

**City of Salem Massachusetts
Public Meeting Minutes**

Board or Committee:	Redevelopment Authority, Regular Meeting
Date and Time:	Wednesday, November 9, 2022, at 6:00 pm
Meeting Location:	Virtual Zoom Meeting
SRA Members Present:	David Guarino, Dean Rubin, Cynthia Nina-Soto
SRA Members Absent:	Chair Grace Napolitano, Christine Madore
Others Present:	Tom Daniel – Director of Planning and Community Development
Recorder:	Colleen Brewster

Regular Meeting

Executive Director's Report

Mr. Daniel stated:

1. The October events were successful for businesses and visitors from a public safety perspective; the City of Salem has a lot of experience managing events of this magnitude.
2. Destination Salem moved their office to the former Scratch Kitchen location at the ground floor of the South Harbor Parking Garage, and opened their visitor center, which has public restrooms, both of which are welcome additions.
3. The evaluations are on-going for determining the success of Destination Salem's events.
4. Ms. Newhall-Smith meets monthly with Salem Main Streets and the Chamber of Commerce to determine existing or upcoming storefront vacancies, such as the Army Barracks, Hallmark Dental, and Brix. An information sharing process has been set-up and is on-going.
5. Pop-up events at Old Town Hall had been managed by Culture House to determine programming that could be a good fit. It was a good way to introduce the building to people that hadn't been in it before. There will be a meeting to discuss their report the following week. Julie Barry, Senior Planner for Arts & Culture, has worked with Mills Whitaker Architectural firm to identify building systems improvements, such as heating, cooling, acoustic, or structural, to provide more flexibility within the building for increased and sustainable operations.

Projects in the Urban Renewal Area

1. **41 Lafayette Street:** Small Project Review – Review of Proposal and DRB Recommendation for the painting of a mural on Central Street façade of Barrio, continued from 10/12/22, request to continue to December 14, 2022.

Ms. Newhall-Smith stated that the owner requested a continuance to the next regular meeting, whose application still needs to be filed with the Public Art Commission (PAC). Mr. Rubin questioned that the applicant going before the DRB prior to the SRA seems out of order. Ms. Newhall-Smith replied that there is no set sequence for applicants to follow for murals, but the sequence could be on a case-by-case basis depending upon the order of the upcoming meetings.

Mr. Daniel stated that there was discussion on whether to paint the brick and that is for the SRA to say yes or no. The PAC will review the artistic execution of the mural.

VOTE: Nina-Soto made a motion to continue to the December 14, 2022, regular meeting.

Seconded by: Guarino.

Roll Call: Guarino, Nina-Soto, Rubin. 3-0 in favor.

2. **301 Essex Street:** Schematic Design Review – Erect a one-story addition above the existing building (known as Jerry’s Army & Navy Store) with ten (10) residential units and twelve (12) onsite parking spaces located inside the building at the first-floor rear with retail space fronting on Essex Street, continued from October 12, 2022.

Attorney Scott Grover of Tinti & Navins, PC, Michael Becker and Carissa Vitas (Owners), and Daniel Ricciarelli (Architect from Seger Architects) were present to discuss the project.

Atty. Grover stated that fundamental changes were made in their approach to redevelop the property before the SRA would consider it appropriate for the Urban Renewal District. Concerns expressed included: design features of the new addition, loss of retail space along Essex Street, and functionality of the parking spaces. A different design program has been developed including consulting with the Zoning Enforcement Officer, Thomas St. Pierre, about the parking requirements for units constructed in an existing building. The following major changes have been incorporated: height reduction of the addition from 3 to 1 story, reducing the number of units to 10 by creating townhouse style units, with the first level in the mezzanine level and the second floor in the new addition. By using the existing building, they were able to use the 1 to 1 parking ratio, which is allowed in the B5 district. The first-floor retail will still have access to the basement space for additional square footage. The reduction in massing and scale has eliminated the cantilever feature which was a concern of some of the Board members.

