

Town of Franklin



Zoning Board of Appeals

Thursday, November 30, 2023
Meeting Minutes

Chair Bruce Hunchard called the above-captioned Remote Access Zoom Virtual Meeting to order this date at 7:30 PM. Members in attendance: Bruce Hunchard, Philip Brunelli, Robert Acevedo, Meghan Whitmore, Christopher Stickney. Members absent: None. Also in attendance: Casey Thayer, Administrative Assistant.

This meeting is being conducted as a Remote Access Zoom Virtual Meeting. The Zoom meeting link and the Zoom meeting call-in number are provided on the agenda. The meeting is being televised and recorded for the public's information.

121 Grove Street - Fairfield Grove Street

Abutters: Paula Lombardi, 757 Washington Street.

7:30 p.m. Applicant is seeking a building permit to construct a 330-unit multi-family development. The building permit is denied without a comprehensive permit from the ZBA. Applicants present: Richard Cornetta, attorney for Fairfield Residential Development; Robert Hewitt, Vice President of Development of Fairfield Residential; John Shipe of Shipe Consulting Associates.

Mr. Cornetta introduced the development team including Robert Hewitt, Vice President of Development of Fairfield Residential; John Shipe of Shipe Consulting Associates; Attorney Paul Momnie of Goulston & Storrs; and Janice Hurst of Fairfield Residential. He explained the applicant is a national real estate development firm. He reviewed that the applicant recently developed the Station 117 project on Dean Avenue which has 257 multi-family housing units. He explained the location of the property for the Grove Street project which consists of two parcels for a total of 32 acres in the industrial zoning district. He reviewed information from his letter to the Zoning Board of Appeals dated October 31, 2023, which was provided in the meeting packet. He noted the land is located in close proximity to downtown, commercial centers, train station, and I-495. He explained there is no significant single-family home residences abutting the site. He said the site is bordered by the Franklin town forest, electrical substation, and office park. He explained some commercial and retail locations around the site. He explained that this development and location would not overburden Rt. 140. He provided an overview that this application is for a comprehensive permit. He explained these would be 330 apartments, not condominiums, for rent. He said there is a great demand for affordable housing in Franklin. He said they believe this issue could be addressed with proposals such as this one. He said 83 of the 330 units would be available to those households earning up to 80 percent of area-median income in accordance with MGL Ch. 40B. He noted that Franklin's subsidized housing inventory currently exceeds the 10 percent threshold. He said they believe the entire 330 number of housing units, because of the apartment style of the development, would be added to these totals which would be a substantial contribution to maintain the threshold for the foreseeable future. He said that during the past 18 months, the applicant has participated in numerous meetings with various agencies of the Town which he reviewed. He said that they incorporated many of

the suggestions made to modify the project to meet some of those inputs and suggestions made by the various boards.

Mr. Hewitt narrated a slideshow presentation and provided an overview of the application. He said that Fairfield Residential is an owner, developer, builder, and operator of apartment communities with a regional office in Braintree, MA. He reviewed some of their recent completions including Station 117 at Dean Avenue. He showed and explained pictures of Station 117 and another finished 40B project, The Quill in Milford, MA, with 242-unit apartments. He showed renderings of the proposed Grove Street Residences. He discussed there would be 330 units with 83 units deed restricted for affordability in perpetuity. He noted 100 percent of the units would be counted toward the town's SHI number. He reviewed the project team members.

