

**City of Salem Massachusetts
Public Meeting Minutes**

Board or Committee: Design Review Board, Regular Meeting
Date and Time: Wednesday, August 26, 2015 at 6:00pm
Meeting Location: Third Floor Conference Room, 120 Washington Street
Members Present: Paul Durand, Glenn Kennedy, David Jaquith,
Christopher Dynia, Ernest DeMaio, Helen Sides and J.
Michael Sullivan

Members Absent:
Others Present: Andrew Shapiro, Economic Development Planner
Recorder: Andrew Shapiro

Paul Durand calls the meeting to order.

Urban Renewal Area Projects Under Review

1. 281 Essex Street (Caramel): Discussion of proposed installation of signage

*Glenn Kennedy was not present at the time of this discussion.

The proposal before the DRB included a sign permit application, photos showing both the existing conditions of the building and imagery with the proposed signage, and designs. Jean Phillipe and Dmitri Vallier were present on behalf of Caramel

Jaquith, Sides, and Durand all commented that they liked the proposal.

Jaquith: Motion to recommend approval of the signage as submitted.
Seconded by: Sides, Passes 6-0.

2. 140 Washington Street (Aurora): Discussion of proposed installation of signage

*At this point Glenn Kennedy arrived and joined the discussion.

The proposal before the DRB included a sign permit application, photos showing both the existing conditions of the building and imagery with the proposed signage, and designs. Trang Tran and Tom Carroll were present on behalf of Aurora.

Sides asked whether the letters are three dimensional.

Carroll responded noting that they are raised one half of an inch.

Sullivan asked whether all of the signs are the same dimension.

Carroll explained that the two side panels are smaller dimensions.

Dynia commented that it would be preferable to have all the text on each sign be the same height. Sullivan agreed noting that the lettering also seemed crowded.

DeMaio commented that he was under the impression that the landlord had a restriction on what style of typeface should be used for the building signage.

Shapiro explained that at least two of the tenants in the building use uniform black typeface, but that the recently approved signage for Hauswitch deviated slightly from those signs. Shapiro then asked Carroll whether the property owner signed off on the proposed signage. Carroll responded noting that he had.

Durand commented that due to the crowding of the letters, the readability suffers. He suggested reducing the size of the letters to: 16" for capital letters, and 12" for lower case. This should be a uniform dimension for all the signs. Those proportions would fit in better with surrounding signs as well.

DeMaio agreed with Durand's comments, and noted that many signs in the immediate area are not as large as what was originally being proposed. The reduced size would be more in scale with surrounding signs.

Carroll agreed that the proposed reduced dimensions could be accomplished.

Durand: Motion to recommend approval of signage conditional upon typeface being reduced to 16" capital letters and 12" lower case letters, and for all three building signs to be the same dimensions. The sign on the glass shall be the same font as shown on the building.

Seconded by: Jaquith, Passes 7-0.

3. 283 Rear Derby Street (Notch Brewing): Discussion of proposed façade/building improvements (small project review), outdoor seating area, and signage

*Paul Durand recused himself from hearing this item and left the room. David Jaquith assumed the position of Chairman.

The proposal before the Board included a comprehensive package of information related to proposed façade/building improvements, outdoor seating, and signage. Photos of the existing building as well as graphical representations of proposed improvements were shown. The package also included designs, drawings, floor plans, and elevations. The applicant also showed a detailed PowerPoint presentation during the meeting. Mark Meche and Annette Popp of Winter Street Architects, and Chris Lohring of Notch Brewing were present.

Meche began by showing a presentation that he had prepared. The site was shown. It is located off of Derby Street in the same building as Brothers Taverna and faces what once was the Grapevine Restaurant. He explained what they anticipated to be the local permitting process for approval of the overall project.

Meche then showed some photos of the existing building and the businesses that are currently present there. He showed a photo of a beer garden in Brooklyn; a style and atmosphere that the applicant is trying to achieve with this project.

Meche explained that their project would repair and adaptively reuse the building, and not necessarily change anything. Existing openings would be restored to their original condition, new windows and doors would be installed, new lighting will be installed, and masonry will be repaired.

Meche showed a floorplan and explained where brewery functions would be distinct from the tap room, which represents 33 percent of the building. An outdoor beer garden concept was shown. It will take up two existing parking spaces and will be enclosed with a fence. Communal wood benches will be provided with umbrellas and lighting.

Meche then showed two schemes/options for signage. "Tap Room" and "Brewery" are proposed as painted directly on the building's brick façade. He showed examples of breweries in different parts of the country that display prominent signs that breach the roofline.

Meche explained that when calculating the amount of allowable signage they could have, they considered the South River elevation as a "frontage" that would count toward their signage allowance. At present the Department of Planning and Community Development had indicated that only the front elevation should be considered. Meche noted that there would be a degree of flexibility if less signage were to be allowed.

