

**May 3, 2022
Planning Board**

Present were: Regular Members: Chair Lori Langlois, Tom McCue, Karen Collins, Henry Noel, Anthony Valliere, and Dan Whittet (on Zoom); **Ex-Officio Member:** Lucie Remillard
Alternate Members: Micah Bachner, Jeffrey Quackenbush, and Amy George.

Excused were: Regular members: Jennifer Lazzaro **Ex-Officio Member:** Lise Barrette

Others Present: Pamela Laflamme, Community Development Director; Michel Salek, Code Enforcement Officer; Shelli Fortin, City Clerk; William Carroll, Daily Sun; Don Bouchard of Horizons Engineers; Anthony Cocca and Bill Schroeder of Cocca Development (on Zoom), and Amber Bachner

Chair Langlois called the meeting to order and appointed Alternate Member Micah Bachner as a voting member.

Public Comments

None

Approval of April 2022 minutes

Mr. McCue made a motion to approve the minutes of the April 6, 2022 meeting as presented. Ms. Collins seconded the motion. All in favor, the motion carried.

Site Plan Review – Design Review – Tax Map 119 Lot 241; 173 Pleasant Street – Mareld Company Inc.

Mr. McCue made a motion to accept the application for site plan review for 173 Pleasant Street as complete. Ms. Collins seconded the motion. All in favor, the motion carried.

Mr. Bouchard of Horizons Engineers began the presentation by distributing plans for the lot. The building will be a drive-thru pharmacy at the corner of York and Pleasant Street. Mr. Bouchard advised that the building and pavement currently there would be removed. The proposed development would have York Street as the main entrance to the building, with access on Pleasant Street as well. The building will be moved to the northwest corner of the lot, with parking on the Pleasant Street side. They have calculated the pre- and post-impervious surfaces, and are reducing the amount, and they have provided the information to Ms. Laflamme in a summary. The dumpster will be in the same location and they have added grassy areas and plantings. Handicapped spaces will be in the front of the building. There is a sidewalk for pedestrians to access the front of the store from Pleasant Street. There is green space between the parking spaces and the sidewalk area, along with landscape islands.

Chair Langlois recessed the regular meeting and opened the Public Hearing at 6:41 pm.

There were no public comments.

Chair Langlois closed the Public Hearing at 6:41 pm.

Ms. George commented that she liked the way they used the same directional pattern as the bank had for the flow of traffic.

Ms. Collins asked if the plantings were the ones they asked for and was advised they are. Ms. Collins asked if the parking is what the city requires in zoning and site plan regulations. Ms. Laflamme advised that they could ask to waive the requirement, but it does meet them.

Mr. Salek asked about snow storage, and was advised that the snow will be removed after each storm, but they could use the island areas for storage until it is removed.

Mr. Quackenbush stated that although he is supportive of Walgreens building in Berlin and believes this plan is better, he has some strong feelings about the parking. Mr. Quackenbush stated that the plan seems like a strip mall concept in a downtown area, and noted that there is a lot of parking already available in the area, currently 142 parking spaces within 100 feet of the site. Mr. Quackenbush noted the importance of walkability in the downtown area, and that the building should be oriented toward pedestrian traffic. Mr. Quackenbush noted safety concerns for pedestrians as you cannot get into the building without crossing traffic, which creates a greater potential for accidents. Mr. Quackenbush stated that he feels the plan would be appropriate for large commercial roads. Mr. Quackenbush noted that he understands it is Walgreens policy, but this should not be the rule for every site in the country. Mr. Quackenbush asked that they have some consideration for the downtown area, suggesting it would be more appealing if it was more walkable.

Mr. McCue acknowledged Mr. Quackenbush's concerns, but stated that there are parking requirements when reviewing site plans, and that spaces on other properties should not be considered as available, as other applicants could also begin to do the same.

Ms. Laflamme advised that two waivers will be required, including the Traffic and Analysis Study, which is not needed, and the Environmental Impact Analysis. Ms. Laflamme also advised that there were no changes to the building and they sent the color packet. Ms. Laflamme advised the plans have been sent to the Police Department and Fire Department, along with Code Enforcement, to review. The Police Department had no feedback, and Fire and Code will wait to get the building plans, and have nothing to add at this point.

Mr. Valliere stated that he believes the developer has heard their major concerns and that the walkway and grass are good. Mr. Valliere noted that he appreciates them building in Berlin and believes they have met the Board's needs.

Mr. Whittet shared an aerial photograph of the property via Zoom. Mr. Whittet noted that the Objectives in the Master Plan refer to walkability. Mr. Whittet noted that they have addressed the green space and sidewalk issue, and agrees that the parking spaces required

should be on site. Mr. Whittet asked if any of the materials removed from the property would be recycled and was advised they will not be.

Mr. Cocca advised that they do not own the building that Walgreens is currently in, and have approached the owner about purchasing it, as they could repurpose it for another tenant.

A Board member asked about making the green space wider between the parking spaces and the sidewalk, but Mr. Schroeder advised they don't have any available space to allow for this.

Mr. Whittet noted that it is important to make things as pedestrian friendly as possible.

Ms. Remillard stated that she likes the building and the new design, and likes the green space. Ms. Remillard noted that she would have preferred to see a crosswalk off of the York Street side of the building as well. Ms. Remillard thanked the developers for staying in Berlin.

