

Great Barrington Zoning Board of Appeals

Minutes Feb. 17, 2016

Attending the meeting at Town Hall were Chairman Ron Majdalany, Vice Chairman Carolyn Ivory, Madonna Meagher, Michael Wise and alternates John Katz and Don Hagberg. Also Town Planner Chris Rembold and Town Counsel David Doneski.

The chairman at 7:30 p.m. resumed the continued public hearing on the Comprehensive Permit Application submitted by **Community Development Corporation of South Berkshire**. The site is the former New England Log Homes property. The application is for 45 affordable rental housing units, 36 market-rate condominiums, 30,700 square feet of commercial retail space and 6,500 square feet of commercial office space on an eight-acre site at 100 Bridge Street. Presenting the plan were Tim Geller, executive director, CDC of South Berkshire; Richard Klein, Berkshire Design Group; Charles Roberts, Kuhn-Riddle Architects; and Larry Boudreau, Chazen Companies.

The board has received:

- Letter from Great Barrington Planning Board, dated Feb. 13, 2016, making six recommendations
- Letter from Great Barrington Select Board, dated Feb. 10, 2016, making ten recommendations
- Copy of communications between Michael J. Budris, Chazen Companies, and Joseph Sokul, Great Barrington DPW Superintendent, regarding town's capacity to accept hookup from 100 Bridge Street
- Traffic Impact Study by Chazen Companies for 100 Bridge Street Project, Feb. 5, 2016
- Stormwater Pollution Prevention Plan by Chazen Companies for 100 Bridge Street, Jan. 22, 2016

And the board was shown:

- A lighting plan indicating types of installations and intensities

Mr. Geller gave a Powerpoint overview of earlier iterations of development plans for the 100 Bridge Street site. Addressing the plan before the ZBA, Mr. Klein said the idea with the open space/green in the center of the property is to limit surrounding parking yet provide sidewalks to encourage walkers. He said there is extra parking at the affordable housing end of the property. Mr. Geller showed architect's cross-sections of buildings to give an idea of scale.

Mr. Geller said he and the professionals have heard several concerns, including one that the affordable housing units are segregated from the market-rate units and have a different appearance. He said that as a rule, affordable units are mixed in and indistinguishable from market-rate units. Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) has granted leeway due to financing/lease complexities with condominiums. All units share open spaces. He said attempt was made for a modernized mill look for the affordable housing units. He said CDC will return to the board with a final plan before construction. He said the buildings are still conceptual and an attempt will be made to make the affordable units more in harmony with the market-rate buildings near the river.

Mr. Geller spoke to concerns about Bridge Street becoming more commercial. He said this grows directly from decades of town planning, in which Bridge Street was expected to become an extension of Main Street so as to curb growth near the shopping centers at either end of Route 7. He said the commercial building proposed at 100 Bridge Street is only two stories high, in keeping with the largely residential buildings across Bridge Street.

Mr. Johnson said the traffic study is based on data collected at the Bentley Avenue/Bridge Street and the Bridge Street/Main Street intersections in January, taking into account seasonal fluctuations. He said Bentley Avenue obviously would see increased traffic, but the impact of 113 vehicles in the morning and 270 vehicles in the evening peak periods would result in no more than 2 seconds delay at the Main Street light. He also described sight distances as more than adequate, though suggested three parking spaces near the Bridge Street bridge be eliminated for safety concerns and a crosswalk be moved. He said the proposed 88-room hotel at the former Searles Middle School was taken into account, as well as seven units going up on Humphrey Street. He said summer daytime peaks were not considered.

Mr. Hagberg said there was considerable traffic on Bridge Street in summer. Mr. Johnson said there was little pedestrian activity. Ms. Ivory suggested the traffic study be made again in July. Mr. Geller said the Chazen specialist used Berkshire County Regional Planning Commission figures from a June 2012 survey. Mr. Wise said the peak traffic on the road in summer is in the day, not at rush hours. June is early; July and August are very busy. And weekends are busy all year. Mr. Johnson and Mr. Geller said other conditions may generate traffic, but what comes from this site will not be significant. Mr. Geller said this project does not attempt to solve the traffic flow problem at Main and Bridge Streets. Mr. Wise pointed out the addition of 88 housing units in the neighborhood is a big change.

