

PLANNING BOARD

DATE: October 8, 2015
TIME: 7:00 P.M.
PLACE: Large Meeting Room
FOR: Regular Meeting
PRESENT: Jonathan Hankin, Chairman; Suzanne Fowle; Jack Musgrove; Brandee Nelson;
Malcolm Fick
Jeremy Higa, Associate Member
Chris Rembold, Town Planner

Mr. Hankin called the meeting to order at 7:00 P.M.

FORM A's:

Michael Parsons was present with a Form A application on behalf of Brian Beckwith for a parcel of land located on the west side of Lake Buel Road. Lot 1 contains 1.158 acres of land.

Mr. Musgrove made a motion to approve the plan, Ms. Nelson seconded, all in favor.

MINUTES: SEPTEMBER 24, 2015

Mr. Musgrove made a motion to approve the minutes of September 24, 2015 as amended, Ms. Fowle seconded, all in favor.

SITE PLAN REVIEW: 910 SOUTH MAIN STREET

Kevin Charleton was present to discuss his application for Site Plan Review for a single family residence with an apartment at 910 Main Street.

Mr. Rembold said the two-family use requires Site Plan Review.

Mr. Charleton said he purchased the property in July. He said a spiral staircase will be added in the back but the fire escape to the third floor will come down.

Mr. Musgrove made a motion to waive the reading of the Site Plan Review criteria, Ms. Nelson seconded, all in favor.

Mr. Musgrove made a motion to approve Site Plan Review, Ms. Fowle seconded, all in favor.

SITE PLAN REVIEW & SPECIAL PERMIT RECOMMENDATION: 79 BRIDGE STREET

The Board conducted a site visit prior to the meeting. Present for the applicant: Attorney Edward McCormick; Engineer Jim Scalise; Architect Michael McKeown; Architect Carl Black; Traffic Engineer Jon Dietrich; Landscape Architect Craig Okerstrom Lang; Dave Carpenter; Applicants Vijay Mahida and Crystal Mahida; .

Mr. Scalise began the presentation with a power point presentation. The project description is of a 3.85 acre parcel located at 79 Bridge Street. The parcel included the former Bryant School

parcel containing .75 acres that was divided from the total acreage leaving approximately 3.1 acres with the former Searles School on the parcel. The proposal is for a 95 room boutique hotel with a gross floor square footage of approximately 90,000 square feet. The proposed hotel would be built approximately on the current footprint of the former Searles School.

Mr. Scalise said parking for the hotel would be in the existing parking lot on the corner of Bridge Street and School Street and behind the building off of Church Street. He said this project would be a continuation of the Bryant School redevelopment and complimentary to the rehabilitated building owned and operated by Jane Iredale.

Mr. Scalise said the reasons for redeveloping the property instead of rehabilitating it are life safety consideration. The stairs and exits within the existing structure are not safe. There is an accessibility issue as the floors numbering more than 8 make it difficult to accommodate an elevator in a hotel. The inefficiencies in the structure can not support a hotel use. The former institutional use of a school does not accommodate the rehabilitation of the building into a hotel.

Mr. Scalise said the permitting element of the project requires a special permit for the hotel use with more than 45 rooms. With the historical designation the project will require a waiver to allow for the request of 95 rooms. A special permit for work within the floodplain is required as the building is on the fringe of the floodplain. The finished floor would be above the floodplain. Mr. Scalise said no fill will be displaced or added to the flood plain. Mr. Scalise said there would be an increase in impervious surface area of 9,550 square feet.

Mr. Scalise said the project is within the Water Quality Protection District which will also require a special permit. In addition to the special permits, a building permit will be required, and a Notice of Intent will have to be filed. There are no expected issues with connecting to Town water and sewer.

Mr. Scalise said this project is a downtown mixed use. There is pedestrian and vehicular access to the site. There will be a reorganization of the curb cuts on the north side of the project for the parking lot. There will be a through driveway entering the east driveway to the rear parking lot and hotel entrance and exiting in front of the building and out the west driveway. There is a fire hydrant on the north side of the building. Employee parking will be in the back along the loading space.

Mr. Hankin asked Mr. Mahida how many deliveries trucks would be entering the site.

Mr. Mahida said he did not expect there to be more than 3 delivery trucks per week.

Mr. Musgrove asked if there would be deliveries of food and beverages.

Mr. Mahida said yes.

Mr. Scalise said there will be parking related to the conference room. A retaining wall will be built along School Street and the grade of the parking lot will be adjusted. There will be 27 parking spaces in the lot which will enter and exit onto Bridge Street.

