

**MINUTES OF THE PROCEEDINGS OF THE
PLANNING BOARD OF THE CITY OF WORCESTER**

March 3, 2021

Pursuant to Governor Baker’s March 12, 2020 Order Suspending Certain Provisions of the Open Meeting Law, G.L. c. 30A, §18, and the Governor’s March 23, 2020 Order, as amended, imposing strict limitation on the number of people that may gather in one place, this meeting was conducted through remote participation. The meeting was livestreamed from the City of Worcester website and via the local cable access channel and is available for streaming online. Public participation was facilitated through a call-in number, 415-655-0001 (Access Code: 1601714991), which was publicized on the posted meeting agenda and during the video broadcast.

Planning Board Members Participating: Albert LaValley, Chair
Paul DePalo, Vice-Chair
Eleanor Gilmore, Clerk
Toni Molinari (departed at 7:00PM)
Edward Moynihan

Planning Board Members Not Participating: None

Staff present: Stephen Rolle, Division of Planning & Regulatory Services
Michelle Smith, Division of Planning & Regulatory Services
Marisa Lau, Division of Planning & Regulatory Services
Stephen Cary, Division of Planning & Regulatory Services
Jody Kennedy Valade, Inspectional Services Division
Jennifer Beaton, Law Department
Nicholas Lyford, Department of Public Works & Parks

Call to Order – Mr. LaValley called the meeting to order at 5:30pm.

Requests for Continuances, Extensions, Postponements, and Withdrawals

Postponements

1. **47R Fourth Street (PB-2020-072) - Special Permit – Cluster & Definitive Site Plan**
Request to Postpone the Public Hearing and Meeting to April 14, 2021
Extend the Constructive Grant Deadline to May 6, 2021
2. **1 Topsfield Road (aka Clarence Street) (PB-2021-002) – Definitive Site Plan**
Request to Postpone the Public Meeting to March 24, 2021
Extend the Constructive Grant Deadline to April 15, 2021

Withdrawals

3. **Narragansett Avenue (West of Steele Street) – 81G Street Opening (PB-2020-082)**
Request to Leave to Withdraw Without Prejudice

On a motion by Ms. Gilmore and seconded by Mr. DePalo, the Board voted 5-0 to approve the request for leave to withdraw without prejudice, and the requests for postponements for the above named applications.

New Business

4. 1 College Street (PB-2021-009)

a. Public Meeting - Definitive Site Plan

Ms. Smith provided an overview of the application. The plan proposes to reconfigure a portion of the parking area approved as part of the plan for the new performing arts center. Revised plans based on staff comments were received from applicant. Staff conditions listed in the memo relate to crosswalks, directional signage and markings, landscaping, and prefer to see median with stairs extended by 4' in width and to create a gentler slope but the applicant has concerns. A new condition was added to include trees in the western parking islands at the southern end. Lighting issues have been addressed.

Attorney Joshua Lee Smith presented on behalf of the applicant. He provided background on the arts center construction in the upper campus of Holy Cross, noting other facilities approved as part of that plan in 2018. The applicant seeks to enhance the circulation in the parking area (Lot A) and further beautify the planting area, particularly the large landscaped median known as Hogan Island. The proposed landscape plan was designed to provide a clear view of the art center as you approach. He explained that trees are not proposed for the western parking islands on the northern end of the parking area for that reason. He provided further detail on how the entrance to the arts center will be used for pick up/drop off by larger vehicles (buses, trucks) and why the proposed width of the one-way drive was appropriate. The drive was extended by 2' rather than 4', which staff confirmed would be acceptable. He described additional lighting on the site not proposed as part of this project.

Board Discussion

Mr. DePalo and Ms. Molinari had no comments.

Ms. Gilmore asked for confirmation of waivers in the staff memo. Mr. Smith confirmed.