Mr. Ricciarelli stated that the previous proposal was for a 3-½ story addition on top of the existing building. There currently is an eclectic mix of 1 and 5 story buildings along Essex Street and their site is an anomaly as a 1-story building with an approximate 18-foot-9-inch-high parapet. They feel the current design deserves some massing. The lot is approximately 6,100 square-feet, mostly occupied by the building except for an alleyway between the building and the Salem Inn. The reduced scale now includes ten 2-story townhomes achieved through ‘inter-flooring’ i.e. adding a floor within the existing building envelope, and the top of the first story being level with the top of the parapet, with the second story of the townhome above. Twelve parking spaces have been added for a 1 to 1 ratio as required for an existing building. The entry door has been relocated from close to the corner to a centralized area for efficiency and Robert Griffin, engineer, will conduct a turning radius review. The reorientation also allowed for an increase in retail space, one of the SRA’s concerns, to almost 1,500 square-feet at ground level by relocating stairs and improving circulation. Private deck/terrace spaces at the parapet levels will be accessed by large sliding doors and the second floor of each unit will have 1 bedroom with 1-½ bathrooms. They are still considering upside down units with living spaces on the upper level and bedroom on the lower level. The existing roof will be removed, and a new interior atrium will be added to provide light within the units. Brick will be used on the upper façade, particularly along The Salem Inn. There is a lot of flexibility with ceiling heights and a lot of glass to let in plenty of natural light.

Mr. Becker stated that the review of the inefficiency of the L-shaped drive aisle and reduction of retail prompted the creation of the double loaded drive aisle and leaves space for bicycles. The changes left 1,500 square-feet at ground level and close to 6,000 square-feet in the basement, with the potential for a more open basement staircase. Thomas St. Pierre, the Zoning Enforcement Officer, agreed that the parking would be considered existing unit parking. The previous iteration with 10 units was not cost feasible on the Pro Forma based on the current cost of construction and interest rates. The lobby staircases are also more efficient and there is an exclusive staircase from the retail space to the basement, as well as a second egress leading to the common access to the garage. The garage drive aisle is wider than normal at the end to increase maneuverability since the end parking spots are close to the wall.

Mr. Guarino suggested only having 10 parking spaces rather than the 12 that are proposed for additional maneuverability. Mr. Becker replied that the parking could be reduced, they are technically overparked by 4 spaces, 2 on-site and 2 off-site. One parking spot could be given to the retail unit. Mr. Guarino noted that the Board received a letter from HSI that raised a general concern of reducing the project scale to 1 floor rather than 2 or 3, which seems to be a financial decision, but also the reduced scale massing not fitting within the neighborhood. Mr. Becker replied that he read HSI's letter, and this decision is financially motivated.

Ms. Nina-Soto stated that while she was disappointed with adding only one additional floor, overall, she was happy and sees the project as having potential to move forward. She would support increasing the budget to add two more units. Mr. Becker replied that the townhouse configuration eliminated the need for an elevator and adding another floor would mean reintroducing an elevator and a second means of egress. The current configuration also keeps all units within the existing building. He noted that they decided against adding one additional floor. Ms. Nina-Soto stated that from the exterior the building resembles three floors even though there are two, but it is aesthetically pleasing. She appreciated the glass, brick and fenestration working together.

Mr. Rubin stated that this is an iterative process which the applicant took to heart. They took a creative approach to fall within a one-to-one parking ratio for residential use and added more commercial space. The corner is a gateway and deserves massing, and Ms. Madore stated in an earlier meeting that this type of project is needed within the downtown district. The cantilever felt awkward, and they changed it, but he believed the massing is now too small and the addition resembles a top hat. He was in favor of the garage door moving closer to the corner and eliminating the long wall and agreed with the HSI's letter which stated that the current proposed size doesn't fit.

