



DESIGN REVIEW BOARD

Meeting Minutes
November 30, 2020
5:30 PM
VIRTUAL MEETING

Present: Peter Darlow, (Chair), Holly Ben Joseph, David Honn, Richard Kelleher, Tom Doolittle, Dean Charter (BoS Liaison), Matt Murphy, Planning Department (Zoom Monitor)

1. Opening

Chair, Peter Darlow, opened the meeting at 5:30 pm and read the Covid 19 protocol procedures for Zoom meetings.

2. Regular Business

- A. Citizens' concerns – Leslie Bresnik, potential DRB member has an upcoming volunteer interview.
- B. Approval of Meeting Minutes – It was moved and seconded to approve the October 10, 2020 minutes. The minutes were approved unanimously.

3. Special Business

A. Presentation of 67 Powdermill Road

Proponents in attendance: Molly Obendorf, Stamski and McNary, and Sven Heistad, Boston Design Partners

This is a proposed mixed-use office and residential building located at the end of the Senior Center parking lot. Please refer to the DRB Project Review Memo of November 30, 2020.

B. Discussion of 22 Elm Street

No proponents in attendance. This is a proposed PCRC for 6 single family houses and adjacent common land. The DRB issued a DRB Project Review Memo dated November 30, 2020. Holly to re-issue the memo with additional comments regarding the excessive size of the proposed houses and the lack of 3D imaging drawings placing the proposed houses into their neighborhood context. Please refer to the DRB Project Review Memos of September 1, 2020 and November 30, 2020.



C. Discussion of Drive-up Windows in Acton

The Acton Planning Department is soliciting comments regarding a potential zoning change to allow more drive-up window facilities beyond those currently allowed for banks. The issue was discussed. The DRB was not in favor of this proposed zoning change. The DRB review memo of November 30, 2020 will be submitted to the Planning Department for their public meeting of December 10, 2020.

D. Tree Removal and Protection Guidelines

Recent activities and decisions regarding trees within Acton prompted a lengthy discussion regarding tree removal and protection guidelines. It was agreed that there are two separate issues to discuss regarding trees: Means and methods to protect existing trees along public streets and clear cutting of private properties to allow for construction activities. Dean Charter, being the retired tree warden, updated the DRB on tree issues and procedures and noted that:

- Ryan Hunt, the Tree Warden, reports to Corey York, Director of Public Works; Ryan is a relatively new Acton employee
- The BoS has been operating under dated guidelines from 1991; the guidelines need to be updated and codified; the BoS, given the Covid-19 and other pressing issues is apparently, moderately interested in these issues at this time;
- Historically, there have been disjointed, out-of-sequence efforts to protect public shade trees and impose fines; i.e. public shade tree hearings occurring after building permits have been awarded and construction activities commencing and no clear procedures for removal and/or damage violations;
- Dean has been involved in consulting work for tree removals for other towns, including Wellesley and Concord
- The committee Green Acton has apparently drafted some guidelines regarding public shade tree removal and violations.

It was agreed that the DRB should concentrate its immediate efforts on the public shade tree protection and violation issue as that issue is considered to be less controversial and actionable than a bylaw involving tree clear cutting on private properties. It was agreed to continue the tree discussion to a future DRB meeting.

4. **Adjournment**

A. At 7:35 p.m., it was moved and seconded to adjourn the meeting.



The motion was approved unanimously.

Documents and Exhibits Used During this Meeting

- Meeting Minutes from October 10, 2020
- New Mixed Use Property For 67 Powder Mill Road dated May 01, 2020 prepared by Boston Design Partners.

Page titles:

C-1 Cover Sheet

C-2 Notes Page

PR-1 Proposed Elevations 1

PR-2 Proposed Elevations 2

PR-3 Proposed Sub Basement and Basement PR-4 Proposed First Floor and Second Floor

Site Plan for 67 Powder Mill Road dated August 20, 2020 prepared by Stamski and McNary

- Page titles:

Sheet 1 Cover Sheet

Sheet 2 Existing Conditions Plan

Sheet 3 Grading & Drainage Plan

Sheet 4 Layout Plan

Sheet 5 Construction Details

Sheet 6 Erosion and Sedimentation Plan Sheet 7 Landscape Plan

- Page titles Site Plans dated November 6, 2020 The Residences at 22 Elm

C1.1 Master Plan

C1.3 Existing Conditions

C2.0 Site Development Plan

Respectfully submitted,

David Honn



TOWN OF ACTON
DESIGN REVIEW BOARD
Review Memorandum: 67 Powder Mill Road

November 30, 2020 Virtual Meeting

DRB Members in attendance: Peter Darlow (Chair), Holly Ben-Joseph, David Honn, Thomas Doolittle, Richard Keleher, and Dean Charter, (BOS Liaison)