Meche noted that one of the proposed options calls for signage above the roofline but understands that the sign ordinance does not allow for it. He explained that they would be willing to seek a variance for this. Another option would have the primary signs below the roofline and affixed flush to the building. He ran through all of the signage proposed for both the front and South River elevations. A placeholder for seasonal banners was shown and proposed.

Meche emphasized that they are seeking approval for general building improvements but understand that more detail and clarity is needed for signage, and therefore, the applicant is willing to return to discuss those details at a future date.

DeMaio questioned the status of a plan for the South River Harborwalk to be completed behind the building because he had not seen it addressed.

Meche expressed that it would not be part of this project but that any walkway would need to extend around, and perhaps be cantilevered, behind the outdoor seating area. This is because the seating, due to state regulations regarding serving alcohol outdoors, needs to be continuous with the building.

Shapiro explained that the harborwalk development is tied to new construction that requires Chapter 91 permitting; he expressed uncertainty as to whether this project triggers that requirement.

DeMaio emphasized that no approvals for this project should impede progress in building out the harborwalk. Shapiro agreed.

DeMaio asked for any detail regarding rooftop mechanical elements.

Meche explained that those issues have not fully developed. Mechanical elements would not be large or too obtrusive. Breweries tend to have stacks and chimneys and this project would certainly incorporate those elements. Screening would be easily achievable.

Chris Lohring noted that there would also be a glycol chiller on the roof with a roughly 300 gallon reservoir, but that it would most likely be installed on the end of the roof furthest from the front elevation and would be difficult to see, if at all, from the front. A compressor for a walk-in cooler would be installed in the middle of the roof.

Sides expressed that she is very excited by this project and that this is an ideal location to draw people. This is a wonderful use of industrial space and there is so much going for this project. I like the roof mounted sign but I understand the limitations. People may be worried about others requesting to be able to mount signs to their roofs, but we're not always going to approve them. The location being set back such as it is provides a good reason for the roof top sign. Graphically the signage is very strong and exciting.

DeMaio seconded Sides' comments and noted that he strongly prefers "option A" in terms of signage. This would add a lot of character to the site. The amount of signage does not seem overwhelming.

Sides inquired about the issue concerning how signage is being calculated.

Shapiro explained that the amount of signage one may have is determined by the space's linear frontage. At this time the Planning Department would only be counting the linear frontage facing the parking lot, but the applicant has expressed an interest in having the South River elevation also counted. The South River does not have a road with which to be considered a frontage. Shapiro noted that the Zoning Enforcement Officer would be the ultimate arbiter of what would be appropriate and allowable by-right.

Sides noted that it would be important for the South River elevation to be addressed in terms of visibility.

Jaquith expressed that he agrees with Sides and that because the space is off of the main road, it needs an identity that can be shown on the roof.

Sullivan said that he feels that rooftop signage may be easily seen from Congress Street, but perhaps not from Derby Street. Lighting will be an important element to address this issue. He also expressed a preference toward option A for signage.

Dynia noted that he agreed with comments that others had made.

Kennedy noted that when the experience is right, people will find the business, regardless of signage. He agrees with option A. In order for the roof sign to work, it will need to have thickness; 10 inches at least. The sign could be lighted from below.

Kennedy noted that he likes the proposed improvements. He likes the tap room and brewery signs above the doors as shown in option A. The banners should not be too big and could be lit – they can draw interest from Derby Street. He noted that execution for the rooftop signs is key, and that perhaps a second roof sign could be added to create a cornered effect.

Sides agreed with Kennedy that the corner of the building could be strengthened with two roof signs and that it would not matter that they would not necessarily relate to the entrance of the building.

Meche noted that they were considering a halo-lit scheme for the roof signage as well.

Kennedy asked about the material to be used for the ground of the outdoor seating area.

Lohring explained that it would be an ADA compliant crushed granite, that is typical of many beer gardens to accommodate for spillage.

Jaquith opened the meeting to public comments.

Polly Wilbert of 7 Cedar Street expressed concern over the roof sign, noting that applicants along Canal Street have requested similar signs. If this sign were to be approved, it could set an unwanted precedent. It's not appropriate in a lot of places. She questioned if it would in fact be viewable from many places.

Jaquith noted that the DRB does not use the word precedent and does not consider it because each project is considered on a case by case basis.

Kennedy noted that precedent is a legitimate concern and that he has seen a-frame signs, for instance, not executed well.

Jeff Bellin of 396 Essex Street commented that this seems like a great use of the space and that he likes the look of the above the roof sign. It seems tasteful and is a nod to an industrial look.

Heather Famico of 195 Essex Street and Ward 2 City Councillor expressed support for the outdoor seating area and the roof sign.