Mr. Katz asked if Church and School Street traffic was taken into account, from Iredale Mineral Cosmetics and the Saturday farmers market. Mr. Geller said it was minimal. Mr. Johnson said it would have been included in the June study numbers. Mr. Wise said the farmers market is busiest in July and August. He also suggested the traffic study is based on vehicles going no more than 30 miles per hour, but many do go faster. Are there remedies, such as a four-way stop at Bentley Avenue. Mr. Johnson said crosswalks can slow traffic, and additionally they can be slightly raised to further slow traffic.

Mr. Boudreau spoke to photometrics on the site. He said lighting is measured in footcandles. He said on Main Street, standing beneath one of the yellow lights gives a meter reading of 3.5 footcandles. Between these lights, 1.5 fc. On the sidewalk, 2.5 fc, near shops, 5 to 8 because of their additional lighting. He said the aim is for 0.5 fc at the property lines. All lights will be LED, and they could be of the sort with built-in night-time timers to automatically dim. Varying pole heights or placement of bollards or lights on buildings will regulate light intensity.

Mr. Boudreau spoke to stormwater management. He said it took considerable engineering, but all contaminated soil will be redistributed on the site in such a way that no further stormwater area will be consumed. Mr. Klein said stormwater cannot leave the site any more quickly than at present.

Ms. Ivory asked for reactions to recommendations from the Select Board and Planning Board. Mr. Geller said the CDC board was resistant to one condition suggested by the Select Board: that the anchor business be locally or regionally owned. He said if this is a condition, rather than a recommendation, it will impede the legal and financial viability of the project.

As to other recommendations from the Select Board, Mr. Geller said: Lighting, visibility, cleanliness and accessibility will be secure; the open spaces will be maintained by the condominium association. If there are safety issues, such as use of the common green area, police will be notified. If need be, lighting levels can be increased. But the belief is 60 windows facing the green will discourage untoward activity. To the look of the buildings fitting the neighborhood,

he said that is the intent. Clean dirt utility corridors will be achieved, he said, explaining he had just met with Department of Environmental Protection engineers. He said contaminated soil goes no deeper than 18 inches. Such soil that is excess in, say, trenches will be spread elsewhere and paved over. He said the ZBA will have opportunity to review plans before construction; the Select Board asked the same courtesy but nothing was said. As to changing some angled parking on Bridge Street, that is being looked at, Mr. Geller said. On Bentley Avenue, at the Planning Board's suggestion, three spaces (of 19) will be removed to insert green/tree protrusions. To the Select Board's request, he said the aim is to have market rate and affordable housing buildings have a similar look and feel. The size of shade trees suggested by the Planning Board is fine, Mr. Geller said, adding that coniferous trees will go on the south line near the wastewater treatment plant and deciduous trees such as red maples elsewhere. To the Planning Board's suggestion the east parking lot near Bentley Avenue be held in abeyance until it is seen whether the spaces are necessary, Mr. Geller said it was a good idea.

To the issue of phased construction, Mr. Geller said the affordable housing would take time to secure financing and quite likely would not be first built. Whatever is built first, the remainder of the property will be fenced. In answer to a question from Mr. Hagberg, he said the unmitigated land could be planted to winter rye and mown. There was discussion of the Planning Board's recommendation of internal signage to discourage traffic using Crosby Street. And there was discussion of how vehicles would make turns or leave the site. It was agreed the intersection of Crosby and Pine is steep and merits cautious travel. Mr. Geller said drivers will figure things out.

Ms. Ivory asked about floodplain storage areas. Mr. Geller said the project is floodplain neutral, that is, it will not need any compensatory storage. Mr. Johnson explained the engineering involved. Mr. Hagberg asked about snow removal. Mr. Geller said snow will be pushed into designated green spaces on the property. In answer to a question from Ms. Ivory, Mr. Boudreau pointed out locations for wheeled totes and Dumpster containers. As to construction hours, Mr. Geller said typically it's no Sunday work, and work between 7 a.m. and 5 p.m. Ms. Ivory asked about the truncated old mill chimney. Mr. Geller said he has no idea where it will move or what it will look like, but it is seen as opportunity to commemorate the property's history and might make for an interesting design competition. Mr. Klein said there should be an interpretive sign nearby.

