Design Review Board Meeting Minutes
Monday, August 19, 2024
7:30 p.m.

Board Members:
Mark Gluesing, Board Chair (P)
Steve Dornbusch, Board Member (P)
Susan Opton, Board Member (P)
Milee Pradhan, Board Member (P)
Elisa Litchman, Administrative Specialist, Planning & Community Development (P)

Mark Gluesing, Chair, called the meeting to order on August 19, 2024, at 7:30 p.m. He reviewed the remote meeting procedures.

Applicants & Attendees:
1. *Continued:* Mehmet Sahin, Falcon Graphics representing Uniq Laser
2. Anna Haluch, Pro Sign Service LLC representing Ayr Wellness
3. Bryan Bonina, Signarama-Walpole representing The Run House
4. Reginald Foster, Needham Housing Authority and Bargmann Hendrie + Archetype design presenting Linden Chambers Redevelopment Project.

Agenda Item 1:
Continued from 7/29/24: Mehmet Sahin, Falcon Graphics representing Uniq Laser located at 922 Highland Avenue and applying for signage.

Mehmet Sahin reviewed the revised application materials, with a sign having a black background with white, LED face-lit letters. There will be a frame around the sign. The lights above the existing sign are proposed to be removed. The glass under the existing sign will not be changed.

Chair Gluesing noted that there is wording shown on the windows in the online presentation that was not included with the plans the Board received. The purpose of the Sign Bylaw is to identify a business in its location. Some general wording on the windows to give a generic description would be acceptable. The Board would likely not approve the wording as shown but would consider alternate wording as a separate submission. They cannot be approved at this time.

Ms. Pradhan recommended additional spacing between the words “Uniq” and “Laser.”

Upon motion duly made by Mr. Dornbusch and seconded by Ms. Opton, it was voted to approve the submitted package for Uniq Laser located at 922 Highland Avenue with the condition that the spacing between the “q” and the “L” be increased slightly. Steve Dornbusch – aye; Chair Gluesing – aye; Milee Pradhan – aye; Susan Opton – aye; Motion passed 4-0-0.

Agenda Item 2:
Anna Haluch, Pro Sign Service LLC representing Ayr Wellness located at 29 Franklin Street and applying for signage.

Anna Haluch, Pro Sign Service LLC, stated that Ayr Wellness will be moving into this location. The proposal is to place a sign above the main front entrance. The front lit channel letter set is proportional to the sign band above. The raceway will be painted to match the façade. The main entrance will have perforated vinyl so that those outside cannot see inside, but those inside will be able to see out. The other vinyl on the windows is blue without lettering in order to cover up seeing inside the store. The company name and store hours are proposed to be placed on the door.

Chair Gluesing stated that there are limitations for 25% of the area of a glass panel to be filled with information. The signage portion is okay, but this would typically go on a clear door. An opaque panel is close to being a façade change instead of a sign area. Other Board members did not consider this a significant change.

Upon motion duly made by Mr. Dornbusch and seconded by Ms. Opton, it was voted to approve the sign application for Ayr Wellness located at 29 Franklin Street as submitted. Steve Dornbusch – aye; Chair Gluesing – aye; Milee Pradhan – aye; Susan Opton – aye; Motion passed 4-0-0.

Agenda Item 3:
Bryan Bonina, Signarama-Walpole representing The Run House to be located at 943 Great Plain Avenue and applying for signage.

Bryan Bonina, Signarama-Walpole explained that the proposal is for a ½" thick PVC double-sided panel sign with graphics applied to each side which will hang from the previous sign location for Three Crown Jewelers.

Chair Gluesing stated that most of the projecting signs in this location, or others, have had an anchor chain from the lower right-hand corner. Mr. Bonina stated that this can be applied, if needed. Chair Gluesing stated that he would like an anchor stabilizing chain as a condition of approval.

Upon motion duly made by Mr. Dornbusch and seconded by Ms. Opton, it was voted to approve the sign application for The Run House located at 943 Great Plain Avenue, with the condition that a small anchor chain be added from the sign to the building. Steve Dornbusch – aye; Chair Gluesing – aye; Milee Pradhan – aye; Susan Opton – aye; Motion passed 4-0-0.

Agenda Item 4:
Reginald Foster, Needham Housing Authority and Bargmann Hendrie + Archetype design presenting Linden Chambers Redevelopment Project.

Reginald Foster, Chair of the Needham Housing Authority, stated that the Housing Authority is in the middle of a program to modernize all of its 316 aging housing units in Needham. This proposal is to remove 72 aging apartments at the Linden Street development and replace them with 136 new units.

