

Town of Westwood Planning Board
Meeting Minutes
September 22, 2009
7:30 PM

Board Members Present: Ch. Steve Olanoff, Steve Rafsky, Robert Malster, and Jack Wiggin.

Absent: Bruce Montgomery

Staff Members Present: Nora Loughnane, Town Planner; John Bertorelli, Town Engineer; and Glenn Garber, Community Development Advisor. Minutes were recorded by Janice Barba, Land Use Assistant.

Ch. Olanoff called the meeting to order at 7:40 PM.

Informal Discussion of Issues Related to Construction of New Library

An informal presentation of plans for the construction of a new Westwood Public Library were presented by Jim Alexander and Ellen Anselone of Finegold Alexander & Associates, Inc., the architectural firm hired by the library to create schematic plans and a projected cost estimate for a new 35,000 square foot library. Tom Viti, Library Director, was present, and gave the board a brief synopsis of the current status of the project. He explained that, at this time, the Library Trustees have formed a Library Building Committee, which has been reviewing the project over the past few months.

Mr. Alexander began a presentation in which he expressed the goal of the Library Building Committee to make a strong and active statement along High Street. He discussed the programming spaces and orientation of each on the plans. Mr. Alexander explained that 'modular repeats' will be used to give a more residential scale to the building, but noted that plans are still evolving. He explained that the back left corner of the parcel is proposed to be the temporary location for the Colburn School during the construction, and noted that once the existing library is demolished, the Colburn School may be located on that site.

Mr. Alexander presented parking plans, which showed a total of 81 spaces and a drop off/turnaround area with special paving for pedestrian and vehicle movement. Setback distances were discussed. Ch. Olanoff recommended that the new library be aligned as closely as possible with existing buildings along that part of High Street. Mr. Alexander said that the current proposal was to align the front of the porch roof with the house next door, such that the building mass will be five feet back from that. He said that all other setbacks would be in conformance with zoning requirements, but that a dimensional variance would be needed to locate the building closer than forty feet from the lot line.

Screening from residential abutters was discussed, as was the maintenance of existing walking pathways to the Deerfield playfields. Sustainability through solar collectors and skylights and LEED certification were also discussed. Ms. Anselone noted that the height of the new building would be approximately 39' with an overall building height average of 34.5'. She said that a dimensional variance with respect to building height would also be required. Ch. Olanoff asked for clarification on the zoning regulation changes. Ms. Loughnane explained that after a meeting with town officials, the Building Inspector said that the zoning that was in place prior to creation of the plan must be enforced. She said that it was determined that this property was always considered to fall within the 'Residence C' zone, and that Town Counsel had recommend that it be treated as such. There was additional discussion about the possibility of rezoning the parcels from Appleseed's up to the McDonald property.

Ch. Olanoff asked if plans for the relocation of the Colburn School had been finalized. Mr. Viti stated that the eventual Colburn School relocation is still somewhat unknown. He explained that a study of the Town's space needs is ongoing, and it is possible that that study will recommend a reuse of the existing library building for other purposes.

Mr. Rafsky stated that he would not consider the height request to be unreasonable. Mr. Wiggin concurred. He commented that the height of the Colburn School is very imposing and said that he would hope the new library building would be less bulky in scale. He also mentioned that the bright lights on the north elevation may be too imposing on the direct abutter at night. Ms. Anselone explained that the large windows were intended to take greatest advantage of natural light, and said that they would investigate some time of interior shading for use at night.

Mr. Rafsky asked about parking regulations for municipal uses. Ms. Loughnane said there aren't any regulations for municipal uses. Mr. Alexander stated that regardless of that, parking spaces are provided in conformance with industry standards. Mr. Wiggin asked if the new driveway lines are lined up with the current lines. Mr. Alexander responded that the new configuration is aligned with the existing curb cut and no changes are proposed with respect to the existing traffic light.

Ms. Loughnane stated that an application to the Zoning Board of Appeals would have to be submitted, requesting two dimensional variances, one for the reduced setback and one for the increase building height. She said that, should these variance requests be approved, the applicant would then need to submit an application to the planning board for EIDR approval.

Mr. Malster mentioned that during the formal hearing process, he will not be participating as a Planning Board member, but as a direct abutter. He said that he would like the Colburn School are far away from his property line as possible, due to the shade imposed by a building of that height. He said that he would be in favor of the reduced front setbacks for both the new library building and for a relocated Colburn School building. Mr. Malster also mentioned the existence of foot traffic from Gay Street to the library. He suggested a pathway be added to maintain this pedestrian traffic flow. He said he would also like to see a safe, direct pedestrian path from the Windsor Road crosswalk, through the library site, to the Deerfield School.