Mr. Hagberg asked if the parking on Bridge Street would be difficult during a snowstorm. Mr. Klein said the angle parking would be no different than elsewhere in town, banned overnight during winter months. The spaces on Bentley Avenue, on the other hand, would be on the property itself and could be used. Ms. Meagher asked a question about the mechanics of handling contaminated soil. Mr. Klein said each phase would handle its own bad soil. Mr. Geller said it has become apparent an earthmoving plan will be needed for 100 Bridge Street. Mr. Klein said funding for one phase won't necessarily be usable to handle bad soil on other phases.

Mr. Wise said the board has heard the project's size is necessary to pay for remediation. What if only one phase gets done? Mr. Geller said funding for affordable housing is the least vulnerable; the rest depends on market demand. Mr. Wise said a waiver is asked of the affordable housing zoning regulation. Why? Mr. Geller said relief is sought from the coincidental timing — phases are necessary.

When the chairman opened the floor to the public, Charlie Bouteiller asked, What if only the affordable housing is built? Mr. Geller said it would have a big green field and river park behind it. He explained that CDC has received economic development grants, and the donor agencies expect economic development to happen. Still, it will be private investment subject to demand,

and timing can't be predicted. Mr. Bouteiller asked how market rate housing on a toxic waste site next to a wastewater treatment plant could be difficult to market. And, he said, it does sometimes smell. Regarding traffic, he said it at times is backed up nearly to the Bridge Street bridge in summer, and common sense says there will be more than a 2 second increased delay for vehicles. He asked about LED light temperatures, and Mr. Boudreau said 4,500 is indicated, but it could be 3,000. Mr. Bouteiller said years ago neighbors were told the site was unbuildable, that housing couldn't go there because of contamination. Mr. Geller said very early site concepts when Keith Girard headed CDC ignored housing, but housing has always been viable. Mr. Bouteiller asked how a construction worker could distinguish contaminated from clean soil, as it all looks the same. Mr. Geller said DEP will be fully involved in monitoring. There ensued a discussion of the success or failures of earlier monitoring when the old building was demolished or the chemical remediation work was done. Mr. Klein said when work begins, there will be no wiggle room for contractors.

Janet Bouteiller questioned whether the parallel parking on Bentley Avenue was necessary and said she didn't like tractor-trailers backing across Bridge Street to make deliveries. She asked for a construction timetable. Mr. Geller said he can't give one, as three-quarters of the project is market driven.

Bobby Huston said town planning has not given direction to this scale a project on Bridge Street, to building out to the sidewalks. He suggested this is a failed premise. He said 88 housing units is huge for the neighborhood. He said the open space is surrounded by a race track of parking. He said motorists will have to make three right turns to get to the parking lots from Bridge Street, and Bentley Avenue will be overburdened. He said the circulation pattern does not work. He said the mill look for the proposed buildings is not justified and doesn't work. They do not reflect what makes mill building special, he said.

Nan Wile suggested the traffic study is flawed in not measuring July traffic and the sale is too large for the neighborhood. Sharon Gregory said the project was planned without regard to marketability. Market research is needed. Jana Vilner said the DEP did not do a good job of monitoring work on the site in the past. She said she was concerned about the project's size, and the loss of the neighborhood. She said she doesn't work Saturdays, and construction would interrupt her sleep or leisure. She suggested that if the market rate buildings are put up first, tenants wouldn't want to see/hear the other construction going on. David Magadini decried the lack of apartments for single people.

Mr. Doneski said the Zoning Board needs a critical piece of information before it can vote on the project; that is, a clarification letter from DHCD regarding the full mixed-use site. The letter on hand only endorses the affordable housing aspect. He said the ZBA has 180 days from the first hearing to make a decision.

Mr. Katz said he has issues with the completion timeline and the look of the buildings. Mr. Wise and Dr. Majdalany said the applicant will return with better realized plans for the board to react to. Mr. Hagberg said if only the affordable housing aspect is built, something will need to be done with the rest of the acreage. Mr. Klein said it will be fenced and seeded. Ms. Bouteiller suggested more affordable housing might go there. Mr. Geller said the DHCD will not built another project next to an existing one. An affordable housing project in Stockbridge came up. Mr. Bouteiller said there is an 80-foot wooded buffer between it and the wastewater treatment plant. Mr. Geller said there will be distance and trees here. He said the market rate units sold very quickly in Stockbridge.

On a motion by Mr. Wise, seconded by Ms. Ivory, the board voted unanimously to adjourn the hearing to Tuesday, March 22, at 7:30 p.m. at Town Hall.

Respectfully submitted

Bernard A. Drew

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