Proponents in attendance: Molly Obendorf with Stamski and McNary, and Sven Heistad with Boston Design Partners

Documents Reviewed:

New Mixed Use Property For 67 Powder Mill Road dated May 01, 2020 prepared by Boston Design Partners.

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It is proposed by the project proponents to develop an approximate 6000SF four story mixed use building comprised of four 1100 to 1500SF residential units and one 800SF office suite. The building is to be located on a steeply sloped portion of a uniquely 'L' shaped site where only a modest upland level section of the

property is suitable for development. The buildable portion of the site is accessed from Sudbury Road via a right of way through a neighboring property's parking lot.

DRB comments regarding site work as proposed:

1. The area of the site to be cleared for construction of the building and associated parking and arrival is necessarily limited by the available buildable terrain. However, a significant portion of the hillside will be heavily altered to establish the large quantity of foundation and retaining walls that are proposed to be constructed. Little visual information is provided regarding retaining wall design, other than as noted in plan form. The DRB would like to see the detailing of the retaining walls given these will establish a very significant portion of the visual impact of this development. As well, many of the retaining walls, by code, will require 42" high safety railing systems, adding to their visual importance to the project.
2. Members questioned how a fire truck can turn around within the available paved area in front of the building entrance. Molly Obendorf explained that this should be feasible. DRB members asked for a graphic illustration.
3. Egress from the sub basement level residential unit will be via an exterior door out to a level area at the "bottom" of the developed hillside. DRB members would like to see how an egress stairway will be built into the hillside to bring the egress path up to the right of way to comply with the building code for ending a means of egress path at a public way.
4. Other than the level area outside of the residential building located at the subbasement, no other outside area has been set aside for the residents. Sven Heistad suggested some areas may be able to be established on the terraces between the retaining walls. This needs development. The DRB would like to see how this is developed.
5. The site will be accessed through the senior center's parking lot. The DRB wondered about the compatibility of using a parking lot, especially one for senior's, as a driveway for a multi-use building. In addition, the proposed location of the building puzzled the DRB since it not only has an awkward access, but that it is isolated from walkable amenities. The question is how much does Acton need this housing and if it is fulfilling a housing need.

DRB comments regarding the building design as proposed:

6. The four residential units and the office suite are individually entered from grade via five entrance porches. Three of the five porches are clustered at the center of the building facing the parking lot. The proponent wants the central entrance cluster to add some visual impact to the building that is otherwise proposed to be wrapped with conventional residential scaled clapboard and trim detailing, and thus has shown a brick veneered entrance appendage. DRB members recommended to stay true to the use of clapboards and trim detailing throughout but to enhance the entrance porch details with more refined column and railing systems and to use larger scaled trim throughout to offer a higher level of finish.
7. As noted above, the retaining walls flanking the proposed building will be an important visual of the total built environment. It is recommended by the DRB to utilize a guardrail detail on top of the walls that is consistent with railing detailing used at the entrance porches.

8. No windows are shown on either end of the 4 story building. The floor plan layouts will benefit from cross ventilation with windows on the ends and the building overall will feel more rich with windows on all sides.
9. Given the lack of ground level space for outdoor activities for residents of the property, DRB member David Honn suggested introducing cantilevered decks on the north facing side of the four story building which will offer some outdoor opportunity for the residential units on the upper floors as well as add significant visual improvement to the otherwise four floor high flat wall surface.

The DRB recommends the BOS consider as a condition of approval to have the project proponents return should the project be allowed to proceed given there is much design development of the site and building not yet established. What may be constructed will more than likely be quite different from what is currently being presented and therefore the DRB believes the town should be provided with an opportunity to fully understand the development prior to granting a permit to proceed.