Mr. Daniel asked if the 8'-3" retail ceiling height could become the standard 9'-0" clear. Mr. Ricciarelli stated that they want to stay behind the parapet and considered different methods of construction to gain ceiling height at the retail floor. The depth of structures is an unknown at this time, however, they will strive to achieve a higher ceiling or include a coffered ceiling.

Mr. Daniel asked about the ceiling height of the retail in relation to the exterior. Mr. Ricciarelli replied at the mullion where the panel meets the glass.

Mr. Daniel stated that the parking approach works better and makes more sense, appreciated the reconfigured retail space that offered more square footage for potential tenants, noted that the building has been a 1 story building for more than 100 years and raised concern with how the addition would interact with the adjoining properties.

Public Comment:

Ms. Newhall-Smith stated that she received a letter from HSI dated November 16, 2022.

Emily Udy, HSI. Appreciated Mr. Guarino's summary of HSI's letter. While the changes to the parking and the retail and unit layout are elegant and simplify the internal workings do so at the loss of the urban scale of the building. Ms. Udy also made the following comments:

- a. Raise the ceiling height at the retail space and the units to add some space to each level.
- b. The mezzanine doesn't need to be fully hidden by the existing parapet or to have a parapet at the top of the building.
- c. An increase in massing would be an advantage.
- d. The design went from a well-designed exterior and an overly complicated interior to a well design interior and an exterior design that they look forward to seeing progress, particularly along Essex Street.

No one else in the assembly wished to speak.

Mr. Becker stated that they are looking at rents and construction costs, and additional structures are not cheap to reconfigure. He asked how the Board felt about that kind of density on the site. Mr. Rubin replied that he is not objecting to added density, only increasing the ceiling heights to create higher ceilings. Mr. Becker asked if any new floors were encouraged. Ms. Nina-Soto noted her desired for one additional floor. Mr. Ricciarelli stated that they can ask the building inspector about raising the ceiling heights to increase massing, which is a great suggestion. Ms. Nina-Soto emphasized the replication of the parapet height and to marry the new construction to the existing building.

VOTE: Guarino motion to recommend it to the DRB noting their comments made. Nina-Soto – second. Roll Call: Guarino, Nina-Soto, and Rubin. 3-0 in favor.

Ms. Newhall-Smith stated that the DRB is meeting one week early due to the Thanksgiving holiday and asked if the applicant could review the design of the ceiling heights prior to that meeting. Mr. Becker agreed and noted that the new floor plan has 1,500 SF retail in a better configuration.

3. **23 Summer Street:** Request for review of proposed changes to approved elevation plans. Proposed changes include the removal of two ground floor windows on the East elevation, the removal of a third-floor balcony on the East elevation, and the removal of two ground floor windows on the South elevation.

Michael Becker and Charissa Vitas (Owners) were present to discuss the project.

Mr. Becker stated that they are proposing to remove ground-floor windows on the east façade that would allow headlights to shine through to the future neighboring building, and to remove the

middle balcony that would provide a direct line of sight into a bedroom, also at the proposed neighboring building. The windows along North Street won't impact anything and can remain.

Mr. Rubin stated that the proposed elimination of windows created an imbalance on the building. Mr. Becker replied that a future structure will be proposed at 27 Summer that would obscure the view of the building being designed by Seger Architects, which he has an ownership stake in. Mr. Rubin noted that the Board cannot plan on future changes that haven't been approved and suggested the applicant return later with a proposed plan. He asked why a balcony providing outdoor space was being suggested. Mr. Becker replied that is the second balcony.

Ms. Newhall-Smith asked if there were any interior changes. Mr. Becker replied nothing at the parking level, the windows on the driveway side would provide light but they don't want windows facing the neighboring parking lot.

Ms. Nina-Soto agreed with Mr. Rubin's comments and noted that eliminating windows takes away the balance and suggested two windows be added on the second floor to maintain balance. Mr. Guarino and Mr. Daniel agreed with the comments facing Norman Street.

