

From: Carrie Vibert May 8, 2012 3:55:06 PM
Subject: Design Review Board Minutes 03/13/2012 ADOPTED
To: SimsburyCT_DesignMin
Cc:

DESIGN REVIEW BOARD MINUTES
MARCH 13, 2012
REGULAR MEETING

I. CALL TO ORDER

Emil Dahlquist, Chairman, called the Design Review Board meeting to order at 5:34 p.m. in the Board of Education Conference Room of the Simsbury Town Offices. The following members were present: Anthony Drapelick, William Gardner, Kevin E. Gray, Charles Stephenson, Rita Bond, John Stewart and Mark Naccarato. Also in attendance were Hiram Peck, Director of Planning, Janis Prifti, Clerk, and other interested parties.

II. APPOINTMENT OF ALTERNATES

None.

III. PRESENTATION(s), DISCUSSION AND POSSIBLE VOTE

None.

V. DISCUSSION

a. Projects and Tasks for 2012

Chairman Dahlquist asked the Commissioners to think about what projects should be considered for 2012 for discussion at the next meeting. He said current Town -wide Guidelines should be updated based on the information from Winter and Company and whether they are published online or hardcopy.

Chairman Dahlquist suggested having a discussion of how best to interface with the Zoning Commission; currently, it is through the minutes, motions, and design consideration text material they receive. He suggested the ideal scenario may be a one-page checklist of what was discussed for a project and the outstanding concerns and general conclusions. Regarding Zoning public hearings, Mr. Peck said they have no problem allowing public discussion if the item is on the agenda, but they do not want de facto

public hearings without the applicant present. He said if the DRB would like to talk to the Zoning Commission that can easily be arranged through Chairman Dahlquist.

The Commissioners discussed different methodologies for establishing a good working relationship with the Zoning Commission and an appreciation of the expertise and recommendations put forth by DRB. The Commissioners believe there is a perception DRB is anti-development, e.g. Dunkin Donuts; however, a reading of the minutes would indicate the opposite. Regarding Chairman Dahlquist contacting Zoning Commission Chairman, Rob Pomeroy, he would also like to have documentation to assure accurate interpretation of DRB recommendations, e.g. Benny Gjonbazaj's plan for a pressure treated deck where composite material was recommended by DRB and misconstrued as strong-arming, rather than the applicant hearing clearly that it was a recommendation and not a requirement for approval. Commissioner Bond stated the difference appeared to be cultural, rather than what the DRB recommended. She added that in the area of aesthetics, a lot of discussion may take place in the process. Commissioner Gray suggested finding out what Zoning and Planning want to receive from DRB; Commissioner Stewart agreed with the idea of setting up an informal meeting to explain how DRB looks at things to better serve the community. Commissioner Bond liked the idea of reviewing some past projects and recommendations and changes that resulted in better projects, e.g. Riverview or Dunkin Donuts. Commissioner Stewart suggested the Zoning and Planning Commissions may not be aware of the expertise and credentials of DRB members in making valid recommendations, as well as problems that have occurred when recommendations were not adopted. Commissioner Naccarato stated DRB understands in its capacity as an advisory board that our advice can be set aside, but DRB's review is actually more impartial and based on Design Guidelines and it is important for the Zoning and Planning Commissions to understand that. Chairman Dahlquist stated the mutually understood jargon and experience of DRB members does not always come through in the minutes.

Mr. Peck suggested a non-quorum of 2-3 members of each Commission sitting down to find a basis for common ground would be more productive. He believes the Commissioners do read the material, but there are differences of opinion among all boards. He suggested it may be useful to be clearer with decisions and recommendations. Chairman Dahlquist requested Mr. Peck set up a meeting and also attend to assure continuity among the Commissions. The Commissioners agreed on moving in this direction. Commissioner Stewart suggested the St. Francis/Giorgio project as a concrete example of what can go wrong. Commissioner Gray stated DRB should say why we disagree in relation to the Design Guidelines. Chairman Dahlquist talked about the Keystone letter and taking care in communicating with applicants. Regarding why they didn't come back to DRB as promised, Mr. Peck said he and Rich Sawitzke took a look at the history of the filing

