



# TOWN OF NORTHBOROUGH DESIGN REVIEW COMMITTEE

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**February 29, 2024**

**Design Review Committee**

**Meeting Minutes**

**Approved as Amended April 11, 2024**

Pursuant to Chapter 2 of the Acts of 2023, An Act Relative to Extending Certain COVID-19 Measures Adopted During the State of Emergency, signed into law on March 29, 2023, this meeting was conducted via remote participation. No in-person attendance by members of the public was permitted but it was open for public comment.

This meeting can be viewed at:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pgf4ZtmvcMQ&list=PL2mWMhvXDP2jEcEYII3OQcq1H4fKZ1CI8&index=38>

**Members Present:** Amy Poretsky, Chair; Lisa Maselli, Mark McMenemy, David Veron

**Others Present:** Laurie Connors, Planning Director; Bob Frederico, Building Inspector and Zoning Enforcement Officer; David Parenti, Fire Chief; Dawn Rand; Ray Dunetz (RDLA); Jim Jackson; Janet Slemenda, Amy Dunlap, Marc Theiss, Todd Ashford, HKT; Nicole Capistran, Pare Corp

The meeting was called to order at 8:30am.

## **Continued Review of Fire Station**

Ms. Dunlap provided a presentation highlighting updates made since their January 25th presentation:

- Relocation of the staff parking to the back of the site opposite the apparatus bays, which allowed for some green space and provided an area for plantings, site lighting, EV charging and snow storage; relocation of the staff parking also allowed for sidewalk improvements and a reduction in the length of the retaining wall along the east side of the building;
- Finished floor elevations (FFE) of 302' were based on the movement of the apparatus;
- Submittal of updated drainage plans, utility plans, landscape plans and photometric plans;
- Detail of the 30' batter wall option for the retaining wall;
- Most recent elevations were shared, along with updated designs of the tower;
- Pergolas proposed to provide some shade on the roof decks;
- Updated street views were provided;
- Detail of the freestanding sign, which will have a LED message board.

Ms. Dunlap responded to a comment made by Ms. Connors regarding the tower's roof; she clarified that the roof is a hip roof because the tower is rectangular in shape. She added that masonry is being reviewed

and will soon be presented to the Fire Station Building Committee (FSBC) along with material options for the façade.

They will be going before the Zoning Board of Appeals to request 19' of relief for the front yard setback, relief of the requirement for signs to be no larger than 32 sf, and for a request for a Variance to allow the use of an Electronic Message Center.

Ms. Poretsky thanked Ms. Dunlap for her presentation but noted that the steps being taken were backwards; typically, the Applicant (FSBC) would come to the DRC for input and their recommendations, but the FSBC met the night before and made their decisions before going to the DRC.

Ms. Poretsky shared the comment letter prepared by Ms. Connors, dated February 26, 2024. Ms. Connors said most of her questions had been answered during the presentation, however, the photometric plan seemed to be based on the prior site layout. Ms. Dunlap said she believed the civil drawing needed to be updated; she would get that corrected. Other comments included:

- A recommendation that the site plan for the Planning Board submittal should depict the underground utilities;
- If the Applicant were considering requesting a waiver from the requirement for 17 street trees, or if more trees would be accommodated; Mr. Dunetz said sight lines are needed for the emergency vehicles and for cars entering the parking lot. Ms. Connors noted there were other areas on the site where trees could be added and suggested that in the waiver request, it could be noted that in exchange for fewer street trees, trees are being provided in alternative locations. Additionally, the requirement exists for trees to be planted associated with the parking lot.
- Ms. Connors said it appeared that there were plans to remove the existing sidewalk on Route 20 and to shift the location of the sidewalk. Ms. Capistran confirmed that was correct, they planned to provide a landscape buffer on the grass area between the ride of way and the walkway. Ms. Connors was in favor as the condition of the sidewalk has deteriorated over time; she asked that they include ADA compliant ramps and detectable warning plates where the driveway locations are. Ms. Capistran said they will be reconnecting the sidewalks to the existing sidewalks at the Hillside Grill and bank walkway, the sidewalks will be smooth connections meeting ADA requirements. Ms. Maselli requested elevations to be able to see how that will look.

Ms. Poretsky asked Mr. Frederico about his interpretation that the tower does not need a variance for height. Mr. Frederico said the tower does not meet the definition of habitable space according to the definitions listed in the state's building code, and the town's zoning code does not have a definition for habitable space.

Ms. Poretsky next discussed the proposed electronic message sign, which she noted was prohibited downtown. Ms. Maselli said the Select Board is adopting a policy for municipal sign conformity and that discussion should wait until then. Chief Parenti said the intent of the sign is for town communications, not necessarily for use by the Fire Department. Ms. Connors said she had not heard of the Select Board's discussions regarding municipal signs. Mr. Frederico suggested that since time is critical, the ZBA application should be filed and if necessary, that request could be withdrawn later. Ms. Connors suggested that perhaps more guidance from the Select Board would be received before the public hearing.

Mr. Veron asked about plans for snow storage. Ms. Capistran said several areas were identified but the relocation of the parking spaces to the back of the site allows them to utilize that area for snow storage. Chief Parenti added that he had had a conversation with the DPW Director regarding creating an area for

snow storage that would be accessible for the DPW to remove snow at times, and that the Director had no concerns about the layout of the site. Because of that, Mr. Veron similarly had no concerns.

