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TOWN OF NORTHBOROUGH DESIGN REVIEW COMMITTEE

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April 11, 2024**Design Review Committee****Meeting Minutes****Approved as Amended June 13, 2024**

This meeting of the Design Review Committee was held in Conference Room B, Town Hall. The meeting was also conducted via Zoom. Members of the public were encouraged to attend the meeting in person, watch using the Zoom link provided on the agenda or watch on cable tv. There was no opportunity for public comment.

A recording of the meeting is available at:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ImMF32AnP3A&list=PL2mWMhvXDP2jEcEYII3OQcq1H4fKZ1CI8&index=40>

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

Members Absent: David Veron

Others Present: Laurie Connors, Planning Director; Robert Frederico, Building Inspector and Zoning Enforcement Officer

The meeting was called to order at 8:37am.

Continued Review of Scorecard/Rubric

Discussion continued from the last meeting regarding the rubric developed from the design guidelines and the standards in the zoning bylaws. Ms. Connors said that since the rubric hasn't yet been adopted by the Planning Board, it shouldn't be used in scoring current applications.

Mr. McMenemy and Ms. Connors each had separate drafts of the rubric with their edits. Committee members, Ms. Connors and Mr. Frederico brainstormed the verbiage to be used for each category.

The role of the Design Review Committee in the permitting process was discussed. Ms. Connors said the benefit of the process is the collaborative role that this advisory committee is part of, although the recommendations made to the applicant and provided to the permitting authority may not always be followed by the applicant, or the permitting authority; however, it would behoove the applicant to follow the design guidelines and standards to move through the permitting process more effectively. A recent application before the DRC for review was discussed; Ms. Connors said in that case, she believed there was a difference of interpretation of the design guidelines and not disregard for the opinions of this committee. She felt the importance of the guidelines is to make them flexible enough to inspire creativity and not restrict them.

Members acknowledged that the definition of New England architecture needs to be determined. Mr. McMenemy said he had information from another community that could be used as a starting point.

Members discussed the formatting of the rubric. Mr. McMenemy wanted to have a one-page summary where comments are summarized, which Ms. Poretsky felt would be useful when drafting recommendation letters to the permitting board, and Ms. Connors said could become conditions of approval. She said, in preparing her review letters, she confirms that the standards, or bylaws, are complied with, but that the guidelines could be discussion points with the applicant; all parties want a successful end result with a nice-looking project which could be collaborated on instead of mandated. She felt it was important to articulate what is a preference versus what is required, and that sometimes that isn't clear. Ms. Maselli suggested a definitions page, Mr. Frederico agreed.

Discussion followed regarding the use of legalese in the rubric/checklist. Mr. McMenemy was concerned that it may be difficult to navigate for laymen. Ms. Connors said that she felt it would be mostly used by architects and civil engineers who are familiar with such terms, and that it would be beneficial to them in their process. She said that she and Mr. Frederico commonly have pre-application meetings with applicants early in the process when the project is in the concept stage. Those discussions are brought back to the development team, which provides a more refined concept to this committee, although not typically ready for site plan review. The benefit of this process is that by the time it goes to the SPGA for review, many questions have already been addressed, which should make the process more efficient. Mr. Frederico said that Ms. Connors provides applicants with information relevant to their project, such as design guidelines and zoning code. He advised the committee to provide a disclaimer on the rubric/checklist indicating that that document is not the zoning code and there may be items that are not included, the zoning code is a living document that is updated yearly.

Discussion will continue at the next DRC meeting.

Approval of Meeting Minutes from 1.11.24, 2.8.24, 2.29.24, 3.7.24, 3.20.24

1.11.24—Ms. Maselli made a motion to approve the minutes as amended, Ms. Poretsky seconded. Roll call vote was as follows: Ms. Maselli—aye; Ms. Poretsky—aye; minutes approved.

2.8.24—Ms. Maselli made a motion to approve the minutes as amended, Mr. McMenemy seconded. Roll call vote was as follows: Ms. Maselli—aye; Ms. Poretsky—aye; Mr. McMenemy—aye; minutes approved.

2.29.24--Ms. Maselli made a motion to approve the minutes as amended, Mr. McMenemy seconded. Roll call vote was as follows: Ms. Maselli—aye; Ms. Poretsky—aye; Mr. McMenemy—aye; minutes approved.

3.7.24—Tabled to the next DRC meeting.

3.20.24— Ms. Maselli made a motion to approve the minutes as amended, Mr. McMenemy seconded. Roll call vote was as follows: Ms. Maselli—aye; Ms. Poretsky—aye; Mr. McMenemy—aye; minutes approved.

Ms. Maselli said she wanted to amend the minutes from January 25, and would email her edits to staff after this meeting. The Planning Director said that since those minutes were already approved and posted, that her proposed edits would be reflected in these minutes.

Ms. Maselli read Dave Veron's comments in the record for the January 25 minutes: "Let's see your roof deck up top again, depending on how that wall goes and where we set up for landscape I would definitely recommend some sort of shading up there for you guys otherwise no one will ever use it, I've seen this in project and project and different restaurants and rooftop restaurants where they've been designed with no shade, some shading up top would be great whether it's done with shading that comes off of the building, which is my favorite, or separate shading with tables and whatever, not my favorite because in a windstorm they go flying."

Continued Review of 61-65 West Main Street (Fire Station)

Ms. Poretsky had requested review of 61-65 West Main Street to be on the DRC agenda since that application will be before the Planning Board the following Tuesday. Typically, the DRC provides an advisory memo for the SPGA, but the DRC has not completed its review. Ms. Connors said she'd drafted a decision in the event that the Planning Board made a decision on Tuesday.

Ms. Poretsky noted that the Fire Station Building Committee (FSBC) has been voting on design items to move forward with, which doesn't allow much flexibility for the DRC. Ms. Connors felt that was because the FSBC was the client in this situation; they are telling the design team what they would like to see and the design team communicates that to the ZBA and Planning Board, that doesn't take away the ability of this committee to discuss and make recommendations. She mentioned that she'd expected the DRC to provide input on the proposed retaining wall at a prior meeting. Ms. Poretsky said the FSBC held its meetings the night before the DRC's meetings and made the final design votes (for example, there were various retaining wall choices and FSBC made the choice of which one to go forward with the night before our meeting), and Mr. McMenemy said it seemed as though they were irrelevant.

Ms. Poretsky said she needed guidance on how to present that to the Planning Board at its meeting on Tuesday, April 16. After a brief discussion, the Committee decided to meet midday on Tuesday, April 16, to continue review of this project in advance of the Planning Board meeting that evening.

Ms. Maselli made a motion to adjourn. Mr. McMenemy seconded the motion. All were in favor.

Meeting adjourned at 11:29am.

Respectfully Submitted by
Michelle Cilley, Board Secretary