

NEEDHAM PLANNING BOARD MINUTES

June 7, 2022

The Needham Planning Board Hybrid Meeting at Powers Hall, Needham Town Hall and using Zoom, was remotely called to order by Adam Block, Chairman, on Tuesday, June 7, 2022, at 7:00 p.m. with Messrs. Alpert and Crocker and Ms. McKnight, as well as Planning Director, Ms. Newman and Assistant Planner, Ms. Clee. Ms. Espada arrived at 8:40 p.m.

Mr. Block took a roll call attendance of the Board members and staff. He noted this is an open meeting that is being held in a hybrid model per state guidelines. He reviewed the rules of conduct for Zoom meetings. He noted this meeting does include one public hearing and there will be public comment allowed. If any votes are taken at the meeting the vote will be conducted by roll call. All supporting materials, including the agenda, are posted on the town's website.

Minutes

Ms. McKnight noted on the minutes of 4/12/22, page 2, 6th line, add "is" so it reads "is only sufficient..."

Upon a motion made by Ms. McKnight, and seconded by Mr. Alpert, it was by a roll call vote of the four members present unanimously:

VOTED: to accept the minutes of 4/12/22 as red lined with the one change mentioned.

Heather Lane Definitive Subdivision and Heather Lane Extension Definitive Subdivision/Residential Compound Special Permit Bond Reduction.

Mr. Block noted letters from Town Engineer Thomas Ryder dated 6/6/22 and 6/7/22, noting bond amounts to be retained for work to be completed. Ms. Newman noted the requests are for reductions on 2 subdivisions. For the Heather Lane Extension the Town holds \$34,500 and recommends the bond be reduced to \$28,000. For the Heather Lane Definitive Subdivision, the Town holds \$122,500 and recommends a reduction to \$95,000.

Upon a motion made by Mr. Alpert, and seconded by Mr. Crocker, it was by a roll call vote of the four members present unanimously:

VOTED: with regards to the bond being held for the Heather Lane Definitive Subdivision, reduce the bond from \$122,500 down to \$95,000 and with regards to the bond being held for the Heather Lane Extension Definitive Subdivision, reduce the bond from \$34,500 down to \$28,000.

Board of Appeals – June 6, 2022

68 Wilshire Park – Adam Pase, applicant.

Upon a motion made by Mr. Alpert, and seconded by Ms. McKnight, it was by a roll call vote of the four members present unanimously:

VOTED: "No comment."

35 Highland Circle – Zdorovie ADH Needham

Upon a motion made by Mr. Alpert, and seconded by Ms. McKnight, it was by a roll call vote of the four members present unanimously:

VOTED: "No comment."

Report from Planning Director and Board members

Ms. Newman asked Ms. McKnight to give an update on the Housing Plan Working Group. Ms. McKnight stated there are 3 subgroups. She, Oscar Mertz and Heidi Frail, constituting the Zoning Subgroup, are considering what steps the Town

should take to comply with the MBTA Communities Law and DHCD Guidelines and other zoning they would like to put out for discussion. This will be presented by Mr. Mertz on Thursday evening. There is also a Housing Development and Preservation Subgroup and a Capacity Building Subgroup. It is likely that the Preservation Subgroup will discuss historic preservation and small homes and make recommendations relative to those subjects. The Preservation Subgroup is concerned with the capacity of the Town when new projects are presented. All 3 reports will be given on Thursday evening. They will be starting with a report from Reg Foster of the Housing Authority. He will bring everyone up to date with the status of public housing in town, funding they are seeking and ideas for improvements.

Mr. Block asked if there will be written reports. Ms. McKnight assumes each group will do a written report. Ms. Newman is hoping the DHCD Guidelines will be out and the Housing Plan Working Group can look at them to get a strategy for an appropriate plan. She is hoping a draft plan will be prepared with goals and objectives.

Public Hearing:

7:20 p.m. – Major Project Site Plan Special Permit No. 2022-02: 557 Highland, LLC, an affiliate of The Bulfinch Companies, Inc., 116 Huntington Avenue, Suite 600, Boston, MA, Petitioner (Property located at 557 Highland Avenue, Needham, MA). Regarding proposal to redevelop the Property with approximately 496,694 square feet of office, laboratory and research and development uses (see legal notice and application for more details).

Upon a motion made by Mr. Alpert, and seconded by Ms. McKnight, it was by a roll call vote of the four members present unanimously:

VOTED: to waive the reading of the public hearing notice.

Mr. Block stated the meeting will focus on the site plan and landscape. The next hearing will focus on traffic and parking. Robert Schlager, Principle of Bulfinch Co., noted this is a redevelopment of the former Muzi site. He said this will be a world class facility and he gave an overview of the project. He noted Bulfinch was founded in 1936 and is the owner and manager of approximately 1,000,000 square feet of space in town. He stated Bulfinch understands the importance of developing something special in the Highway Commercial 1 District. The Highland Innovative Center will have 496,694 square feet of office, laboratory, research and development uses with retail.

Mr. Schlager noted there have been 7 neighborhood meetings in April, May and June to gather public input. He noted this is a special project with a world class state of the art life science building. This will be the new gateway to Needham. He showed a brief video and gave an overview. This is 9 acres of land that was the site of the former Muzi Car Dealership and body shop. Demolition was completed in February 2022. The hazardous materials on site were remediated. He noted the land was used in the 30s and 40s as a gravel pit and gravel and fill was transported via rail to Boston and also used as a radar missile anti-aircraft system site through the 1950s.