Ms. Poretsky asked if thought had been given to placing the transformer at the back of the building instead of the west side. Ms. Dunlap said this was the best location for building operations and taking cost into account; it will be partially screened with landscaping.

Ms. Poretsky asked if the car charging stations would resemble the large electrical units at Walmart. Ms. Dunlap did not have cut sheets available to share. Mr. Frederico said technology has evolved, units are smaller and more efficient.

Ms. Poretsky referred to the line indicating the limit of clearing and asked why that line was picked. Ms. Capistran said that was set based on the grading required to allow for the wall. Ms. Poretsky asked if there was a way to utilize natural or stabilized slope grades versus a wall and shared some examples. Ms. Capistran said the finished floor of the building is the same all around so vehicles can back in at the back of the building; HKT explained that otherwise, an elevator would be needed if it was a different elevation and if they were to slope the hill, they would need to ensure they had separation in the ability to swale and not direct a slope to the area planned to be used for vehicles.

Ms. Poretsky asked about fencing on the wall. Ms. Dunlap said fencing is planned but has not been designed yet. Ms. Poretsky mentioned a safety feature on the sides of the fence, if the fence was set back from the wall, so people couldn't access the wall and walk on it. She stated it isn't far from Assabet Park and a 30 ft high wall could be dangerous. She showed an example from Northborough Crossing.

Ms. Maselli asked about the connection between the proposed wall and the wall at the Hillside Grill, since there is a drop off on Hillside's side. Ms. Capistran said there will be about 30' of landscape between the fire station site and on the Hillside Grill side. Mr. Jackson said the new wall will reduce the pressure on that existing wall at the Hillside Grill, cutting the fill out on the fire station side will reduce the loading and will not increase any loads on the wall, swales will capture storm water, drainage under the wall will be collected. Ms. Dunlap shared the proposed drainage plan. Ms. Poretsky asked if the drainage plan would be reviewed by a town engineer once the application for site plan review before the Planning Board is filed. Ms. Connors said yes, that would be reviewed by staff. Ms. Maselli asked for elevations to be provided.

Ms. Connors said the drawing shows that retaining wall for the Hillside Grill does not abut the property line. There will be grading as shown up to the property line but on the Hillside Grill's side, it is just a forested area between the retaining wall and the property line. The walls will never meet. There will be about 35' of landscaped area.

Ms. Poretsky suggested picnic tables with umbrellas instead of pergolas to help reduce costs. She asked about safety rails; Ms. Dunlap said there would be a combination of the parapet and railing and that it would be 42" high.

Ms. Poretsky was concerned that cutting into the membrane and insulation of the roof with the installation of the roof monitors could cause leakage over time and heating loss, and stated that she took a tour of the Southborough Fire Department and the glass on the apparatus bay doors let in plenty of light and there were LED lights when needed. Ms. Dunlap said the insulation would not be cut into, these aren't skylights that would interrupt the roof plane and would not affect the performance of the building; the

intent is to build a healthy building and it is well known that access to light and views helps with occupant health and that the roof monitors contribute to that.

Mr. McMenemy said he had recently become a member of Design Review and that they were developing a scoring system where they go through the design guidelines and apply them to a particular project. He shared slides of his observations of the project regarding parking, drainage, the dangers relative to the height of the retaining wall, advantages of elevating part of the site, and massing. Ms. Dunlap said some of the suggestions made would have significant implications for the operations of the department.

Ms. Maselli asked about the kind of material proposed for the metal letters on the face of the building, and that she would like to see a detail of what the entrance will look like. Ms. Dunlap said that is part of the material palette to be presented, they are wrapping up the schematic design now and there is a lot of design work that needs to be done for a building of this size.

Ms. Poretsky thanked the design team for their presentation.

### **Discussion of Proposed Sign Bylaw, Sign Guidelines, and Design Guideline Changes**

Mr. McMenemy asked for input regarding the scorecard he had begun to develop. Ms. Connors felt it was important to distinguish between mandatory requirements in the zoning bylaw and design guidelines that are advisory, applicants should not be penalized for not adhering to all the design guidelines, some flexibility in the scorecard is important.

Ms. Maselli said that it was written in the November 30th minutes that sandwich boards will be allowed in downtown as temporary signs as long as they are not blocking sidewalks; her concern was with regard to ADA compliancy and the narrowness of sidewalks, and she wondered if they should be more specific. Ms. Connors said the requirement is to leave 3' feet of clear distance for people to pass, they could specify that.

Ms. Poretsky said she was considering removing the sign bylaw from this year's town meeting, she was not sensing support from the MPIC or from the Planning Board, they could reevaluate for another time. Ms. Maselli and Mr. McMenemy agreed. Ms. Connors also agreed, and said there were some changes that Town Council wanted to make; she felt it was important to hear the feedback since maybe the sign bylaw is going too far in certain categories and there isn't support to go there, in which case those changes should be removed if it isn't what residents want. Ms. Poretsky said she would mention that to the Planning Board at their next meeting and suggest bringing it back for discussion for the Fall Town Meeting.

### **Approval of Meeting Minutes from 10.12.23, 10.19.23, 11.30.23, 12.14.23**

Tabled to the next meeting on March 7, 8:30am.

Ms. Maselli made a motion to adjourn the meeting, Mr. McMenemy seconded the motion. Roll call vote followed, all were in favor.

The meeting adjourned at 10:51am.

Respectfully Submitted by  
Michelle Cilley, Board Secretary