and there was significant discussion about berms in front and landscaping along Hopmeadow, but various project professionals criticized expenditure for architecture and then hiding it behind berms and landscaping. He said DRB did not hear that, but staff and the Town Engineer and others heard it, and the applicant decided they only needed to meet the Zoning Regulations. He said maps on file back to 2009 show the 2 buildings where they are now that were periodically revised. He stated the applicant asked to come back to DRB to review the finished materials and that was what they had agreed to do and they were shocked at the reception. Chairman Dahlquist said that Mr. Giorgio stated that DRB was familiar with the new configuration of the site plan with 2 buildings which was not the case. Mr. Peck stated that the project has changed configuration many times and it is a challenge to keep track of it and there may be a way to improve that. Chairman Dahlquist stated that the past Chair of Zoning would send applicants back to DRB with revised plans to get DRB's feedback. Mr. Peck said staff has a lot of discussion with applicants about what they should do but they do not have total control over it. Mr. Peck said the Zoning Commission has a different set of players and there is a need to find ways to suggest to applicants how to make their project better with DRB's suggestions softened a bit. The Commissioners agreed Zoning needs to understand DRB is an advisory board that serves them and they need to value the design review referral. The Commissioners agreed things started out well with Dr. Giorgio who spent a lot on site preparation and could have an improved one-story building. Mr. Peck said the initial approval could have gone forward, but the economy turn around had an effect, as well as a tenant with specific requirements. He believes there will be some solutions on the site with a potential new road connecting Wolcott Road to Hoskins which will change access and visibility, potential substation changes, and Dorset Drive may be realigned internal to the site with probable opportunity to comment.

Commissioner Stephenson hopes Dr. Giorgio will develop the site to look as well as possible. Mr. Peck agreed and believes the finished landscaping will make a big difference. Commissioner Gray stated the need to recognize the back of the building is more of a front than a back and if the access road is built, those are the 2 most visible sides which raise questions. Commissioner Naccarato said in an initial review of the former project it was important the buildings be created to not have a front or back because they are on Hopmeadow - that's a front, but they also need to create a walkable environment - that's another front, especially with a free-standing drugstore - the template is to have a 2-sided building with no glazing on it and you could see the outline of that with the drive-thru canopy on the corner of the site. He said it is totally a reversal of what was previously discussed at great length of being sensitive to that and mimicking glazing with the buildings being viewed from all sides. Chairman Dahlquist said the issue is Dr. Giorgio meeting his tenant's requirements

and getting a lease in place to make profit on the project. Commissioner Stewart asked on future projects if an applicant states his client has certain requirements does DRB acquiesce. Commissioner Dahlquist gave the example of Simsbury Commons and the issue of a connection between a pedestrian walkway on the Stop & Shop side and Bob's where they would only sign a lease if they did not share parking.

Mr. Peck said they continue to tell applicants to bring in plans as early as possible. Regarding major retailer projects, Commissioner Stewart stated other area Commissions have gotten them to modify plans using examples from other locales. He recalled his office spent a tremendous amount of time discussing with Dr. Giorgio how to improve the walkability and disability of the project which was seen at that point by Dr. Giorgio as a selling point and making the northern area a testament to good design, high quality and to spur development in the area, but the final project turned its back on what was proposed with the primary concern getting a tenant; rather, he believes DRB should act to serve the community in this area. Mr. Peck suggested simply taking the edge off recommendations. Chairman Dahlquist said DRB does not want to promote branding. Commissioner Stephenson asked if there is anything in the Guidelines regarding branding. Commissioner Naccarato said scale and massing is often the worst part of architecture in smaller towns and the best vehicle for making change may be to focus on Guidelines that apply to massing and using materials consistent with the vernacular. Chairman Dahlquist stated it is not desirable to apply wallpaper to the outside to make a fake colonial building, but a big box store can be broken down to more manageable size. The Commissioners discussed ways to refine branding and examples of better-looking McDonald's around the world.

Commissioner Gray asked if the sister building at Dorset Crossing has to be the same as the first building. Mr. Peck said not as far as Zoning is concerned, and he will pass on suggestions from the DRB to Dr. Giorgio. Commissioner Gray said changes could be modest without adding to cost. Commissioner Stephenson suggested simply articulating the roof shape, similar to the Gristmill condo modifications. Chairman Dahlquist said DRB will provide suggestions for minor changes.