Mr. Scalise discussed the entrance for the hotel. He said the east driveway on Bridge would be an entrance only. The sight lines are not adequate to allow for an exit there. He said signs will be used to direct clients into and out of the property. He said there will be 122 parking spaces in total, including the 27 on the School Street lot. Consideration of one loading space is being requested therefore a waiver of the required 3 loading spaces would be needed.

Mr. Scalise said Mr. Okerstrom Lang is here to discuss the landscaping plan in detail. He said as an overview there will be street trees along Bridge and School Streets. The landscaping plan will extend the landscaping on the Iredale property as the goal is for there to be consistency between the two properties. Rain gardens will be used to assist in water management. There will be pedestrian friendly sidewalks that tie into the streetscape.

Mr. Scalise said the lighting will also mimic that on the Iredale property. He said there will be 12 foot light poles in the parking lot with LED fixtures with downward directed lighting. Bollard lighting will also be used.

Mr. Musgrove asked if the lighting would be on all night.

Mr. Mahida said yes.

Mr. Scalise provided detailed storm water management calculations.

Ms. Fowle asked how long before water from the parking lot would enter the river.

Mr. Scalise said the water would go into an underground treatment system where it could be for hours. The more water that builds up and pushes into the system the faster it could move through and into the river.

Ms. Fowle said the system is helping with sediment not toxins.

Mr. Scalise said that is correct. He said the Conservation Commission will review the plan and determine if it is acceptable.

Mr. Rembold said it appears that an acre of land is draining into one catch basin.

Mr. Scalise said it can be done due to the way the parking lot will be graded. Water that puddles over the catch basin will actually push itself into the system.

Mr. Musgrove said there could be a puddle in the parking lot.

Mr. Scalise said there could be a deep puddle but it would drain and be gone within a few hours. The goal is to catch the first half inch of rain as it will put the most dirt into the system.

Ms. Nelson asked Mr. Scalise why he is not catching an inch, there is room.

Mr. Scalise said there is no justification to spend the money for more.

There was some discussion of proposed rain gardens that will filter and drain the water as well.

Mr. Musgrove asked where the snow will be placed.

Mr. Scalise said he would expect that the snow will have to be removed and trucked away. There will be minimal storage along the edges of the property.

Mr. Scalise turned the architecture portion of the discussion over to Michael McKeown the project architect from BMA Architectural Group.

Mr. McKeown said the project is sensitive to the original character of the existing building and its historic nature. The existing building is a mid 19th century Queen Anne design. The building has three sections, a center section with a wing on each side. Each wing has a hip roof. The existing building also has a gymnasium and a smaller wing in the back. The connecting wing (The Annex) is lower in height.

Mr. McKeown said the gymnasium is also lower in height. This feature will be the conference center component of the project. It will be closer to Bridge Street than the current structure and will have a mansard roof to keep the scale down. This component will have a third floor and will remain sensitive to the Bryant structure and sensitive to the view from that building. The structure will have a flat roof with a photo voltaic system mounted on the roof at a 2-3 degree angle so it will not be visible.

Mr. McKeown said the Annex will be the activity wing with an indoor pool and fitness center. The roof will be kept as low as possible.

Mr. McKeown said the project will consist of a 95 room hotel with a 60 seat restaurant and 5000-6000 square feet of meeting space.

Mr. McKeown said there are specific details and architectural components that we wanted to match including the dual chimneys and some window elements. He said the goal is to create a structure that is very similar to what exists.

Mr. Hankin asked if the dolomite base would be recreated or reused.

Mr. McKeown said as much of the dolomite will be saved as possible and will be reused on the site where applicable.

Mr. Hankin asked if other elements of the existing structure would be reused.

Mr. McKeown said there are a couple of chalkboards and other ornamental elements that we are trying to incorporate into the plans. The dolomite is the only exterior material that can be saved.

Ms. Nelson asked for a description of the 3 building components.

Mr. McKeown said the goal is to adhere to the existing footprint. The proposed building would be a four story structure whereas the existing building is 3 stories. However, due to the very high ceilings in the existing building a fourth story can be incorporated by increasing the height of the building by 5-7 feet. The overall massing is very similar; the increase in the footprint would be imperceptible.

Mr. McKeown said the project is very sensitive to the Riverwalk.

The conference wing will be slightly taller and closer to the street than the existing gymnasium. The mansard roof will help to keep the building from looking larger. We do not want the building to feel any larger than what exists.

Architect Carl Black gave an explanation of the history of the architecture of the existing structure and the basis for the architectural design of the proposed building.