Kennedy noted that the Board would need to see a final proposed plan for signage, the umbrellas for the patio, the fence, and the mechanical elements for the roof.

Kennedy: Motion to recommend approval of building/facade improvements and outdoor seating area; continuation of signage; conditional upon future approval of final plan for signage, lighting, umbrellas, fencing, and rooftop mechanical elements and screening. Seconded by: Sides, Passes 7-0.

4. 44 Boston Street and 401 Bridge Street (Gateway Center): Discussion of proposed mixed-use residential and retail development with City's Community Life Center

*Paul Durand returned to the meeting and resumed as Chair.

The submission under review included a full set of plans with elevations, floor plans, and perspectives showing both the proposed Community Life Center (CLC) and mixed-use residential and retail building proposed for the site. A PowerPoint presentation was shown.

Harry Gunderson, architect in charge of the design of the CLC began. He introduced the rest of the project team, including landscape architect Blair Hines, Chris Semmelink of "The Architectural Team," (TAT) which is in charge of designing the mixed use building, Attorney Joseph Correnti, and developer David Sweetser.

Gundersen explained that a previous project had been permitted in the past and showed a schedule of anticipated permits that the applicant would seek. He showed the site, which is at the corner of Bridge and Boston Street. He then showed a site plan for the previously approved project, which showed one large building pushed to the corner of the site. He explained that the site is being treated very much the same as the previous one, but now the CLC was a standalone building and a new mixed-use building would occupy the corner of the site.

The previous project had a 138,000 square foot building, four stories, 58 feet high, and 374 parking spaces. The new project has a separate 20,000 sq/ft CLC building, which would be two stories. The new multi-family building would be a little over 162,000 sq/ft and five stories high. It would have 117 units and 298 parking spaces.

Landscape Architect Blair Hines explained that there were no changes to the buffer in the back of the site and that a generous supply of trees is provided for the parking area.

There is pedestrian plaza at the mixed-use building, which provides access to both Boston and Bridge Street and the residential area and parking area.

Architect Chris Semmelink of TAT explained that an effort was made to create a street edge and a strong corner at Bridge and Boston Street. He showed floor plans for the mixed-use building, as well as elevations. The building will have a steel-framed podium with a wood frame on top. There would be brick elements for the retail component on Boston Street and a vertical metal referencing the past industrial nature of the site. There will also be wooden clapboards used throughout the building.

Gundersen explained that the project team worked with a committee designated by the City on the design of the interior of the CLC. He showed floor plans for the CLC and explained uses of various rooms and space. The first floor would be communal and also have offices for Parks and Rec as well as Council on Aging. It would have a great room. The second floor would focus on programming space. It is anticipated that the building will have a steel frame with interior exposed ductwork. Board and batten would be used on the upper story of the building, with clapboards on the lower level. There will be outdoor gathering spaces with landscaping elements.

Shapiro then noted that the Board received two letters in response to the project; one from the Federal Street Neighborhood Association and the other from Nina Cohen and Gary Kinley, residents of Chestnut Street. He explained that the Board had been provided these letters ahead of the meeting and had the opportunity to review them.

Durand then opened the meeting to public comment.

Dana Endres of 166 Federal Street commented that it seems that one industrial building is being replaced with what looks to be somewhat industrial in look and feel. There is a lot of parking on-site. Historic character needs to be considered. Something more majestic or that has a Federal style look to it would be more appropriate for the site. Perhaps a building could serve as a parking garage in order to eliminate some of the surface parking, which would enable more of the site to be used as green space.

Jeff Bellin of 396 Essex Street expressed that the CLC looks like a 1970s era structure. He expressed a preference to see a style of architecture more referential to the historic district in the immediate area. He also noted that seniors may have a difficult time navigating all of the surface parking to get to the retail area on the other side of the site.

Emily Udy of Historic Salem Inc. expressed that the design review process is premature given that many issues must be resolved at other boards, which may in turn, could change the project in some ways. She also expressed an opinion that the project does not meet the standards set forth in the North River Canal Corridor Master Plan. The buildings do not relate to the historic context and do not create a village like neighborhood. She noted that the CLC seems to lack a civic presence. She expressed an appreciation for the architectural character of the residential building but questioned whether it suits the surrounding context.

Polly Wilbert of 7 Cedar Street expressed support of the prior comments coming from members of the public. She asked the Board to think hard about how the site functions. The senior center also supports activities by other age groups. There does not seem to be a lot of safety for pedestrians given the large surface parking lot, especially in the winter. She expressed a desire to see the CLC oriented toward Boston as opposed to Bridge Street. She questioned whether there is enough snow storage on site. She expressed a concern about the potential for a liquor license to be granted somewhere on site and whether that would mesh well with a community use like the CLC.