Mr. Becker noted that the project is funded and ready to proceed.

Ms. Newhall-Smith stated that all changes must go before the DRB for review, and that can occur at their next meeting. Mr. Becker will review changes with the architect Tom Mayo and adjust all windows to ensure they are aligned.

Public Comment:

No one in the assembly wished to speak.

Mr. Daniel stated that they want the project to return to the SRA since the scope of work is also a PB matter. Mr. Becker raised concerns that waiting until the December 14, 2022 regular meeting could affect their timeline. Mr. Rubin noted that there is a small chance the PB would have an issue with the proposed changes.

VOTE: Guarino made a motion to refer the project to the DRB with SRA comments. Nina-Soto seconded the motion.

Roll Call: Guarino, Nina-Soto, Rubin. 3-0 in favor

New / Old Business

Redevelopment of the Historic Courthouses and the Crescent Lot: Update on Project Status

Mr. Daniel stated that the Crescent Lot project went before the Conservation Commission and will go before the DRB and PB next week. Winn submitted their application for DCAMM in October which is required for a January application for financing and a PB decision will be needed before January. Winn has been looking for a group to work with on the non-residential spaces, and conversation have continued with Urban Smart Growth, that will meet with the SRA and community members in the future. They secured \$600,000 from MassDevelopment to support the courthouse project for predevelopment expenses. A P&S has been executed with the MBTA to move forward with closing.

Mr. Rubin asked what role Urban Smart Growth will play. Mr. Daniel replied that Winn always envisioned a partner responsible for the commercial space, like a condo owner that owns the non-res component. They are seeking the right fit in a commercial partner with adaptive reuse projects

experience for a mixture of tenants to activate the spaces that will align with the goals, although Winn would be a controlling entity.

Mr. Rubin requested a crescent lot update. Ms. Newhall-Smith replied that the design team is still before the DRB, and next week will be their third visit for this phase. The architect and landscape architect have been very open and welcoming of comments to plug in changes and there have been no large changes, only tweaks to address concerns of the board and public. She believed they are close enough that it could be approved next week, and materials boards are available to view in the City Hall Annex. Mr. Rubin asked if the design team was being asked to blend two different designs and create a hybrid design. Ms. Newhall-Smith replied that the hybrid design seems to have met with the DRB's approval and those drawings can be found in the November 16, 2022, DRB folder.

SRA Financials:

Mr. Rubin asked if Matt Zahler was still active in the process. Mr. Daniel replied that Mr. Zahler meets regularly with the Planning Department. Ms. Newhall-Smith added that while Mr. Zahler doesn't invoice regularly, they see him in the Planning Department weekly. She also noted the jump in banking interest rate on the account.

Approval of Minutes

1. Review of July 13, 2022, Regular Meeting Minutes

VOTE: Nina-Soto made a motion to adjourn the regular meeting. Seconded by: Guarino.
Roll Call: Guarino, Nina-Soto, Rubin. 3-0 in favor

2. Review of August 10, 2022, Regular Meeting Minutes

VOTE: Guarino made a motion to adjourn the regular meeting. Seconded by: Nina-Soto.
Roll Call: Guarino, Nina-Soto, Rubin. 3-0 in favor

3. Review of September 14, 2022, Regular Meeting Minutes

VOTE: Nina-Soto made a motion to adjourn the regular meeting. Seconded by: Guarino.
Roll Call: Guarino, Nina-Soto, Rubin. 3-0 in favor

4. Review of October 12, 2022, Regular Meeting Minutes

Continued to the December 14, 2022, regular meeting.

Other

Adjournment

VOTE: Guarino made a motion to adjourn the regular meeting. Seconded by: Nina-Soto.
Roll Call: Guarino, Nina-Soto, Rubin. 3-0 in favor

The annual meeting adjourned at 6:45PM.

Know your rights under the Open Meeting Law M.G.L. c. 39 §23B and City Ordinance Sections 2-028 through 2-2033