



TOWN OF WINCHESTER

Design Review Committee
Town Hall, Winchester, Massachusetts 01890

Juli Riemenschneider, RLA, ASLA, Chair

Ellen Spencer, Vice Chair

Adrian LeBuffe, LEED

Eileen Casciari, RA

Mary Grassi

Tracy Burhans

Jamie Devol, AIA

MEETING MINUTES

Wednesday, February 2, 2022, 7:30 pm - Meeting by Zoom

Present:, Riemenschneider, Spencer, Devol, LeBuffe, Burhans, Casciari, Grassi,
Recording Secretary Nancy Upper

- 1. Open meeting. Vote to approve January 5, 2022, minutes** - All in favor.
- 2. Aberjona Initiative Update for Conservation Commission (Con Com).**
Guest presenters: REED PUGH, Designer and Horticulturalist; ANN STORER, Climate Action Committee member.

The Aberjona Initiative is a sub-working-group of the Conservation Commission. Its two goals are to:

Restore a healthy, sustainable, beautiful, native habitat along the banks of
Winchester's downtown waterways.

Provide a foundation for:

- Cultural displays and events
 - Resident and visitor enjoyment
 - Commercial and business events
 - Town gatherings
- a. Aberjona Initiative Plan:
 - i. Restore visual access to downtown waterways.
 - ii. Add native and attractive plantings to waterways' banks.
 - iii. Create opportunities to involve other groups, such as Wright-Locke Farm and the Winchester Garden Club.
 - b. The Initiative's area of focus extends from the end of Judkins Pond at the High School, through Mill Pond and the Center Falls Dam, to Waterfield Street.

- c. The Initiative's area of immediate focus is Mill Pond between the Mt. Vernon and Main Street bridges.

Said Reed Pugh, "Mill Pond was intended to be the heartbeat in the center of Town."

- d. Accomplishments since 2018:

- i. Trimmed overgrown yews.
- ii. Removed an "immense amount" of biomass and invasive annuals.
- iii. Limited the use of herbicides.
- iv. To pay for the work, used \$40,000 of the Initiative's own funds.

- The Town has no budget for the Aberjona Initiative.
- Initiative members will ask the Town for revenue to complete the project since it benefits residents, visitors, and Town prosperity.

- e. Reed Pugh asked us to "Paint a Picture" in our minds of how a future downtown Winchester might look. Imagine:

- An improved Converse Street bridge.
- A boardwalk built over the dirt path that skirts the southeastern side of Mill Pond.
- Tiers of amphitheater seating on the hillside behind the library.
- All four sides of Mill Pond made accessible and beautiful.
- Pugh said that the Cultural Council, Select Board, and other Town councils, boards, commissions, and committees all have good ideas.

- f. In sum, the Aberjona Initiative ensures the beautification and revitalization of downtown Winchester by, in Pugh's words, "Smart Intent rather than random development."

DRC comments:

- a. You have our complete support.
- b. We will help you with this project in every way we can.
- c. We suggest you submit a proposal to the Capitol Planning Committee to secure funding.

3. **Petition 3954 - 14-16 Oak Street, Winchester MA**

Guest presenters: LARRY MURRAY, Attorney at Murray & Quill, P.C. representing Mr. and Mrs. Kevin O'Donnell; KEVIN O'DONNELL, owner of the 14-16 property and house; BETH STECCHI, the O'Donnells' daughter.

- a. Larry Murray spoke on behalf of his clients Mr. and Mrs. Kevin O'Donnell.
 - The O'Donnells have owned this property for more than 45 years.
 - The existing house is a duplex that, over the years, has suffered extensive termite damage.

- The O'Donnells wish to demolish the house and build a new, larger duplex, so their daughter Beth Stecchi, her husband, and the Stecchi's daughter (O'Donnell's granddaughter), can live close to each other.
 - Mr. Murray noted that the Historical Commission viewed plans for the new dwelling and gave "high marks" to how the proposed design would fit into the character of the neighborhood.
- b. DRC compared an archival photo of this 1876 house to illustrations of the proposed new design. DRC comments:
- The front of the existing house is historically significant, so should be preserved. The new design, by Afab Enterprises of Burlington MA, alters the look of the dwelling in number of windows, number of staircases, double-decker effect, the front end gable facing the street, etc.
 - The rear part of the existing house is narrower than the front part, making the rear portion nearly invisible from the street. The new design is for a structure with a single block of uniform width.
 - Indentations in the driveway side of the building don't line up with any other architectural element.
 - The rear section of the new design is taller than the front which creates an undesirable profile and proportion to the entire design.
 - Materials used in the original house may be superior to modern materials proposed for the new design.

