



**Planning Board Meeting Minutes**  
**Tuesday, March 17, 2020 at 7:30 pm – Zoom Meeting**

|                   |                             |                |
|-------------------|-----------------------------|----------------|
| Members Present:  | Heather von Mering (chair)  | Diab Jerius    |
|                   | Maureen Meister             | Heather Hannon |
| Members Absent:   | Elizabeth (Betsy) Cregger   |                |
| Also Present:     | Brian Szekely, Town Planner |                |
| Others Attending: | David Hacin                 | WinCam         |

A quorum being in attendance, Chair von Mering calls the Winchester Planning Board (PB) meeting to order at 7:33 pm, noting that the meeting is being video recorded via WinCam and is the first Zoom format being used.

**1. Updates, Chair von Mering:**

- A. The parks, playgrounds, etc. are closed due to COVID and social distancing is required. For anyone needing assistance, food is available from the Woburn Council of Social Concern. Other support opportunities will be announced as they become available.
- B. MBTA Commuter Rail Station: the stair is now behind Thompson Street along with one elevator. Access is via one of three elevators, this stair, or a ramp at Shore Road toward the Aberjona Lot.
- C. Not sure if Spring Town Meeting will be delayed.
- D. Town Hall is closed to the public; staff continues to work.
- E. The Town Common project is delayed.
- F. Building Department continues to issue permits; submittals will be remote, using a drop-off box at the back entrance of Town Hall. If need to reach PB, send a message via the town website/email [planningboard@winchester.us](mailto:planningboard@winchester.us).

**2. 10 Converse Place: Preapplication Presentation**

David Hacin, Hacin & Associates, architects: using Power Point slides, Mr. Hacin presented the update on this development project; highlights from previous design include:

- Further developed the preferred scheme “Figural Edge”
- Converse Street will be a woonerf concept; recommending reversing road one-way direction to facilitate the residential drop-off (enter from Main Street)
- Maximum retail along Mt. Vernon Street; now wraps around the side of the building on Town Hall side as well
- The Mt. Vernon Street façade is stepped-back; the design includes a more animated roofline and the façade on Converse Place and Mill Pond sides is articulated
- Now have 4-stories on Mt. Vernon St., 5-stories on Town Hall side, and the roof, the 6<sup>th</sup> level, is stepped back on both sides.

Dennis Carlone, architectural consultant for Town: Mr. Carlone comments to the design are summarized:

- What is the set back of the building on Mt. Vernon Street? Mr. Hacin responded 10-12 feet.
- Is the path on the Town Hall side private property or part of the development property? Mr. Hacin responded private.
- The retail, restaurant and seating look great; perfectly located.
- Location of the residential lobby is great.
- Concern about the sidewalk on Converse Place unless it is really a woonerf.
- Agree with changing the direction of Converse Place.
- The materials selection is great; likes the use of slate on the top.

- Likes the outside oval area, with the idea of public ice skating, but landscaping needs work. This area should feel like public space as compared to it being used by the building occupants only; suggest curving the façade (making it less angular).
- The setback on the roof looks like 12 feet. Mr. Hacin confirmed.
- Will the development team be working with the Town on the “Mews” redesign? Mr. Hacin responded yes.
- Are there 46 units? Mr. Hacin noted there are now 40 units.
- What is behind the retail on the ground floor? Mr. Hacin noted residential trash, restaurant back area, ramp, transformer vault and other support services.
- What is in the outside corner on the ground floor? Mr. Hacin said it is a placeholder.
- Is Converse Place pavement? Mr. Hacin indicated no.
- Suggested detailing the retail on Mt. Vernon Street differently to avoid dark windows.

Public Comments: none

PB Comments:

Ms. Meister: What is the overall height? The tallest point downtown is a cupola at 44 feet. Mr. Hacin noted 48 feet along Mt. Vernon Street and 65 feet overall.

Ms. Meister: Also noted that the roof does not work.

Mr. Carlone stated that his sketches during the Center Business District rezoning discussions were more to scale with the downtown buildings. The PB approved a higher density and up to 60 feet if going to allow a 3.0 FAR. This is a quality way to do that and 45 units is usually the critical point. From the historic perspective, maybe five and a half stories is too tall. What is the goal of the PB? Mr. Carlone noted that his review of this design was based on previous PB direction.

Ms. Meister: The PB provided a letter to the design team disagreeing with that height.

Mr. Hacin: The design team looked a FAR 3 and the trade-off of including the open spaces compared to the taller structure. The creation of the outdoor spaces increased the building height but remained under 70 feet.

Ms. Meister: During the development of the CBD Guidelines, Mr. Carlone’s concept seemed viable without going to a height of 60 feet.

Mr. Carlone: What “fits” is important but also what is financially viable. During the development of the Guidelines, his concept involved a larger PUD site (intention of combining properties) making it possible for a lower height.

Chair von Mering: This architecture does not meet the style of our downtown character. The CBD Design Guidelines Section 7.3.17.4 describes what this means specifically. This design and detailing do not reflect the architecture of our downtown. The massing and window design tends to make the building feel taller. The dark finishes at the top makes it look heavy. The way it responds to the environment is excellent; site wise and position of the building are great.