Mr. Moynihan stated he was glad to see the conduit for charging stations on the plan and he hoped the university would lead by example in installation of working EV infrastructure. He asked whether the proposed trees to be relocated were new or replacement trees, and/or if a net loss of trees was proposed. Craig Miller, Project Engineer, clarified that those trees would replace two trees that are to be removed. He noted the project would increase the amount of green space on campus while improving pedestrian and vehicle accommodations in this area, among other benefits.

Mr. LaValley asked about the western parking islands (proposed to be striped) at the north end of the lot would affect sight lines as you enter the campus/lot. He stated that curbed islands would also be traffic calming devices as cars entered the lot. Mr. Miller gave more information on the intensity of use of this driveway and parking area, known as Lot A. He stated the proposed revisions to the approved plan were driven by the need to better organize traffic circulation on campus, and that the spirit and intent of the greenspace requirements in the Ordinance had been met, as well as nearly all landscaping requirements.

The convenience of striped islands for snow plowing is a secondary, but important benefit of the plan that the Board had previously approved.

Mr. LaValley stated he doesn't believe curbed islands would present problems for plowing and providing them would improve the plan in terms of safety and circulation.

Mr. Miller offered to add several additional trees to the landscape design but indicated the applicant respectfully disagreed in terms of plowing operations. Mr. LaValley indicated additional trees would be welcome of course.

Ms. Gilmore stated that she could not speak to the operational issues under discussion but noted that the striped parking islands could be easily missed by pedestrians or cars. She supported adding more trees.

Mr. Miller noted that the applicant does not want to lose sight of the objectives of the plan and that based on existing conditions and how the lot is currently used (going back many years), curbed islands are not needed for better parking circulation.

Ms. Smith summarized the staff conditions in the memo and how the Board could add to or amend those based on the discussion.

Mr. Moynihan supported curbed islands stating that students might know the parking area very well but visitors coming for conferences and performances would be using the lot. Curbing would help clearly delineate the parking spaces and drive aisles, prevent parking in striped areas, and improve pedestrian safety too. He suggested some low plantings and mulch in curbed islands on the northern end.

Ms. Gilmore expressed a preference to see the striped islands to be curbed and landscaped.

Mr. Smith emphasized that the applicant is seeking to amend the plan to enhance the overall project as well as this parking area, rather than settle for a lesser design. He stated the existing parking conditions have not posed any traffic safety problems to date and characterized the striped parking islands as a small request relative to the proposed improvements. He does not see any benefit to curbed islands in this area. He noted that staff had agreed to the proposed plan, which would provide two curbed islands with trees on the southern end.

Ms. Molinari stated that she supported the plan as proposed.

Mr. DePalo appreciated the conversation about additional landscaping and supported the plan, with the additional trees as noted by Mr. Miller and was in support of his colleagues comments.

Mr. Rolle added that the staff thinks one of the parking islands is too narrow for any curbing/plantings.

Mr. LaValley thanked everyone for their input and summarized members' preferences as stated.

Ms. Gilmore added that applicants appearing before the Board are subject to comments, questions and discussion points related to the proposed design. The Board does not exist to rubber stamp plans.

Mr. Moynihan added that it is the Board's duty to make inquiries and raise questions about the proposed plans. Board members are simply doing their job tonight as representatives of the community. He noted that the applicants' efforts on the project to date and as stewards of the campus is appreciated.

On a motion by Ms. Gilmore and seconded by Mr. DePalo, the Board voted 5-0 to approve the Definitive Site Plan with conditions of approval and grant waivers as noted in the DPRS staff memorandum.

5. 719 Southbridge Street (PB-2021-011)

a. Public Meeting – Definitive Site Plan

Ms. Smith presented an overview of the application. The site is in a residential zoning district. The existing car wash and gas station will be demolished; a new gas station with a 3,600 SF convenience store. The project received a special permit from the ZBA related to altering a number of privileged nonconformities. She emphasized several staff conditions in the memo, including a new pedestrian connection to Chelsea Street, removal of the existing fence along Chelsea, an alternate style fence along the northern property line abutting residential uses, and a revised photometric plan addressing spillover and overall lighting levels. After discussion with the applicant, staff would be comfortable with 30 footcandles (fc) as the maximum lighting level on site. The applicant has safety concerns related to several conditions that they will discuss in their presentation. She noted revisions to the landscape plan and the western entrance to the building on Southbridge Street had been made in response to staff comments.

