block” markings.

Chair Ippolito: I would add to that how necessary is that overhand right here? You're pulling this whole corner forward. I know you are trying to keep some kind of dimensional look to the enlargement.

Ms. Ansara: It's an overhang. I'm creating this because we're dealing with air conditioning and heating, and we're heating and air conditioning the outside 365 days a year. I cannot keep the northeast wind coming in through that door; it's like working outside. I'm trying to enclose my sidewalk so I have some kind of vestibule so I can contain the temperature in the store.

Planner Kane: Looking at your plan, what is going on here (empty area within vestibule)?

Ms. Ansara: We have ice machines and what I'm trying to do is a walk-in humidior. Moving carts here because it's very jammed up. What I'm doing is enclosing the sidewalk. I'm not pushing forward even though this drawing doesn't show what I'm actually doing. I'm putting barriers here so cars can't come into the store. I'm making this compact and handicap so there won't be any large pickup trucks.

Chair Ippolito: I agree that there are some traffic things that need to be looked at. It's hard to back out at certain times of the day.

C. Bench: You have to find out from a professional. We have to be able to understand from an engineering perspective how the traffic is flowing and how much you need for the turning radius. Can you put some kind of landscaping there? Do you need to use that space for some sort of cross-channelization of cars that are trying to get over to your primary parking area?

G. Potts: What if you were to move the entrance over which would pull all the traffic away from the intersection?

Ms. Ansara: I can't afford to lose retail space. If it were not for the additional 20 feet, I would not be doing this entire thing. That is how important it is. I am starting an online website which will generate more pick up. I don't know if we're going to get there. I have to find something that would keep cars from going into the storefront wall (referring to the bollards along the storefront parking spaces).

Planner Kane noted the number of bollards could be reduced. Ms. Ansara stated they are currently placed every 3 feet on the plans. She explained that they're planned to protect pedestrians and to prevent "smash and grab" in the middle of the night.

J. Blonder inquired if the applicant had considered pervious material (open pavers) for the parking along Paradise Road. Chair Ippolito noted that it would make a difference and positive impact in the parking area with regards to water runoff. J. Blonder then asked if the landscaping would be improved. Ms. Ansara said she plans to have the islands near the entrance improved and that the green areas on the plan are mulched.

G. Potts stated that making some kind of interest would be a nice enhancement; the architect (not present) may have some suggestions such as windows in the upper level.

J. Blonder was concerned that the Board's concerns with the project wouldn't be applicable since there was so little time with the ZBA hearing to happen the following night. Planner Kane stated that the Planning Board should let the ZBA know its concerns and suggest how to make the plan work.

C. Bench: I think we should consider an unfavorable recommendation to the ZBA with list of areas for improvement: traffic engineer, architectural detail, additional landscaping, and improved surface material as well as pedestrian access.

Chair Ippolito noted that the Board should be supportive of the applicant's desire to expand their business.

JR Young said that he would vote for a favorable recommendation which prompted further discussion among Planning Board members. Planner Kane noted that the intent of site plan review is to minimize the imperfections and problems of a site while maximizing the benefits.

Vice Chair Blonder moved to recommend unfavorable action of the project due to concerns regarding traffic flow and safety, pedestrian access, landscaping, drainage issues, and architectural detailing. Motion seconded by C. Bench and approved 4-1 with JR Young voting no.

PETITION 14-22

Site Plan Special Permit application by CC Swampscott to add about 2,740 sf to an existing commercial building (at 450 Paradise Road).

Vice Chair Blonder recused himself from the review as he is an abutter.

Petitioner Andy Rose was recognized and briefed the Planning Board on the success of Girls Inc. operating on this site for a few months which enabled the organization to meet their annual budget. Attorney DiMento presented the petition seeking approval of Planning Board for a 2,740-square foot addition to the back/side of the existing structure.