Ch. Olanoff noted that this was not a formal hearing, but asked if any of the members of the public wished to comment.

Ralph Buonopane, Chairman of the Westwood Historical Commission, asked what approvals would be required if the Colburn School is moved to the site of the existing library. Ms. Loughnane stated that the town is currently treating the proposed new library and the relocated Colburn School as two separate proposals. She said that an application to the ZBA will be made by the Library for the new library facility, and a second application would be made by the town to address any variances required for the relocated Colburn School. Ms. Loughnane noted that the Colburn School is currently permitted as a pre-existing non-conforming structure. She said that once the building is moved, the setbacks and height would no longer be grandfathered, and dimensional variances would be required.

Mr. Malster expressed disappointment that the town hasn't already made important decisions about the future of the Colburn School. He said that he expects that Town Meeting will ask why, with all the space needs of the town, would the existing library be torn down and not re-used. Mr. Viti responded that he has expressed similar concerns to the Board of Selectmen and that the ultimate disposition of the current library will be known soon. Mr. Alexander stated that the new library and old library cannot exist on the same site without acquiring new property for parking. Mr. Viti said that it is unknown whether new property will be acquired.

Mr. Olanoff asked if the override for funding the new library will be requested during the regular town election. He suggested that this project get pushed forward to the January election.

Mr. Olanoff said he would be very supportive of the proposed variance for setback and said that the Planning Board should send a letter of support to the ZBA. Mr. Malster agreed, but expressed concern about the design of the front façade of the building. Mr. Malster also mentioned drainage issues need to be addressed at the site. Ms. Loughnane agreed to draft a letter from the Planning

Board to the ZBA, supporting the library's request for front setback and for height variances. Upon a motion by Mr. Rafsky and seconded by Mr. Wiggin, it was agreed, 3 in favor with Mr. Malster abstaining, to write the requested letter.

Mr. Olanoff asked what level of the L.E.E.D. certification will be sought. Mr. Alexander responded that the silver level will be sought, based on budget constraints. Mr. Olanoff also asked about the paths and requested that the crosswalk have a raised surface.

Members of the audience commented about the gap in the buildings if the Colburn School was not located where the current library is. Mr. Viti asked the Planning Board would send the Board of Selectmen a letter requesting that they finalize plans for the Colburn School at the earliest possible date. Mr. Rafsky recommended that it would be more effective if individual board members contact the members of Board of Selectmen.

An audience member asked what the Comprehensive Plan says about the purpose of the Colburn School. Ms. Loughnane said that the Colburn School was still being used as the school administrative offices when the Master Plan was completed. She noted that the Colburn School is identified as a contributing structure within the historic district. Mr. Buonopane said he did have one meeting with the Town Administrator and a member of the Finance Commission to discuss these concerns.

Ms. Wiggin, a member of the Library Board of Trustees, expressed her concerns that the library is being burdened with the Colburn School issues. Mr. Wiggin said the best thing to do is to discuss these concerns with the Board of Selectmen. Mr. Buonopane commented that he has been very clear about his concerns that the town come together and agree on appropriate plans for the Colburn School.

This portion of the meeting ended at 8:55 PM

Update on Zoning Amendments for Town Meeting

Ms. Loughnane distributed a copy of an excerpt from the Mansfield Zoning Bylaw that Mr. Montgomery forwarded to her, as an example that he'd like the board to consider. This excerpt covers landscaping within off-street parking areas. Ms. Loughnane asked the board to review this and send her any comments. This excerpt is related to work on proposed Article 1.

Other items

Mr. Rafsky asked Ms. Loughnane for an update on the lawsuits related to the Morgan Farm/Powissett Estates case. Ms. Loughnane said that Town Counsel informed her that the town's position was upheld in the most recent level of appeal. She noted that it is likely that this decision will be further appealed.

Mr. Rafsky asked if there was any new information on the appeals involving 401 Sandy Valley Road. Ms. Loughnane stated that she had no new information, but that Town Counsel was fully apprised. She said that she would forward any new information as she receives it.

The Board asked Ms. Loughnane for an update on compliance with EIDR approvals for the following properties: Bubbling Brook Restaurant – 1652 High Street; Prime Mercedes Dealership – 425 Providence Highway; and 100 Everett Street and Audi Dealership – 420 Providence Highway. Ms. Loughnane stated that she would visit each site and provide a status report, prior to the next Planning Board meeting.

The next meeting of the board is October 13, 2009.

The meeting adjourned at approximately 9:45 PM.