



TOWN OF NORTHBOROUGH Zoning Board of Appeals

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Northborough Zoning Board of Appeals

Zoom Meeting Minutes

March 26, 2024

Approved May 28, 2024

In accordance with the provisions of MGL Chapter 40A, Section 9, the Northborough Zoning Board of Appeals held a public meeting on Tuesday, March 26, 2024 at 7:00pm. 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. To participate in the public comment portion of this meeting from a PC, Mac, iPad, iPhone or Android device, attendees were encouraged to click this URL to join: <https://town-northborough-ma-us.zoom.us/j/84075375325> Or join by phone: +1 646 876 9923 Webinar ID: 840 7537 5325 Passcode: 311390

This meeting can be viewed at:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iFUtUH7BsMA&list=PL2mWMhvXDP2ilbvrFI0jyRpE9V0iq7M4k&index=1>

Members (Remotely): Paul Tagliaferri, Chair; Fran Bakstran, Suzy Cieslica, Mark Rutan, Brad Blanchette; Jeff Gribouski, Alternate.

Members Absent: none.

Staff (Remotely): Laurie Connors, Planning Director; Robert Frederico, Building Inspector and Zoning Enforcement Officer; Tim McInerney, Town Administrator.

Others (Remotely): Janet Slemenda, Amy Dunlap, Tim Alix; HKT Architects; David Parenti, Fire Chief; Dawn Rand, Fire Station Building Committee.

The meeting was called to order at 7:00pm.

HEARING

Consideration of the petition submitted by the Town of Northborough for a Variance of 19' from the 20' maximum front yard setback requirement, a Variance of 113 square feet from the 32 square foot maximum size of a wall sign, and a Variance to allow an Electronic Message Center. The applicable property is located at 61 & 65 West Main Street, Map 63 Parcels 9 & 10, and 10 Monroe Street, Map 63 Parcel 7, in the Downtown Business District and Groundwater Protection Overlay District Area 3.

Janet Slemenda, HKT Architects, provided an overview of the site plan for the proposed two-level fire station on West Main Street. Three variances were requested:

- A variance for 19' of relief to locate the proposed building 39' from the front lot line to accommodate the emergency vehicles use of the site, since Zoning Bylaw Section 7-06-030

requires the minimum front yard setback in the Downtown Business District to be 6', and the maximum front yard setback 20'.

- A variance for the use of a proposed freestanding sign with a message center to advertise public events and public messages. Currently the use of electronic message centers is not allowed in this zoning district. The sign will not be lit.
- A variance of 113-sf from the 32-sf maximum size allowed for a wall sign; since the building is proposed to sit 71' from the road, the Northborough Fire Station sign would be unreadable.

Chair Tagliaferri noted the site plan had changed since the original concept in 2018-2019. Ms. Slemenda said different architects were involved then with a different program; they now have more knowledge about the site after having studies and surveys done, as well as a plan projecting growth 20 years ahead.

Ms. Cieslica asked if there were plans for a traffic light by the fire station. Chief Parenti said no, only lights for a preemption system.

Mr. Blanchette questioned the fire station's need to have an electronic message center. Chief Parenti said, after discussion about relaying critical information to the public, it was decided such a sign would be the quickest means to do so; the alternative was the programmable sign that the DPW transports, or the current message board owned by the Lions Club in the downtown that is not dependable.

There were no questions from staff or the public, and no further questions from the Board.

Mr. Rutan made a motion to close the public hearing. Ms. Bakstran seconded the motion. Roll call vote followed, all were in favor.

DECISION

Ms. Connors acknowledged receipt of a request for waiving the advertising fees for a town project.

All the members were in favor of granting the waiver, the variance requested for the setback, and the variance requested for the wall sign, but there was disagreement regarding the variance request for the electronic message board.

Chair Tagliaferri, Mr. Blanchette, and Ms. Cieslica were not in favor of granting the variance for the electronic message center. Chair Tagliaferri said such signs are prohibited and that a manual message board was sufficient. Mr. Blanchette said the Lion's Club sign could be repaired, that location was appropriate for such a sign; he questioned the necessity of such an electronic message board with the technology and social media available today. Ms. Cieslica thought it would distract drivers.

Ms. Bakstran and Mr. Rutan, the two remaining voting members, were in favor of the electronic message board. Ms. Bakstran felt that variance request made sense based on the shape of the lot, placement would allow the sign to be easily seen, unlike a manual sign. She felt there was room for interpretation of the criteria. Mr. Rutan thought they had adopted the electronic sign ordinance to prevent commercial signs in the downtown area advertising their products and degrading the look of downtown. He felt the proposed message center for the fire station was tastefully done and would prevent staff from having to manually update public messages. It was not advertising any product.

Mr. Gribouski, although not a voting member, was in favor of granting the variance for the electronic messaging sign; this is a unique situation, there could be significant benefit in allowing such a sign for a municipal building, the sign would be controlled by the town and would provide useful information. He did not agree that would be distracting. He said it may fail a technical strict application of the use variance test but that the use variance is a tool in a tool belt.

There was no further discussion.

Ms. Bakstran made a motion to grant a waiver of all application and advertising fees. Mr. Blanchette seconded. Roll call vote was as follows: Ms. Bakstran—"aye," Mr. Blanchette—"aye;" Mr. Rutan—"aye;" Ms. Cieslica—"aye;" Chair Tagliaferri—"aye." The waiver was approved.

Ms. Bakstran made a motion to grant a variance of twenty feet from the 20-foot maximum front yard setback requirement. Mr. Blanchette seconded. Roll call vote was as follows: Ms. Bakstran—"aye," Mr. Blanchette—"aye;" Mr. Rutan—"aye;" Ms. Cieslica—"aye;" Chair Tagliaferri—"aye." The variance was approved.

Mr. Rutan made a motion to grant a variance enabling installation of a wall sign totaling 172 square feet, or 140 square feet of relief. Mr. Blanchette seconded. Roll call vote was as follows: Mr. Rutan—"aye," Mr. Blanchette—"aye;" Ms. Bakstran—"aye;" Ms. Cieslica—"aye;" Chair Tagliaferri—"aye." The variance was approved.

Ms. Bakstran made a motion to grant a variance enabling installation of a freestanding sign containing an Electronic Message Center. Mr. Rutan seconded. Roll call vote was as follows: Ms. Bakstran—"aye," Mr. Rutan—"aye;" Mr. Blanchette—"nay;" Ms. Cieslica—"nay;" Chair Tagliaferri—"nay". The variance was denied.

OLD/NEW BUSINESS

Consideration of Minutes from November 28, 2023 and February 27, 2024—Ms. Bakstran made a motion to approve the November 28, 2023 minutes as submitted, Mr. Rutan seconded, roll call vote followed, all were in favor. Mr. Blanchette made a motion to approve the February 27, 2024 minutes as amended, Mr. Rutan seconded, roll call vote followed; Ms. Bakstran abstained, all in favor.

Discussion regarding hybrid meetings—the ZBA will have its first hybrid meeting in May.

Any other business that may legally come before the Board—Ms. Cieslica said Town Cleanup is April 27. Ms. Bakstran mentioned a letter sent to the Town Offices Feasibility Committee on behalf of the MPIC.

There were no further comments.

Ms. Bakstran made a motion to adjourn. Mr. Blanchette seconded the motion. Roll call vote followed, all were in favor.

The meeting adjourned at 8:36pm.

Respectfully Submitted by
Michelle Cilley, ZBA Board Secretary