Ms. Fowle asked what the square footage of the building would be and how much of an increase compared to the existing building's square footage.

Mr. Scalise said The interior square footage would increase by 40 (from 55,000 to 90,000). He said the footprint would increase by 4,000 square feet.

Mr. McKeown said there would be a 30% increase over the existing total square footage. The existing building is 55,000 square feet. The proposed would be 90,000 square feet. The floor space would be used more efficiently than the existing.

Mr. Musgrove asked about the signage for the property.

Mr. McKeown said the sign at the east entrance would be similar in character to the one on the Iredale property. He said it would be a low level elegant sign backlit in a tasteful way. He said it would a 4x6 foot ground mounted sign with "The Berkshire" backlit from within.

Mr. Musgrove asked if there would be any direct light that could shine in the eyes of drivers.

Mr. McKeown said absolutely not.

Mr. Hankin asked about lighting.

Mr. Okerstrom Lang said the lights in the main parking lot would be 12 foot pole lights. He said the lighting plan has not been completed and still needs to be worked on.

Mr. Musgrove asked what type of lighting would be on the front side of the building.

Mr. Scalise said there will be lights on the porch.

Mr. Okerstrom Lang said there is no bollard lighting proposed in the front as there are street lights.

Mr. Scalise said there will be a wall pack on the east side.

Mr. Musgrove said he would like to make sure that people leaving the site will be able to see. He said he is in favor of the plan for exiting the property but he wants to make sure there is sufficient lighting.

Ms. Nelson asked about the pedestrian use.

Mr. Scalise said the landscaping will be used to direct pedestrian traffic on the site.

Mr. Carpenter said there needs to be more thought given to the pedestrian walkability.

Mr. McKeown said a deliberate attempt has been made to separate the pedestrian traffic from the vehicular traffic. The vehicular traffic will be pulled to the rear of the building as quickly as possible..

Mr. Musgrove asked if any thought had been give to eliminate the exit onto Bridge Street.

Mr. Scalise said it was considered but that would put a lot of traffic onto Church Street.

Ms. Nelson asked how the traffic would be directed to leave the site. She said good signage would be needed to direct motorists.

Mr. Scalise said the curve of the driveway might be revised.

A member of the audience asked how many units would be part of the 100 Bridge Street project. The response was there would be approximately 82 units.

Ms. Nelson asked for an explanation for the 95 rooms.

Mr. Carpenter said that is the number of rooms that would make the project fiscally viable.

Ms. Fowle asked what level of occupancy the Fairfield Inn experiences.

Mr. Carpenter said approximately 100 days a year the hotel is at full occupancy.

Mr. McCormick said the scale of the project is determined by economics. In addition if the size of the building is much smaller it would not look right. He said the goal of the project is to extend the downtown area onto Bridge Street.

Mr. Scalise returned to his power point presentation saying that the site is served by Town water and sewer. Both utilities can more than accommodate the project. Each department will write a

letter to the Selectboard to confirm the information. There is a fire hydrant on the north side of the project that produces 3200 gallons per minute.

Mr. Scalise said the dumpster would be located in the vicinity of the loading space. It will be shielded by a fence.

Ms. Nelson asked if the parking lot would be a full depth reconstruction.

Mr. Scalise said yes.

Jon Dietrich discussed the traffic study for the project. He said traffic counts were done on Bridge Street and Church Street. The counts were taken on weekday mornings and the peak hour in the afternoon, 4:30-5:30. He said the Main St. construction made it difficult. His study was not based on weekend traffic rates. The study projects that the hotel at peak occupancy would generate 67 vehicle trips with 33 vehicles entering the property and 34 existing. Mr. Dietrich said he did not expect a change in the level of service at the Bridge and Main Street traffic light. He said that intersection is currently a level D with a 36 second delay. Traffic from the hotel could potentially increase the delay by another 6 seconds, which would still be a D LOS.

Ms. Nelson asked if any off street parking would be available for those using Memorial Field.

Mr. Scalise said Bridge Street is a terrible location for on street parking.

Ms. Nelson said there is a demand that will need to be met.

Mr. Scalise said he does not have an answer.

Mr. Hankin said there is likely to be an excess of parking at the hotel. Is there any thought of allowing some of the parking to be used for the ball field.

Mr. Carpenter said there have been discussions of this matter.

Mr. Rembold said there are 27 parking spaces for the conference center in association with the hotel use. Will there be a need for those 27 spaces regularly.

Mr. Carpenter said those parking space are being kept part of the project because they are important.

Mr. Rembold asked what the floor space of the conference center will be.