Attorney Mark Borenstein presented on behalf of the applicant and introduced the project team. He stated the project will update a site with a 1980s gas station and improve the streetscape significantly. Site circulation will be improved through the consolidation of curb cuts on Southbridge and a new driveway on Crompton Street. A variety of other site improvements are proposed, including on EV space with charging station, bike racks, a new retaining wall with additional landscape screening along a residential street, improved drainage through new runoff treatment and infiltration, and new fencing. Pedestrian accommodations will be greatly improved through connections to the sidewalk on Southbridge Street and a new walkway extending the length of the storefront. The applicant does not believe a new connection from Chelsea Street will be safe given vehicular traffic at the gas pumps. Furthermore, the site has a history of robberies and providing that connection would also be a safety concern as a result. Similarly, the applicant's experience has shown that increased lighting is necessary for safety reasons but agrees to the 30 fc maximum. Photometric plan revisions will eliminate spillover onto the residential properties to the north (to the 0.5 fc level). He requested a pedestrian connection to Chelsea Street be removed from the conditions of approval.

Board Discussion

Ms. Gilmore stated that when opportunities to redevelop gas stations arise, despite her dislike of this type of infrastructure in general, she appreciates applicants' efforts to provide significant site improvements as in this case. She would support the removal of the new walkway condition.

Mr. Moynihan supported the plan as proposed with staff conditions, minus the walkway condition. He called out the EV space, the consolidated curb cuts, and the benefits of directing pedestrian traffic to the driveways.

Mr. LaValley asked the applicant about the feasibility of installing a new walkway further north on Chelsea Street, although grades might be too steep. Staff confirmed steep slopes would prevent that due to the need to make the walkway accessible.

Ms. Smith replied to Mr. Moynihan's question stating the Fire Dept. had approved the design for their emergency access vehicles.

On a motion by Ms. Gilmore and seconded by Mr. DePalo, the Board voted 4-0 (Ms. Molinari absent) to approve the Definitive Site Plan with conditions of approval as noted in the DPRS staff memorandum with the following changes:

1. Amend (1g) to: *Eliminate areas of glare onsite so that light levels do not exceed 30 fc.*
2. Strike (1b): *Provide a pedestrian connection to Chelsea Street in the southwestern corner of the site.*

6. Polar Park (aka 100 Madison Street) (PB-2021-015)

a. Public Meeting – Definitive Site Plan Amendment

Mr. Rolle provided an overview of the application. He introduced the project team from Bohler Engineering, Matt Mrva and Tim Hayes, and City Economic Development staff, Greg Ormsby and Tom Harvey. The purpose of this amendment is to memorialize minor design changes that occurred as construction of the ballpark progressed and provide an update to the Board on conditions of approval in the decision for the site plan application, most of which related to pedestrian accommodations particularly around entrances into the ballpark. He reviewed changes to the revised plan, noting that overall these better integrate the stadium into the existing urban fabric and support walkability in the area. The driveway width off of Madison Street was reduced by 5 feet as requested, allowing access for the oversized vehicles and emergency vehicles that will use the fire lane and small parking/loading area here. The striped parking area to support daily operations has minor compliance issues related to aisle width that will need to be resolved by the applicant in the final plan. Out-swing doors were relocated, with one exception, from Madison Street to a proposed plaza; these provide a significant benefit for event uses but will no longer open directly onto the sidewalk network. Plaza designs were improved to include hardscape areas and protected plantings for high-intensity use, as well as less formal planting areas with grass. Proposed trees have been incorporated into the plazas to provide substantial shade for pedestrians. Previous concerns about pedestrian access at Madison and Washington have been addressed through a much wider sidewalk (up to 2.5 times the original width that was proposed). Another pinch point starting at the center field entrance to the north of the stadium has also been redesigned with a wider sidewalk that continues along Summit Street. He asked Mr. Harvey to talk about the new design for the terraced area with vendors east of Summit Street (the street will be closed for game events).