Mr. Shipe continued narrating the slideshow presentation. He said he is a civil engineer and his role is to guide projects like this. He stated that he worked on the Dean Avenue project. He reviewed the locus map and stated the location is excellent. He discussed the existing property which is about 32 acres. He discussed the existing conditions including that it is not historical, no direct residential neighbors, and no floodplain. He stated the wetlands have been fully delineated. He reviewed the Grove Street Residences – Colored Site Plan with Legend slide. He reviewed the typical amenities for the residences. He said they try to spend a lot of money on the landscaping. He discussed that it is a combination of four and five story wood framed buildings. He explained there are 158 one-bedroom units, 140 two-bedroom units, and 32 three-bedroom units proposed. He reviewed that the average size is approximately 1,000 sq. ft. per unit. He said the parking is approximately 1.74 spaces per unit with dedicated EV charging. He stated that they have met with a lot of folks in town and received feedback. He reviewed the changes to the site plan based on feedback to date including moving the building at Grove Street farther back from Grove Street, reducing building heights by designing flat roofs, conducting a traffic study, incorporating Fire Department comments to allow access to all sides of the buildings, and adding EV charging stations. He discussed providing easements and support for the construction of the multiuse path. He reviewed that they are putting together a Notice of Intent for the Conservation Commission in December. He reviewed stormwater management. He said the stormwater design complies with the MassDEP Stormwater Management Policy including stormwater runoff and quality control, recharge to groundwater and Low Impact Development (LID) strategies. He explained that they will file for a NPDES Permit for erosion control and spill prevention controls, and they will prepare a Stormwater Operation and Maintenance Program. He noted that two stream crossings are required, and they are complying with the applicable stream crossing standards. He explained they propose to build culverts for the stream crossings which will be submitted to the Conservation Commission. He reviewed the traffic study. He stated that a detailed Transportation Impact Assessment was prepared by Vanasse & Associates to review existing and future traffic conditions. He said the project is expected to generate about 134 new trips during the weekday morning peak hour, and traffic conditions are anticipated to change only slightly with some minor increase in delay and queue length. He reviewed that traffic demand management will include providing residents with information on public transportation and promoting carpooling; there will be on site bike storage to encourage use of bicycles. He showed and explained the design intent on limiting impact to the surrounding environmentally sensitive areas. He noted buildings were designed with flat roofs to minimize building height. He said there would be a mix of exterior materials, colors and balconies used to create a residential appearance. He showed and explained a rendering provided by the architect. He discussed the project benefits as explained on the slides. He noted the estimated increase in tax revenue would be more than \$800,000 per year versus the \$13,000 today. He reviewed the benefits to public infrastructure including that this would contribute toward the State's mandates for affordable housing return, increase the Town's subsidized housing inventory, building permit fee of \$700,000, minimal traffic impact, and fully designed on-site stormwater management system. He reviewed that there would be no impacts on residential neighbors. He reviewed the included list of waivers provided in the meeting packet.

Mr. Mark Bobrowski, attorney for the ZBA, introduced himself. Mr. Joseph Peznola of Hancock Associates introduced himself and said he would be doing the technical peer review of the civil engineering for the project for the ZBA.

Chair Hunchard asked Mr. Shipe about the holes needed to be dug. Mr. Shipe said they were able to do the test pits. Chair Hunchard reviewed his list of questions/concerns including noting the buildings were reduced to 57 ft., moving the Grove Street building farther back from Grove Street, looking into a possible rail trail, working with the Town to determine the best place for a sidewalk. He reviewed that this project was before the ZBA in 2006. He noted that at that time, the ZBA was entertaining two 40B developments. He explained why this project did not go forward in 2006. He said this is the best use to probably come along for this piece of property and generate some tax revenue for the Town.

Ms. Whitmore said it looks very nice. Mr. Stickney asked about a barrier between the project and electrical substation regarding noise, and he would like to see the traffic study impact for Beaver Street and Rt. 140 intersection. Mr. Acevedo said he was on the ZBA in 2006 for the other project and thought it was approved. He said he thought this was a nice location for a 40B. He said he does not see any backup happening on Grove Street or Beaver Street. He said he sees no downfalls with this project. Mr. Brunelli said most of his questions were covered.