The Commissioners agreed on setting up a non-quorum meeting with Zoning with 2-3 members; Chairman Dahlquist and Commissioners Drapelick and Stephenson agreed to participate.

b. Update on Town Center Guidelines

Chairman Dahlquist and Commissioner Drapelick attended the Town Center Guidelines presentation. Mr. Peck said representatives from most boards and commissions attended, as well as the business community and Chamber.

He said some people were disappointed in progress to date, but the consultant held back some material while providing a good skeleton and would like comments within 2 weeks to finish the Guidelines; they will be back in late April and finish in June providing 2 more opportunities for comment. Chairman Dahlquist said the mockup used the Town Center Guidelines format and asked whether they will be in hardcopy form. Mr. Peck said once printing cost is determined it may be a free-standing document initially until funding is available to redo it all. He said once budget funding becomes available, the Commission may want to decide to begin funding work on a village district in Tariffville or Weatogue and save putting the whole document together until that is complete. Chairman Dahlquist said the mockup pictures are only examples and the consultant would like photo recommendations from DRB. Mr. Peck will put the mockup up on the website on Monday. Regarding examples of weaknesses in the Code, Mr. Peck said changes will be proposed to the Code and staff definitely recommends against applicants coming in with something that off. He said the consultant recommends changes to the Code and the Design Guidelines in the 3-tiered worksheet sent out.

Chairman Dahlquist said in the Town Center Guidelines around Pg. 8 it states General Goals to 1) achieve excellence in design; 2) promote creativity; 3) design with authenticity; 4) design with consistency; 5) design for durability; 6) design for sustainability; 7) draw upon local design traditions; 8) honor the heritage of Simsbury; 9) design to fit with the context; 10) enhance the public realm; 11) enhance the pedestrian experience; and 12) provide signature open spaces; and there are explanatory paragraphs for each goal. The Commissioners discussed the goals and the idea of making an overriding point with subsets - which of the 12 is most important. Regarding improving the Town Center process, Mr. Peck said comments come in informally, he reviews them, and distributes the information. He said DRB can change its process, and Zoning will decide on its own process. Mr. Peck will make printed copies available tomorrow for pickup or resend it as a PDF.

Chairman Dahlquist said on Pg. 2 is the Guideline structure with main category topics and a statement of intent below in a hierarchical arrangement and recommended Guidelines to achieve them, e.g. maintaining a human scale with bulleted recommendations. Mr. Peck asked for feedback on this suggested arrangement; there could be some changes as a result of these suggestions for the Code and Design Guidelines, if Zoning understands what DRB is doing. He said there will be a public hearing process before the Code can be changed and developers will receive all the material in order "to do good design". He asked for any suggestions to streamline or simplify the Guidelines. Chairman Dahlquist asked for suggestions on what could be merged, e.g. parking, and what would be Guidelines with all information printed in the same booklet. Mr. Peck said it is not known

what Zoning will adopt and a lot is based on whether DRB recommends approval; if DRB recommends approval and the project meets the Code, the applicant can get into a shortened process. He reiterated the consultant will return the 2nd or 3rd week in April. Chairman Dahlquist asked to receive comments with a cc to Mr. Peck. Commissioner Stephenson suggested having on 1 page the reason the Guidelines are important to read - cliff note style.

c. Budget Discussion

Other discussion:

Mr. Peck said Connecticut Transit has offered to replace the bus shelter at the Weatogue commuter lot with a shelter removed from another location and he needs to know if DRB agrees. He said it is a similar size to the current wooden shelter which is in bad shape; the replacement has 3 sides and is free. The Commissioners agreed it is a temporary replacement at no cost and to go ahead with it.

Mr. Peck said that in Bruce Kaplan's building next to Eno Hall, he previously put windows in one side of the building and is asking to put two windows on another side of the building. The Commissioners agreed to the request.

VI. CORRESPONDENCE

None.

VII. STAFF REPORTS

None.

VIII. APPROVAL OF MINUTES of February 28, 201

The February 28, 2012, minutes were amended on Lines 109, 110, 132 and 139 to change "Vercari" to "Arcari"; and on Line 76 to change "3 footprints" to "2 footprints". Commissioner Gardner made a motion to approve the February 28, 2012, minutes, as amended. Commissioner Bond seconded the motion, and it was passed unanimously.

IX. ADJOURNMENT

Chairman Gardner made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 6:57 p.m. Commissioner Drapelick seconded the motion, and it was passed unanimously.

Kevin E. Gray, Secretary