Respectfully submitted,

The DRB



TOWN OF ACTON
DESIGN REVIEW BOARD
Review Memorandum: 22 Elm Street - Second Review
PCRC plans
November 30, 2020 Virtual Meeting

DRB Members in attendance: Peter Darlow (Chair), Holly Ben-Joseph, David Honn, Tom Doolittle, Richard Keleher, and Dean Charter, (BOS Liaison)

Proponents in attendance: None

Documents Reviewed:

Page titles Site Plans dated November 6, 2020

The Residences at 22 Elm

C1.1 Master Plan

C1.3 Existing Conditions

C2.0 Site Development Plan

In reviewing the November 6, 2020 submittal drawings, the DRB does not see any significant changes from the 9-08-2020 drawings. It appears none of the DRB's suggested changes in our last design memo were incorporated into the revised drawings. Therefore, the comments from the first review are still applicable, please refer to the attached first review.

The DRB would like to reiterate the following comments:

- The proposed PCRC development does not follow the intent of the PCRC bylaw since the land proposed to be preserved is wetlands, which would not be developable in a typical subdivision proposal. The PCRC as proposed doesn't provide any additional open-space protection than what would be allowed under sub-division regulations. The proponent, on the other hand, is gaining a benefit – a higher density development and therefore a greater profit. The PCRC development is showing 6 units, if not a PCRC then approximately 3 houses could fit into the area of the property that is suitable for building per standard subdivision setbacks, (which also should take into account the area required for a standard subdivision roadway and turn around), as per subdivision rules.
- A residential compound is allowed a maximum of 5 houses where a private common drive is allowed, (such as was approved for 46 High Street). The DRB doesn't understand why this project

be granted a waiver on this, especially since we think the massing is too dense and the houses are overscaled for the neighborhood.

- The PCRC bylaw states the development has to fit within the surrounding community, the proposed housing units appear to be 3,000 + SF which is substantially larger than the surrounding homes. In addition, the density is significantly higher. The massing and size of the units do not blend into the scale of the neighborhood.
- At this review, the DRB cannot support this proposal because we need more information. No floor plans or elevations have been provided, which is a key tool to evaluate the image of the project, and the impact on the surrounding community. The DRB requests that the proponent provide architectural plans and elevations and 3-D renderings of the proposed development, including the surrounding neighborhood. (3-D renderings are now a standard graphic tool used by architects and planners as is graphically placing a proposed development into an existing area).

Respectfully submitted,
The DRB



TOWN OF ACTON
DESIGN REVIEW BOARD
Review Memorandum: 22 Elm Street - *Revised*
PCRC plans
September 1, 2020 Virtual Meeting

Note: revised text in italics.

DRB Members in attendance: Peter Darlow (Chair), Holly Ben-Joseph, David Honn, and Dean Charter, (BOS Liaison), Robert Hummel Planning Department

Guests and potential members: Tom Doolittle, Richard Kelleher

Proponents in attendance: None

Documents Reviewed:

Page titles Site Plans dated June 15, 2020

The Residences at 22 Elm

1 of 10 Title Sheet

2 of 10 Master Plan

3 of 10 Record Plan

4 of 10 Natural Features & Existing Conditions Plan

5 of 10 Site Development Plan

The proponents are proposing to develop a planned conservation residential community at 22 Elm Street, currently a single family home with a horse corral at the front of the property along Elm Street. The rear of the property consists mainly of wetlands. A portion of the rear neighbor's lot was purchased in order to come into compliance of the PCRC regulations for percentage of upland vs wetland in the open space area. The plan is divided into three parcels – parcel C contains the residences, and parcel A and B contain the open space. The proposed plan has five new residences and the one existing residence. A new garage is proposed next to the existing residence. Access into the proposed public area is indicated to be at the terminus of Elm Court, a neighboring private drive. Some of the existing trees will remain, but other are not indicated on the plan, and some will be removed.

The DRB has the following comments:

1. The DRB questions how much the public will benefit from this project. The proposed open space is largely *unbuildable* wetlands and appears to be inaccessible. It is an island of land surrounded

by private property. In addition, no paths or boardwalks are shown within the open space on the plan- how could anyone with mobility issues use the space?