DRC favors historical preservation and restoration over demolition and reconstruction.

- c. Larry Murray and Kevin O'Donnell responded:
- Murray: Despite extensive termite damage, the house could be restored, but at a very high cost.
 - O'Donnell: Inside the house, damage to the joists, window frames, etc. is *very bad*. "My wife and I would not move in there if the house is left in place."

DRC recommends unfavorable action on the proposed design. **Vote: 7-0**

Conditions:

- DRC favors restoration of the house. If restoration proves unfeasible, or unaffordable, then:
 - Demolish the old house.
 - Create a new design that is more like the original in façade, roof line, siding, materials, corner boards, porch style, and setback, with a narrower extension at the rear.
- DRC would support a new design that closely resembles the historically significant original house.

4. 10 Converse Place, Winchester MA - Project Update and Discussion.

Guest presenters: DAVID TABENKEN, LEED, Senior Associate at Hacin + Associates; IAN GILLESPIE, Owner, Gillespie and Co. Inc.; SEAN SANGER, ASLA, Principal, Copley Wolff Design Group; Sally Dale, Vice Chair, Clerk, Winchester Planning Board

- a. David Tabenken showed the presentation that he showed to the Winchester Planning Board at their February 1, 2022, meeting.
 - Tabenken’s slides displayed design modifications that, in one DRC member’s words, make “big improvements in breaking up the monolithic mass of the building.”
 - Another DRC member said, “We appreciate the “betterments of architectural details. Our big concern is still the SIZE of the building.” It remains a monolithic mass that blocks views and has adverse effects on surrounding buildings.
 - Tabenken’s slide titled MASSING MODEL AERIAL VIEW - FROM SOUTHEAST shows clearly how the proposed design dwarfs Town Hall.
- b. Just prior to the February 2, 2022, DRC meeting, the 10 Converse Place design team shared a more developed sketch plan and five sections of landscape concepts for the Mill Pond sides of the building. Features include:
 - A multi-use path that links to the Tri-Community Greenway.
 - Slope stabilization at the water’s edge in harmony with the Aberjona Initiative.
 - Stepped terracing. A DRC member commented, “The steps down to the water look like the reverse of the Center Falls dam.” And that, “An intermingling of the stone or concrete steps with vegetation would be more interesting than a monolithic stair.”
 - An overlook terrace supported by a retaining wall and a guardrail.
- c. Sean Sanger commented that the Winchester Conservation Commission gave “really good feedback” on the stepped slope.
- d. A DRC member noted there were some good ideas, but permitting and ownership issues may make them challenging to realize.
- e. Ian Gillespie mentioned that they [the developers] are working with Parterre, the same landscape company that has worked with Reed Pugh works on the Aberjona Initiative.
- f. Gillespie commented that, “We have been discussing this [project] for two years with the Planning Board.”
- g. His comment prompted a DRC member to observe that, in all this time, “We have seen only ONE design concept.” Another member agreed: “We haven’t seen other designs to get excited about. We’ve just seen you playing with one design.”
- h. A DRC member commented that the project fails to meet the following CDB regulations. See Zoning Bylaw section 7.3.17.4 subsection 4 *Massing*:

Regardless of any preconceived development configuration for

any particular use, new development is expected to:

- *Break down any building type's typical massing to relate to the historic character and mass of Winchester's CBD.*

>>> Member noted that the proposed building will be the largest building in Town, will set a negative precedent for size, and will destroy Winchester's "small-town" character.

- *Avoid a monolithic appearance.*

>>> Member noted that every Town resident who has attended open meetings about the proposed building says it is too massive.