Mr. McKeown said over 5,000 square feet.

Mr. McCormick said the ball field is being considered an amenity for the hotel. With good communication we will work something out for the parking.

Ms. Nelson asked how many employees will work at the hotel.

Mr. Carpenter said there will be 30-40 full time employees.

Mr. Scalise read through the special permit finding for the project. These were part of the power point presentation.

Ms. Nelson asked if Master Plan had been considered.

Great Barrington resident Paul Ivory said he did not think the project met any of the goals of the Master Plan.

Mr. Fick read a letter dated October 5, 2015 submitted by Mr. Ivory.

Mr. Carpenter said he had not seen the letter prior to this reading so he was not able to comment. He said the existing structure would be very difficult to reuse so that is what led to the decision to build a new structure.

Mr. Fick said he likes the project but he is not able to support it. He said the language of the bylaw is in conflict with the intent of the bylaw ultimately resulting in the unintended consequences of the possibility of the structure being taken down.

Mr. Fick said there are several structures in Town that have been or in the process of being redeveloped including Bryant School. The intent and the purpose of the bylaw is for reuse and redevelopment of a historic structure. The Master Plan states that Searles should be preserved and protected. The bylaw supports a special permit when the project conforms with the general purpose and intent of the bylaw.

Mr. Fick said the unintended consequences are that any building could be torn down and a hotel could be built. If this special permit is granted it would nullify the 45 room limit for hotels.

Mr. McCormick said section 7.10.2 of the bylaws provides a mechanism for a deviation. It allows for the redevelopment by erecting a new building emulating the building being replaced.

Selectman Dan Bailey said the Town does not have a bylaw to prevent the demolition of buildings.

Mr. Hankin said no one has talked about the condition of the building. The building was determined not to be viable as a school. The building has been empty for 10 years. Two other developers have determined that the building is not viable. The land owner does not want to own or develop the property. He said he appreciates the sentiment for saving historic buildings, but we need to be realistic about what is best for the Town and what is in compliance with the bylaw.

Mr. Fick agreed the project would be good for the Town but he did not agree that it is in compliance with the bylaw.

Mr. Musgrove said when we wrote the bylaw the goal was for reuse or redevelopment. It was envisioned that a building could be taken down and redeveloped.

Mr. Fick asked if it is ok to take down buildings on South Main Street to put up hotels.

Mr. Musgrove said no.

Mr. Hankin said the special permit is before the Selectboard. They need to make the findings.

Mr. Fick said he remembers specific discussions. He said he does not remember the intent being to destroy historic buildings.

Mr. Hankin said ultimately it is the Selectboard's decision.

Mr. McCormick said we have just heard from the authors of the bylaw. Tearing down or rebuilding are similar. He said there is no way the existing building can be reused as a hotel. He asked what will happen to the existing building, will it sit empty for another 10-20 years?

Attorney Lucy Prashker said the unintended consequences of the bylaw are understood. In 2010 the entire site was sold to River School Redevelopment. The redevelopment of the site was to be done in stages. Bryant School was the first phase of the redevelopment. The historic school has been redeveloped and reused as a "component of a project". The original plan for the second phase of the project was not viable. Now we have a plan from someone who believes they have a viable project. The Bryant project was the redevelopment of a historic structure. This project complies with the words and the intent of the bylaw.

Mr. Hankin said the proposal is to build a building that will generate taxes for the Town.

Bobby Houston said he purchased the Dolby site. He said the buildings will be reused. He said he thinks it is shock to the people of the Town that this building might be torn down. He said he is asking the Board to do their job and work with what exists. He said he is surprised that the existing footprint will be respected as it is not a good footprint. He also questioned having the conference component as the first thing that would be seen when coming down Bridge Street from Main Street.

Jane Iredale said she put her heart and soul into the Bryant building. She said she wanted to save the Searles building, but the building has been changed many time over the years. What was originally built is not what exists today. She said when she "inherited" the building she wanted to see what would work there. She said originally she did not want to see a hotel on the site, because she lives next door and did not want to look out at a hotel, but as time as passed without a viable idea, we have considered this proposal and feel that it would be a benefit to the Town. It is a good idea. We brought in an architect from NYC to see what can be saved. It was determined that it can not be saved so this is the proposal being presented.

Claudia Ryan and Sharon Gregory also spoke in opposition to the project.

Paul Ivory said he took the bylaw at face value for saving buildings. He said he would not have supported it, had he know this would happen.

Mr. Carpenter asked the Board to focus on the permit.