Mr. Hacin: The team works with the character of the town but creates an architecture of their own reflecting our time today. Their goal is reflected in the design; they are not historic designers. They are trying to create a building that is sympathetic to and respectful of the Town.

Ms. Meister: Referenced “view 12” (from the Power Point presentation) and noted how the top does not work. Harvard Professor Ann Sussman has authored a book titled *Cognitive Architecture* in which she discusses her findings that the ways in which humans respond to the environment are not random. The Guidelines refer to Silhouette, Elements of Form, based on the surrounding architecture. This does not. The Whitney Hotel mentioned is in Boston and that city can handle a larger scale structure. We are a suburb and a town.

Mr. Hacin: He is willing to have a conversation to explore this further.

Ms. Hannon: She liked many of the design details. She noted the landscaping is important and needs further development. She is concerned about the scale and suggested putting residential units on the ground level. She is not sure the Town needs so much retail space.

Mr. Jerius: He suggested adding curves to the building, and liked the materials, forms and textures used. He had no problem with the height; however, he did not want it to appear as two buildings (maybe slant the "chimneys" to reduce the effect). He questioned the ramp instead of the elevator for parking.

Mr. Hacin: The team will look at softening the building corners. The roofline is currently sloped between the five "lanterns" but will look at the proportions and shape. Regarding the parking, the elevator would require 24-hour support and the economics did not work for this size complex. Self-parking is 24 hour and more viable, and probably preferred by residents.

Mr. Jerius: Did the number of parking spaces change?

Mr. Hacin: There will be more than one space per unit.

PB discussion with consultant Mr. Carlone:

Ms. Meister: The planned view/massing study now shows 69-foot height. Do we really want that height? Maybe less open space would be better and maybe less retail, to bring the height down.

Mr. Carlone: The space at the pond is a reasonable size and critical for downtown. Retail along Mt. Vernon Street is important; retail and housing together are critical for the success of a residential building. Looking to the PB for direction regarding the height. Parking is under the open outside space so cannot locate trees there. If they reduce the open space, it will not help very much with the height. The open space is essential. If FAR 3.0 is ideal from a PUD real estate development point of view, then it may be too much to make it work. The setbacks are significant.

Ms. Hannon: Asked for a confirmation of the existing building height: 62 feet.

Chair von Mering: This design goes 6 feet above the existing Mill Pond building.

Mr. Jerius: The outside restaurant is important. He is not afraid of the height except for the view from Mt. Vernon Street. The roofline needs work to reduce the massing at the top.

Ms. Hannon: Hard to go higher than the existing building.

Chair von Mering: We have not seen a section showing the floor to floor height and there may be an opportunity to bring it down. She asked Mr. Carlone if he understood her architectural comment.

Mr. Carlone: Confirmed his understanding and stated that this is a more modern expression that has a richness of the old buildings. He noted that the floor to floor height is probably not going to get much reduction in the overall building height.

Mr. Hacin: The floor to floor height is 9 feet clean (minimum). To get to 62 feet, the building would lose an existing floor and lots of detail.

Chair von Mering: What is the diversity of the housing types and price points?

Mr. Hacin: There are mostly 2-bedroom units with some ones and a few threes. Pricing is up to the developer.

Chair von Mering: This design is pushing the limit for the PUD. The developer needs to come in with what the Town wants.

Ms. Meister: Suggested the PB meet with Mr. Carlone to review the presentation and discuss further. The biggest concerns are the height and roof. Seeing some examples would help (suburban vs city).

### **3. Abby Road Update:**

Mr. Szekely summarized the progress of a triparty agreement (Applicant, Town, Bank). The agreement would enable the Town to release lots to the applicant while retaining funds for work not yet completed. Some work cannot be finished until later. Currently the Town is holding the lots. Once released, the lots can be sold. Engineering is in the process of finishing their inspection and developing a cost estimate for the remaining work. Currently no timeframe yet for completing the engineering estimate. Vote taking place on March 24<sup>th</sup>. Chair von Mering raised concern on timing, to allow for PB review and legal recommendations. Mr. Szekely noted nothing would be released until the agreement is signed.

### **4. PB Budget Update:**

Mr. Szekely noted the PB budget for an Assistant Town Planner of \$60,000 will not meet the minimum required for Step 1 for this grade Town employee. The minimum is \$60,535. Need to vote another \$535 to meet Step 1 of this grade.

Ms. Meister moved to amend the budget to include another \$535 and request the Personnel Board to amend the Article as such. Mr. Jerius second the Motion. Meister, Jerius, Hannon, von Mering in favor. 4-0-0 Motion passes with Cregger absent.

**5. Master Plan:**

Chair Von Mering noted that the Master Plan will be on next week's agenda for vote.

**6. Other Items:**

Mr. Carlone requested to be assigned to review the Main Street development project. Ms. Meister noted he has been involved, will maintain continuity, and sees the Town comprehensively. Mr. Szekely confirmed that the current budget should cover this review.

Next meeting March 23, 2020. Meeting adjourned at 10:17 pm. No vote was taken.

Nancy Polcari, Recording Secretary

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Diab Jerius, Clerk