Mr. Harvey, director of ballpark planning, described this area as akin to Jersey Street at Fenway Park in terms of being integrated with the ballpark operations. He gave examples of possible uses, including a refurbished diner, new public spaces with attractions such as a duck boat, cooking demonstrations, and a beer vendor. A service/mechanical area and ticket sales area is also anticipated.

Mr. Rolle went over the two photometric scenarios (event and non-event) provided in the application. Street lighting around the stadium will be sufficient and all lighting at the ballpark is highly programmable. He noted other documents had been updated, including the stormwater report and landscape plan, and

a new preliminary signing plan was included although the Ordinance does not regulate signage inside the facility.

Mr. Rolle ended by reviewing the conditions in the staff memo, highlighting the request for architectural plans for exterior signage when available. He shared photos from his recent tour of the stadium and described the great views of the city from the seating area.

Matt Mrva, Project Landscape Architect, presented on behalf of the applicant. To add to Mr. Rolle's summary, he noted they were requesting a waiver for interior landscaping requirement as applicable to the small parking area and thanked City staff for working with them on the project over the years.

Board Discussion

Ms. Gilmore, Mr. DePalo, and Mr. LaValley had no comments.

Mr. Moynihan appreciated the duck boat being incorporated into the site design as a sculpture piece, and noted that a trolley car or other similar Worcester memorabilia would be similarly welcome.

On a motion by Ms. Gilmore and seconded by Mr. DePalo, the Board voted 4-0 (Ms. Molinari absent) to approve the Definitive Site Plan amendment with conditions of approval and grant the waiver as noted in the DPRS memorandum.

Other Business

7. Approval Not Required (ANR) Plan(s)

- a. 857 Main Street & 19 Ripley Street (Public) (AN-2020-054)
- b. 4 Brighton Road (Public) (AN-2021-013)
- c. 86 & 88 King Philip Road (Public) (AN-2021-014)
- d. 10 & 12 Belisle Avenue (Private) (AN-2021-015)
- e. 25 Aphrop Street (Public) (AN-2021-016)

On a motion by Ms. Gilmore and seconded by Mr. DePalo, the Board voted 4-0 (Ms. Molinari absent) to endorse all ANRs.

8. Communication(s)

- a. Notice of a community outreach meeting regarding a proposed Adult Use Marijuana Product Manufacturer at 41 Fremont Street; from Cannabakeri LLC; received February 11, 2021
- b. Notice of a community outreach meeting regarding a proposed Adult Use Marijuana Delivery Operator at 76 Millbury Street; from Major Bloom, LLC; received February 19, 2021
- c. Invitation to the CMRPC's Quarterly Meeting on Best Practices on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in Planning (on 3/11/2021 at 7:30PM); from the CMRPC; received February 17, 2021.

There was no discussion by the Board.

9. Discussion of Board Policies and Procedures

a. Review of a draft application form for special permits to allow urban farms

Ms. Smith noted that the draft form is closely based on the site plan application and uses a new tabular format that might be easier to fill out. A prospective applicant has contacted staff, so the first application will likely be received soon.

Ms. Gilmore stated the form and updated format looked appropriate and complimented staff.

Mr. LaValley stated he is excited to get their first special permit for urban agriculture.

10. Approval of Minutes

On a motion by Ms. Gilmore and seconded by Mr. DePalo, the Board voted 4-0 (Ms. Molinari absent) to approve the minutes of 11/18/20, 12/09/20, 12/30/20, & 2/10/21.

Adjournment

On a motion by Ms. Gilmore and seconded by Mr. DePalo, the Board voted to adjourn at 7:36 pm.