Ms. Laflamme pointed out again that the post-drainage will be less than the pre-drainage, so this has been reduced. Ms. Laflamme noted that the approval of the site plan review should contain the condition that any federal, state, or local permits obtained should be copied to the Planning Department for the file.

Ms. Remillard made a motion to approve the site plan review for 173 Pleasant Street as presented with the conditions stated by Ms. Laflamme. The motion was seconded by Mr. Valliere. All in favor, the motion carried.

Ms. Laflamme stated she will send the notice of decision to Cocca Development.

Mr. Cocca, Mr. Schroeder, and Mr. Bouchard left the meeting.

2022 Master Plan Draft Review & Update

Ms. Laflamme advised that the Public Hearing will be scheduled on a City Council meeting night on Monday, June 13th at 6:30. It will then be adopted formally by the Planning Board at the next meeting on Wednesday, July 6th. Ms. Laflamme will upload the corrected version to the website and send out a copy to the members.

Planning Board Appointments/Changes

Ms. Laflamme thanked the members who have moved into new positions: Karen Collins, Henry Noel, and Jennifer Lazzaro. Micah Bachner is a new alternate member. Both Brian Valerino and Suzanne Wasileski decided not to continue on the Board.

Zoning Ordinance amendment continued discussions

Ms. Laflamme advised that she hopes to bring the manufactured housing amendment to the June or July meeting.

Ms. Laflamme advised there has been discussion by the NH Community Loan Fund, the Conservation Fund, NHHFA, the NH Endowment for Health, and the Tillotson Fund about employer assisted housing for those who work in the outdoor sector, as housing is not affordable for those who work in these positions. There is a housing summit next week that Ms. Laflamme and Chair Langlois will be attending. The purpose of the summit is to bring groups together to discuss the issue of making housing more accessible, as many people are finding it difficult to find or afford housing. One of the discussions will be on different types and styles of housing, and the lack of housing choices. Ms. Laflamme stated that they will need to figure out a way to put language into the ordinance that will allow for more flexibility. Ms. Laflamme advised that language such as affordable, workforce and subsidized housing comes with a stigma, but it is housing for the working class that we can all afford. Ms. Laflamme noted that AHEAD is also looking at options. Ms. Remillard noted that manufactured housing could be an option.

Mr. Quackenbush noted that this is a great idea and asked if anyone can attend the summit. Ms. Laflamme advised that it is limited to 80 participants.

Ms. Laflamme stated that if something is not written in the ordinance as permissible, it would need a variance, which is why they need to create language to allow more flexibility in the types of housing the City can offer. Ms. George suggested finding language in existence in another community that they could use.

Mr. Whittet asked what the definition of an affordable home would be, and Ms. Laflamme advised that it is subjective, but will send the definition from the RSA to the members. Ms. Laflamme will continue to work on this, and will bring more information to the Board.

Other

Mr. McCue reviewed the Right-to-Know law and reminded the Board that they cannot send emails directly to Board members, as if more than 1 person responds it is considered to be a meeting. All meetings have to be noticed and the public given an opportunity to be heard. It was recommended that if members have factual information to share before the meeting, it should be sent to Ms. Laflamme, who can then distribute it to the members for review.

Karen Collins mentioned the on-line training that she attended, and stated that the Board members should not share their opinion before the hearing, and that no comments should be made on social media. Ms. Laflamme advised that the training was recorded and is available to watch. Links to the training can be provided to those interested.

Public Comments

None

Member Comments

None

Planner Comments and Project Updates

Ms. Laflamme was pleased to announce that the City Council was able to award the Riverwalk contract and that a pre-construction conference is scheduled for next Tuesday. They are hoping to begin by June 1, but may be able to mobilize even quicker than that.

Ms. Laflamme advised that the housing demolition I&I project is underway. This project removes housing that was improperly hooked up to drainage, had failing sump pumps, and/or flat roofs, and will reduce the amount of excess water going in to the sewer system. The lots that remain after demolition will need to remain as green space for the life of the loan. Split rail fencing will be installed around the properties. The Pleasant Street property that is being demolished was paid for by Primex, so this lot will be able to be put out to bid.

Ms. Laflamme advised that they are working with CMA on the water and sewer extension on Route 110.

Ms. Laflamme advised that the City Council is in the process of changing the speed limit on Route 110 to allow ATV access to the park via Route 110.

Ms. George asked if the green space from the DES project could be used for community gardens. Ms. Laflamme will check with DES. Mr. Quackenbush asked why fencing was required for the green spaces, and Ms. Laflamme advised it was to keep others from encroaching on the property, and to be sure vehicles are not parked on the lots. Chair Langlois suggested that Friendship Park could be used for community gardens, as there are already beds there available to plant. Several ideas were suggested to encourage use of these, including having the Food Coop organize volunteers, and having children from the summer parks program participate. Mr. McCue asked if the City would be required to maintain the green spaces and Ms. Laflamme advised they would be maintained by the Parks Department.

Adjournment

There being no further business to come before the board, Mr. McCue made a motion to adjourn, seconded by Mr. Bachner. All in favor, the motion carried.

The meeting ended at 7:51 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Shelli Fortin

* Note: These minutes are unofficial until they have been accepted by the Planning Board by motion.