Mr. Bobrowski said that he had some questions for Chair Hunchard and some for the applicant. He asked about the 32 three-bedroom units and noted there is a 10 percent requirement; he said this is one unit short. He said they need 33 units unless Mass Housing says it is okay. He said he is concerned about traffic as that is a lot of vehicles. He said he would like a quick look at this traffic study from a peer reviewer. He stated the wetlands waivers need to be itemized and sent to Conservation Commission for official recommendation back to the ZBA. He said the same things with the Board of Health regulations. He said he would like to hear from Building Commissioner Gus Brown on any zoning concerns that he may have in regard to height and code issues. He said this should go to Fire and Police to get recommendations from those chiefs. He said he spoke to Mr. Cornetta a few times, and they agreed to keep this focused on one issue at the next public hearing. Mr. Bobrowski said he suggested civil, and traffic done at the following meeting and any other topic can be scheduled accordingly.

Ms. Thayer confirmed the meetings in February 2024 are February 1 and February 15. Mr. Bobrowski said February 15, 2024, is okay. Mr. Hewitt stated February 15, 2024, is okay.

Mr. Shipe noted that only the executive summary of the traffic study was submitted to the ZBA. He said the full report can be submitted. Mr. Bobrowski said that Mr. Peznola can look at the full study and if Mr. Peznola thinks they need to go another step, we can make that recommendation. Mr. Peznola said he can do that and if needed they can bring in additional partners regarding the traffic study. He asked for the ZBA's permission for Hancock to converse directly with RJ O'Connell. Chair Hunchard said that is fine with them. Mr. Peznola said that regarding the wetland setbacks, the applicant is asking for a blanket waiver from the requirements, but they should itemize this. He said the applicant is also asking for a blanket waiver from the Franklin stormwater bylaw; an itemization where they do not meet the requirements would be helpful. Mr. Shipe said that he will do that.

Mr. Bobrowski said he can coordinate with Mr. Cornetta to have a full evening of work to do on February 15. Mr. Cornetta said they submitted a check for the consultants. Chair Hunchard said they voted yes and accepted the check to hire the consultants.

Ms. Paula Lombardi, 757 Washington Street, stated that she is concerned about the height as it is a five story and they are comparing it to Dean Avenue, but Dean Avenue is actually below grade. She said she

is worried as there is not a ladder truck that could attend to something that high. She said that if there were a fire with wind, it could blow toward Benjamin Landing which is less than .25 miles away and to the state forest. She noted concern about the traffic/traffic study. She said the railroad gates on both Beaver Street and Grove Street get really backed up. She asked about access for a bus where children could wait near the entrance to the project. She reiterated her main concern is about the height. She asked if there are terraces on the buildings and if the residents would be allowed to have grills on them. She noted that in Milford there were 220 apartments and asked if there were five stories in that project. She asked how many occupants are actually anticipated for the 330 units.

Chair Hunchard stated that the height issue has been discussed over the last 1.5 years; the Fire Department is fine with the 57 ft. He noted the applicant has made flat roofs. He said that he is pretty sure the buildings are all sprinkled if there was a fire.

Mr. Cornetta thanked the ZBA for their time. He said he looks forward to working with the Town's consultants.

Motion made by Philip Brunelli to continue the public hearing to February 15, 2024, at 7:30 PM. Motion seconded by Robert Acevedo. Roll Call Vote: Brunelli-YES; Acevedo-YES; Hunchard-YES. Unanimous by the Board.

General Business:

Meeting Minutes November 9, 2023

Motion made by Robert Acevedo to approve the Meeting Minutes as presented for Thursday, November 9, 2023. Motion seconded by Philip Brunelli. Roll Call Vote: Brunelli-YES; Acevedo-YES; Hunchard-YES. Unanimous by the Board.

Motion made by Philip Brunelli to adjourn the Remote Access Zoom Virtual Meeting. Motion seconded by Robert Acevedo. Roll Call Vote: Brunelli-YES; Acevedo-YES; Hunchard-YES. Unanimous by the Board.

Meeting adjourned at 8:41 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Judith Lizardi
Recording Secretary

Signature



Date

1.9.24