Nina Cohen of 22 Chestnut Street noted that she felt that the design was not yet ripe for review. She noted that the developer does not have the right to the variances that were granted in 2010, although he thinks that he does. What was granted before was for a commercial building, but the use has now changed to residential.

Jeff Millar commented that the residential building seems like effort was put into making it seem interesting, whereas the CLC building lacks interest and seems “cookie cutter.” He noted that there is a great room in the CLC but no apparent windows for it. The mass of the two buildings are completely incongruous, but it is difficult to say whether that issue can be corrected.

Polly Wilbert commented again, noting that the landscaped buffer zone should be activated with play equipment or other uses for people to utilize.

Heather Famico, Ward 2 City Councillor, compelled the Board to work with the design team to make the project more interesting. We need to make sure that the site has more green space.

Durand then asked Board members to provide comments.

David Jaquith:

- The residential building – I like that it has an element on the end of it (the tower piece), but it isn’t truly a tower. It needs some work.
- The linkage between the two residential/retail buildings needs some work. The best thing that could happen is that the building is reduced by one whole floor. There is no basis for having five stories, for a residential building along Boston Street. This revision would help with the issue of scale between the residential building and the Community Life Center.
- The CLC building needs to start over from scratch. It looks too industrial, or as one member of the public put it: a nineteen sixties era school.
- All the windows are the same, yet the uses behind the windows are not all the same.
- The CLC windows are 5 feet squared. If they are operable, some people will have difficulty pushing them open.
- The café portion of the CLC should work with both the inside and the outside.

- There should be more bringing of inside and outside features around the entire building. One should have a better sense of what's going on both inside and outside of the building. The landscape has to work better in this respect.
- I don't know if the building can be moved within the site or not. There is an issue of isolation.

Helen Sides:

- Disappointed in the loss of a much nicer project. The former corner piece was far superior to what is being presented now.
- The tower is silly looking. It doesn't belong with the rest of the building. It's not successful.
- The plaza is a nice gesture but it's just there because you need it to be there.
- There is a sea of parking without anywhere for people to go, which is very different than parking area that would have been a commercial building, with people coming and going, and no parked cars at night. There's a lot of asphalt.
- I am disturbed by the repetitive square windows for the CLC. There are far more creative ways to handle windows, such as ribbon windows.
- If you want a building to appear contemporary, then use different materials, not clapboard. Those are cheap gestures to make it look like it's in an old neighborhood. It's not successful.
- Scale is always going to be an issue now that the CLC has been separated from the residential building. I'm not sure anything can be done to make them go together.

Christopher Dynia:

- The biggest thing to focus on is the scale. The tower is pushing almost 80 ft. The middle section of the building is almost 70 ft.
- It will be difficult for natural light to penetrate the plaza area as it's currently designed. It will feel like you're in a tunnel. Get more light, air, and openness into that space.

Ernest DeMaio:

- There is a perception with the way the buildings are organized now that Bridge Street is the backside of the project. I think moving forward, Bridge Street needs to be looked at as being a future of the NRCC, and how we make that more welcoming.
- There is an uninteresting repetitive sameness of the residential building, and that is representative of the materials, which are a significant downgrade from the prior approved project.
- Every window is repeated hundreds of times.
- I agree with comments recommending that the CLC should be closer to Boston Street.
- The scale of the elements of the CLC don't seem to make sense.

J. Michael Sullivan:

- I appreciate the notion of trying to create a community, but I don't think it's been successful – there is too much asphalt on the property.
- How did we arrive at 296 spaces? I question if that is necessary.

Paul Durand:

- I caution about stylistic intent. I'm all for using high quality materials that were used more frequently in the past, but I also realize that using those materials comes at a high cost and can derail a project.
- I am more focused on scale and how the buildings will fit in. The former site plan for the commercial building fit that site plan very well, but the current uses do not seem to fit this presented site plan well.
- I am disappointed that the CLC is separate. There is a jarring scale discrepancy between the two buildings.
- I would have probably had the residential uses situated along Bridge Street, closer to the train station.
- I would have put the CLC toward Boston Street.
- The windows are repetitive. They don't seem to reflect what's actually going on inside the CLC.
- The tower looks like a typical suburban gesture to look historic, but it fails.

Durand: Motion to continue,
Seconded by: Jaquith, Passes 7-0.

Minutes

Approval of the minutes from the July 22, 2015 regular meeting.

Jaquith requested that the minutes be considered at the next meeting in order to allow more time to review them.

Durand: Motion to continue.
Seconded by: Jaquith, Passes 7-0.

Adjournment

Durand: Motion to adjourn,
Seconded by Sides. Passes 7-0.

Meeting is adjourned at 8:38 pm.