Member noted to see also, Zoning Bylaw section 9.5 Site Plan Review, subsection 9.5.7 Decision, sub-subsections 1, 2, and 7:

1. *Minimize unreasonable departure from the character, materials, and scale of buildings in the vicinity.*

Member noted that the proposed building departs significantly from others in the vicinity in character and scale.

2. *Minimize any adverse effect on any historic resource.*

>>> Member noted that the proposed design dwarfs the Northmark Bank building across the street, and the Brown and Stanton Block nearby.

7. *Minimize obstruction of scenic views from publicly accessible locations.*

>>> Member noted that the proposed building blocks views on all sides.

- i. As to Planned Unit Development, which includes affordable housing, a DRC member made this comment: "Let's just say it: This is a luxury condo building with a few affordable condo units." The member later emphasized, "This is a profit-driven design."
- j. Gillespie said that on March 15, 2022, the terms of some Planning Board members will expire, and new people will take their places. To vote, members need to attend all the hearings. Between March 1 and March 9, the PB will vote on the 10 Converse Place design.
- k. Sally Dale, PB Vice Chair, said, "The Planning Board will greatly value [a list of] fleshed-out, articulated suggestions" for the building's redesign — from minute details to big ideas. Dale urged DRC to clearly state design recommendations.
Continued Dale, "It is really important to take time to get this right, because this building will last 150 years."
- l. A DRC member agreed, saying, "People walking into Town will wonder how this [massive monolith] happened."
- m. At a previous meeting, DRC members requested a physical model to better understand the scale of the building in relation to the Town Center.

- The 10 Converse Place design team produced an interactive digital model, but did not give DRC enough time to review it prior to DRC's February 2, 2022, meeting.
- DRC members need ample time to study the model to make recommendations.

DRC did not vote on the February 1, 2022, design presented by the development team, because DRC members needed more time to review materials and articulate their recommendations.

- DRC scheduled a meeting for Wednesday, February 16, 2022.
- The meeting will develop design recommendations for 10 Converse Place.

5. Petition 3953 - 21 Laurel Hill Lane, Winchester MA

Guest presenters: DAVID TUELL, property owner; MICAELA TUELL, David's wife

In anticipation of a future family, the Tuells wish to construct in their steeply sloped back yard, a retaining wall that extends the length of the back yard, and at the end of the yard, two 4-foot walls perpendicular to the long wall.

- a. David Tuell showed plans of the proposed walls, and photos of the property as it looks now.
- b. Micaela said they distributed a packet of plans and pictures to neighbors, and all responded positively to the proposed wall designs.
- c. A DRC member commented that most properties in this hilly neighborhood have retaining walls.
- d. DRC landscape professionals noted that the area between the walls would be dry, so advised the Tuells to choose plants, such as evergreen spreading junipers, that require less water.

DRC recommends favorable action on the proposed walls, with three conditions: **Vote 7-0.**

Conditions:

- Instead of installing a guard rail fence, install dense plantings at the top of the walls to protect against drop-off. This should be reviewed for building code compliance by the building inspector.
- Choose plants suitable for dry conditions to grow between the walls.
- DRC agrees with the homeowners' choice of natural stone for the walls.

6. Winchester Nails & Spa Sign - 19 Thompson Street, Winchester MA

DRC Comments and recommendations:

- a. The proposed sign looks "Halloweeny."
- b. The sign is non-illuminating and will not be illuminated, so sign designers chose silver letters on a black background for visibility. The silver-on-black gives the sign still more of a Halloween effect.
- c. Choose a simpler typeface that is more legible from a distance.

- d. Decrease font size, so the “Winchester Nails & Spa” sign does not overpower the “Soul Amour” sign next to it.
- e. Simpler lettering on a white background will make this sign more compatible with other signage on this building.

7. Adjourn.

| SUMMARY of Design Review Committee VOTES — February 02, 2022 | | | |
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| Minutes # | Item | Address | Vote |
| 3. | Petition 3954 | 14-16 Oak Street | Unfavorable action 7-0 with conditions |
| 5. | Petition 3953 | 21 Laurel Hill Road | Favorable action 7-0 with conditions. |

Next meeting: Wednesday, February 16, 2022. Location to be announced.

Respectfully submitted by Recording Secretary Nancy Upper.