2. Regarding access into the proposed public space, the DRB questions accessing the open space through Elm Court a private drive as suggested on the plans. *The DRB understands that a PCRC's open space set aside requires access to a public way, in this case Elm Street. Elm Court is a private drive which fails to meet this PCRC requirement. Residents on a private drive should not be subjected to public use of their drive in order to satisfy an adjacent property owner's development proposal nor should the public be made to feel uncomfortable while attempting to access the open space. DRB members questioned if the Elm Court residents have agreed to this access or will they block it off in the future.*
3. The DRB suggests that if this project is accepted as a PCRC community, then access into the site should be ironclad. Therefore we recommend that access should be on the proposed development's land along the west property line behind the houses. This could be accomplished by:
 - a. Moving the road to the east, essentially following the existing driveway's alignment,
 - b. Moving the line of homes to the east, providing for more space at the back of the homes so that a path can be added along the property line from Elm Street into the open space.
4. The project is located adjacent to typical subdivision found throughout Acton, with single family homes on large parcels. The proposed development is significantly more dense and the DRB is concerned about the visual impact to the neighborhood. The DRB suggests that the front residence at Elm Street be facing Elm Street, so that it reflects the orientation of the rest of the homes on the street.
5. In addition to orientation of the front home, the DRB suggests other elements be added along the frontage to help blend this development into the existing neighborhood. Ornamental fencing and layers of landscaping are highly recommended.
6. The DRB would like to know what is planned for the existing row of mature evergreens on the east side of the property, between the driveway and the neighbor's fence. These are not shown on any of the documents. Will they remain?
7. The DRB is concerned that because of the density and the front garages, the streetscape will be overwhelmed by garage doors. The DRB recommends that driveways be placed to the sides of the homes and be shared, and to locate the garages on the sides of the buildings. This was successfully done on a similar development on River Street. Providing usable front porches in place of garages along the street promotes a sense of community.
8. The proposed new garage is placed in an awkward location and is on a diagonal to the rest of the buildings. It is also at the end of the siteline of the street, the DRB suggests moving it to the west side of the existing home, aligned with the existing building and planting a specimen tree in this location.
9. The DRB believes the proposed footprints of the buildings are over-sized for proposed lot sizes and suggests reducing them.

Respectfully submitted,
The DRB



DESIGN REVIEW BOARD

November 30, 2020

COMMENTS ON DRIVE-UP WINDOWS

To: Planning Department; Board of Selectman
From: Design Review Board (DRB)
Re: Comments for the December 8, 2020 Forum on Drive-Up Windows

At the Design Review Board's meeting on November 30, 2020 the proposed zoning change to allow drive-up windows was discussed. After review and discussion of photographs of multiple installations of drive-up windows the Design Review Board agreed that:

1. The Design Review Board believes that drive-up windows do not contribute to the desired character of the Town of Acton, as exemplified by the Complete Streets program and the Kelly's Corner project.
2. The DRB will not support a zoning change to allow drive-up windows for any businesses beyond the current exemption for banks.
3. The DRB believes that drive-up windows will fundamentally alter the physical character of Acton, are unnecessary, and will prove detrimental to Acton for the following reasons:

Additional drive-up windows are antithetical to the planning efforts over the past decade or so to promote a less vehicle-centric environment as exemplified by

the promotion of the Complete Streets Program emphasizing more walkable streets, bike lanes and public transit possibilities;

Zoning changes should not be instituted in times of uncertainty. Until the long-term effects of Covid-19 on the built environment can be determined, the DRB believes that efforts to effect a zoning change allowing drive-up windows to accommodate Covid-19 concerns is premature and should be paused.

The integration of drive-up windows into the building stock leads to a significant increase in space required for traffic management on project sites, results in a building developed as an island within an asphalt paved

car centric yard rather than a pedestrian friendly walkable town environment, and results in much more carbon waste and greenhouse emissions as cars queue in conflict with Acton's community goals for energy use reduction.

Additional vehicular curb cuts would undoubtedly be required for drive-up windows. Considerable time, effort and monies have been expended on, for instance, the Kelley's Corner project which was promulgated to the resident's as a future pedestrian friendly environment. Considerable sums are being expended to obtain ROW agreements that will eliminate curb cuts.

Additional curb cuts pose a safety hazard for pedestrians and slow down traffic flow.

As a practical matter, there isn't any need for drive-up windows as Covid-19 has accelerated the use of, and established the viability of, multiple pick-up and delivery options for prescriptions, food, liquor and goods of all kinds without the use of drive-up windows.

The DRB suggests exploring the use of WALK-UP windows as an alternative.

4. Should it come to pass that the Town does proceed with a zoning change for drive-up windows, the DRB would like to weigh in on the attributes that will be likely be associated with the development of drive-up facilities.

Respectfully submitted,

Design Review Board