Dan Chen, Architect with BH + A, explained that the site plan review submission is scheduled for later this month on August 26th with the goal of having the Planning Board hearing in September. The public has been engaged in this process and comments are being sought from all stakeholders. Regarding the existing conditions, the project deals with two sites which are contiguous to each other. The Linden site has 18 buildings built around 1959-1962 and the Chamber site has five, two story buildings. The buildings are in fairly poor condition and, as the demographic of the units is an elderly population, accessibility becomes particularly important. The units are approximately 400 s.f. studios, which are significantly under sized for today's standards. The site presents some challenges particularly with adjacency to wetlands and a Notice of Intent is being filed through the Conservation Commission. The goal of the project is to improve the living standards of the residents and the site.

The zoning requirements for the proposal include a height maximum of 58’, a maximum number of four-story buildings, with an FAR of 0.5, a maximum number of 25 dwelling units per acre, and 0.5 parking spaces per unit. The buildings proposed are four stories with an FAR 0.36 and a height of 53’. To build Phase 1A 40 units of residents will have to be relocated. The phases will be built in sequence. Phase 1A includes 76 units, primarily one-bedroom units, averaging 600 s.f. Phase 1B includes 60 units. Both buildings will be four stories. The Linden Street site will include 70 parking spaces and two fire lanes. There is a detailed landscaping plan. Lights poles are proposed in the parking lot and along the fire lane. There will also be pedestrian scaled site lighting. The fixtures will be dark sky compliant and downcast. The package contains a detailed list of materials proposed for the buildings.

The committee first discussed the site organization and landscaping. The Board discussed the location of the proposed buildings to the nearby wetlands. Mr. Chen explained that lawn will not be established in the back of the buildings and native plantings are proposed. All the runoff from the site will go through the underground storage area in the parking lot. Outside of the two subsurface stormwater management systems on site, a low point will be graded into one of the lawns to create a swale, but it is not large enough to be considered a detention area. Ms. Pradhan suggested there be a consideration for additional paved walks throughout the site to make the site pedestrian friendly.

Ms. Opton noted that proximity of the site to the school across the street. She asked about intermingling the two communities by making more small, intimate spaces on the site. Some of the seniors that live in this community love to watch the children play on the adjacent sports field and the proposal includes seating areas along Linden Street to facilitate this.

Ms. Opton asked about potentially burying telephone poles in the area. Mr. Chen stated that the poles will remain. A new transformer will be brought on site to service the buildings. Ms. Opton asked about the mix of trees along the Linden Street roadway. It was noted that there will be a mix of trees along the street. The species options are included in the planting plan. Ms. Opton suggested rabbit-resistant plants in the planting beds.

Chair Gluesing noted that the amenities are very high for this project which is wonderful. The project will need to determine how the Fire Department can get what they need on the site. Regarding surfaces, he has previously seen some success with mitigating the width by using a stamped concrete material or some sort of accent at the edges. If possible, extend the walking path visually through the drives. He echoed Ms. Pradhan's comment regarding continuing the path towards the garden area on the south and then into the new development if they can find a way. A surface change, impression, or paint may be a nice feature for this. The proposed patio and community room will be a real asset. He asked if there will be a larger mix of age groups in the new facility. Mr. Foster stated that this will continue to be senior housing only.

Chair Gluesing suggested breaking up the massing of the buildings a bit more using the different materials, if possible. Ms. Pradhan stated that the mirroring of the front entry at the back is successful. The larger wings' elevations could be broken up a bit more. Mr. Chen noted that the ceiling heights make some of this difficult but there is additional work to do on the back building elevation design. The applicant stated they expect to develop the material mix in the elevations more to help break down the scale.

Ms. Opton agreed that the proposal has a large footprint to what currently exists on the site. Something to break this up would be useful. The building is broken into gabled sections with connector sections. These sections are angled relative to each other to help break up the building scale.

Mr. Chen agreed that the height and massing of the proposed buildings is recognized compared to the existing. The intention is to pull back from the Linden Street frontage while also being sensitive to the Maple Street neighbors. Mr. Dornbusch suggested a larger contrast of materials on the Maple Street side of the buildings to help break up the massing.

The Board approves of the general design, and a memo will be issued to the Planning Board with their comments.

Minutes:

Minutes from the 07/29/2024 meeting

Upon motion duly made by Mr. Dornbusch and seconded by Ms. Opton, it was voted to approve the meeting minutes of July 29, 2024, as amended. Steve Dornbusch – aye; Chair Gluesing – aye; Milee Pradhan – abstain; Susan Opton – aye; Motion passed 3-0-1.

Upon motion duly made by Mr. Dornbusch and seconded by Ms. Opton, it was voted to adjourn at 9:15 p.m. Steve Dornbusch – aye; Chair Gluesing – aye; Milee Pradhan – aye; Susan Opton – aye; Motion passed 4-0-0.

Next Public Meeting – September 9, 2024, at 7:30pm via Zoom Webinar