Mr. Hankin said the Board has two tasks, a recommendation to the Selectboard and Site Plan Review.

Mr. Musgrove suggested that Site Plan Review should be done first.

Mr. Hankin said he didn't think the Planning Board could get through Site Plan Review tonight.

The Board decided to try to make a recommendation to the Selectboard.

Mr. Musgrove made a motion to send a positive recommendation to the Selectboard to grant the special permit for a hotel with 95 rooms as per 7.10.3, because it is a component of a project that redevelops or reuses a historic structure, Ms. Nelson seconded.

Mr. Fick said he opposes the project but the best argument presented is that this is phase II of the Bryant project which would be justifiable under the bylaw.

Ms. Nelson said she thinks this is a fabulous opportunity. We have struggled with 7.10.2(3). Ms. Prashker's argument makes me more comfortable with the project.

Mr. Musgrove said the site needs a viable plan. At this point the building is not salvageable.

Ms. Fowle said she has listened to all sides. She said she has concerns about increased traffic and the traffic study. We all wrote the bylaw. She said she believes the voters voted to increase the room limit based on reusing a historic structure. If we wanted to increase the room limits we would have used different language. She said she will vote against the project because she thinks the voters read the bylaw with something else in mind. If there were a slight increase in the room limit I might feel different, but the increase is so dramatic it feels like a bit of the "gotcha" Mr. Ivory is accusing the Board of. She said she is concerned about the proposal's relationship to River Walk and the WEB Duibois birthplace.

Mr. Hankin said the original idea of allowing an expansion of the room limit was his. He also said that he originally proposed the room limit bylaw. The reason for the expansion of the room limit was there were people interested in developing this site and it seemed like a good idea. Reuse of the site would be a boost for the Town. He said he started thinking about how to keep the room cap but also allow for a larger hotel that would benefit the Town. The goal was not just to preserve historic building but more to identify sites that could accommodate a large hotel and provide the mechanism for the use. Ultimately the goal was to provide benefits to the Town.

Mr. Hankin called for a vote on the motion.

Mr. Musgrove, Ms. Nelson and Mr. Hankin in favor.

Ms. Fowle and Mr. Fick opposed.

Mr. Musgrove made a motion to send a positive recommendation to the Selectboard to allow development in excess of 20,000 square feet as per 9.4.9, Ms. Nelson seconded, all in favor.

Mr. Musgrove made a motion to send a positive recommendation to the Selectboard to allow work in the flood plain overlay as per 9.1, Ms. Nelson seconded, all in favor.

Mr. Musgrove made a motion to send a positive recommendation to the Selectboard to allow work in the Water Quality Protection District as per 9.2.12, Ms. Nelson seconded, all in favor.

Mr. Musgrove made a motion to recommend that the Selectboard waive the loading space requirement as per 6.1.9. as the Planning Board finds that only one loading space is required for the use, Ms. Nelson seconded, all in favor.

The Board continued discussion and vote on the Site Plan Review until October 22, 2015 at 7:00 P.M.

TOWN PLANNER REPORT:

Mr. Rembold said there is a BRPC meeting on October 15. BRPC will be hosting workshops on November 12 and December 10.

Mr. Rembold said the topic at BRPC's 5th Thursday meeting will be an update on the medical marijuana law.

BOARD & COMMITTEE UPDATES:

Ms. Nelson said the Lake Mansfield Improvement Task Force will have information and activities on October 17 from 2:30-6:00. There will be tours and walks around the lake to describe the conditions and what is being considered to improve the lake. There will be other activities as well.

Ms. Nelson said there will be a public workshop with the consultant to discuss what can be done at the lake. The workshop will be at Crissey Farm at 7:00 P.M. on November 4.

Ms. Fowle said the CPC is busy with 13 applications. All the applicants are listed on the web page.

CITIZEN SPEAK TIME:

Elizabeth Ornstein said she voted for the bylaw to allow more hotel room in a historic building. She said the spirit of the bylaw is different from what was discussed at tonight's meeting. She said she supports the hotel but she doesn't buy the argument for demolishing the building. She said she feels duped.

Having concluded their business, Mr. Hankin adjourned without objection at 10:46 P.M.

Respectively submitted,





Kimberly L. Shaw
Planning Board Secretary

Material Presented at the Meeting:

- Site Plan Review Application for 910 Main Street
- Power Point Presentation from SK Design
- Special Permit & Site Plan Review Applications for 79 Bridge Street
- Letter from Paul Ivory date October 5, 2015
- Letter from the Great Barrington Historical Commission dated October 5, 2015
- Town Planner's notes for October 8, 2015