Engineer David Kelly reviewed the plan incorporating deminimus changes suggested by Town Planner Kane. The pavement alongside the building will be pulled back about 18 feet so there will be a small reduction in impervious surfaces. Access to building in front and landscaping will be increased to offset reduction in other areas. The angle of the drive-thru will be made smaller. They're proposing a total of 65 parking spaces on the lot. In the mall there are a total of 882 parking spaces and 690 spaces are required. Stormwater drainage will be enhanced by installation of larger catch basins and reducing pavement from underground stream by 18 feet.

Andy Rose noted that they are also considering adding a window on the side of building for visibility to the side lot.

C. Bench: My primary concern is pedestrian access to the building from Paradise Road. There currently is no access to the mall with consideration for cyclists or pedestrians to enter from Paradise Road. The goal is to encourage more people to be able to walk and bike.

Engineer Kelly noted that the sidewalk around the building will be extended and tie in with on-site crosswalk.

Planner Kane: People walking up Paradise Road and cyclists have no pedestrian access from the stoplight.

Attorney DiMento stated that the Town does not support pedestrian/bicycle navigation, but may sometime in the future. He told the Board that there were 13 hearings of the Planning Board before going to ZBA because of the rundown condition of the property prior to construction of the present mall structures.

Chair Ippolito said there have been big improvements but still have a long way to go and referenced the Market Street site in Lynnfield which is user friendly. Andy Rose told the meeting Stop and Shop has complete say over the mall property and said an overlay should be done to redevelop the mall area.

C. Bench: We should make progress toward goals like pedestrian safety, rules should be put in place because there is a principle of accessibility; whatever gets built, there needs to be that kind of access. There are two new buildings that are being proposed that have no pedestrian accessibility.

G. Potts moved to recommend favorable action to the ZBA, seconded by Chair Ippolito. Motion approved 3-1 with C. Bench voting no.

NEW BUSINESS

ZONING BYLAW REVIEW SUBCOMMITTEE

Board member G. Potts who has been the Planning Board representative on the ZBRS said he is unable to continue in that capacity because of his new work schedule. He said matters under review on the subcommittee include height of buildings, handicap accessibility, and regulations on contractor signs at construction sites.

C. Bench was nominated and voted in as the new Planning Board rep to the ZBRS. Planner Kane will coordinate providing details to C. Bench.

BEAUTIFICATION COMMITTEE

Planner Kane raised the issue of the Beautification Committee which oversees beautification of town property. There's a problem because committee members don't have a clear mission or direction. They are requesting consideration of becoming a subcommittee of the Planning Board and wanted the Board's feedback. Planner Kane asked the Board members for their thoughts on this request.

Chair Ippolito said the Planning Board could support it from a procedural point. They need direction, need to know if there is a budget, the scope of their work. She said the committee is a very talented group, very dedicated volunteers but they need direction. They could fall under the Open Space & Recreation Plan Committee or Planning Board. They don't know what to do with feedback from the Board of Selectmen (who formed the committee originally).

J. Blonder inquired if it's true that they're a Board of Selectmen committee. Planner Kane confirmed that and stated they could remain under the Board of Selectmen with staff support from Town Hall. They are looking for input from this Board if they should be a subcommittee of the Planning Board of possibly have Planner Kane sit as an ex-officio member.

Chair Ippolito: In terms of long-range planning, we need to look at the Planning Department further. It really should include community development to get synergy among the committees. The Beautification Committee had no direction from Board of Selectmen, just ad hoc comments.

Planner Kane: They want better direction, better oversight.

Chair Ippolito: Let's figure out what kind of direction to give them.

Planner Kane: They are doers and thinkers but they don't know how to put things in process to implement.

Chair Ippolito: I suggest putting the Beautification Committee under the Planning Department and Town Planner Kane.

The Board then agreed that they would defer any recommendation to Chair Ippolito and Planner Kane on the best route.

UPCOMING BALLOT

G. Potts asked whether the Board wants to take any position on any ballot initiatives. The Board voted 3 to 2 against taking any position on ballot initiatives.

Motion to adjourn unanimously approved and meeting closed at 8:45p.

Helen Kennedy
Planning Board Secretary
(transcribed from cassette tape)