Eric Weyant, Architect with Stantec Architecture and Engineering P.C., gave an overview of the architecture. He showed a 3D maximum zoning envelope. He noted this is allowed by special permit. The proposal has an FAR of 1.25. There is a 50-foot landscape buffer down to a 20-foot setback along the highway ramp right of way. The building can go to 40 feet in height and 70 feet in height if set back 200 feet. He showed a rendering of what was submitted in April. He noted there have been updates made. There are 3 key components. The south building is 3 stories and 42 feet tall and the north building is 5 stories and 70 feet tall with a 2-story atrium space connecting the 2 buildings. The parking garage is 55 feet tall and a jogging, half mile walking path with exercise stations is proposed. There will be a retail plaza with 10,000 square feet of retail and restaurant and an outdoor retail plaza with a water feature at the corner. He noted there will be 1,408 parking spaces which is a reduction of what is required by zoning.

Mr. Weyant stated there was a lot of input from the community and the town departments with a lot of great feedback. The landscaping and screening along Highland Avenue have been increased and there is more diversity of plantings. The setback of the walking path from Highland Avenue has been increased. A Gould Street amenity space has been added, 2 pickle ball courts, ice skating, an expanded lawn space and pergola. They have reduced the number of loading docks and added windows and active use spaces. The massing has been updated at Gould and Highland to soften the corner and 5,500 square feet of open space has been added. The visual length of the building on the Highland Avenue frontage has been reduced by

35 feet. Retail is preferred to be family friendly and not a brewery. The electric vehicle commitment is 25%. He noted the laboratories are not to exceed BSL Level 1 or 2. The project is interested in pursuing, above the footprint of the garage, a PV solar array. The building will step down from 3 stories to one story retail to the retail plaza. The new design pulls back the massing and they have doubled the number of trees and screening. He showed the changes made with the input received.

Eric Joseph, Landscape Architect with Paul Finger Associates, stated a variety of different spaces for a public-park-like setting have been created with a fitness path meandering throughout the site with 4-inch trees. Pin oaks, lindens and locust would be a secondary buffer line. He noted there are 3 levels of buffer from Gould Street. It is mainly park space with a water feature in the back. The fitness path allows different plantings to the retention pond. There will be a number of fitness stations on the half mile path. The amount of lawn has been reduced due to comments. There will be a segment of no-mow lawn and the number of trees has gone from 80 trees to 140 trees with a great variety along Gould and Highland. There will be a tree every 40 to 50 feet.

The fitness path has been moved closer to the building and a solid hedge barrier has been created with plantings on either side of it to soften it. Lavender, salvia and day lilies will bloom early spring throughout the summer. The 2 pickle ball courts have been widened and the lawn is artificial turf so it could be covered with a skating rink. There will be a pavilion for a gathering area. There is more potential for the neighborhood to come gather. The plantings have been increased.

Mr. Joseph noted there have been improvements to the north loading docks and loading dock locations. The docks have been reduced from 4 bays to 2 bays. The internal café space has been expanded and there are more windows. The south building loading docks have been reduced from 4 bays to 2 bays. There has been an internal bike room and repair shop added. They have added pickle ball, lawn space and a shade structure. He showed the rooftop layout with the mechanical equipment. The project is fully compliant with the roof top height at 58 feet with 25% roof top coverage with both mechanical equipment and equipment itself. The roof screen maximum height is 15 feet. There are 4 pairs of air handlers evenly distributed. The façade will be earth-tone terracotta coloration, glass fiber (GFRC) and reinforced concrete panels. The project will be a series of modulars, with a curtain wall and charcoal metal panels. He noted GFRC is very flexible material.

Mr. Joseph noted the parking garage will have a structural precast façade with some glass curtain wall material at the stairs and elevator. A series of fabric screens will be installed around the perimeter of the property. This has been done before and he showed an example of what was done in Cambridge. He stated it helps to screen the garage during the day and cuts down on the light at night. The retail wraps the corners at Gould and Highland with a retail plaza. There will be retail of 10,000 square feet with smaller retail shops. It will be community focused retail. There will be a family friendly retention basin with an overlook bridge over the water feature and a PV solar array above the garage.

Adam Jennings, Energy and Sustainability Department Manager, gave an overview of the impacts of the project and reviewed the sustainability and resiliency strategies. There will be high efficiency chillers and high-density boilers. A hybrid electric heating system will minimize gas usage and there will be 500 kw solar canopies on the roof tops. There will be rainwater capture for the north and south buildings and the water will be reused for flushing toilets and such. This will save about 70%. There was a whole building lifestyle assessment. The project finds alternatives to concrete and steel to reduce carbon building materials. He reviewed the LEED certification checklist and noted 3 different certifications. They are focused on making the building as efficient as possible and will be committed to LEED gold certification.

Mr. Jennings noted the Wellness Strategies will be Fitwell and Well. The health and wellness of the occupants of the building is important to them. There will be a fitness path around the building and quarterly air and water monitoring.

Betsy Gilman-Dwayne, of Environmental Health and Engineering, gave a life science overview. This project may include life science labs such as Pfizer and Moderna. She discussed life science labs. There are smaller amounts and types of biomedical and chemicals when compared to other uses such as hospitals and auto body shops. This will be biosafety Levels 1 and 2. Level 1 is low to no risk and level 2 poses a risk to individuals within the lab, but not to the community such as blood, salmonella and gene therapy. The employees work in bio safety cabinets for safety.

Sean Manning, of GPI, gave a transportation update. He noted GPI was commissioned to study and determine traffic impacts and improvements. He worked with the Town Departments and Massachusetts Department of Transportation (DOT). He discussed the Transportation Demand Management (TDM). This is to encourage transit use and other transportation alternatives. He noted there will be new traffic signals at Gould and Central and signage to alleviate cut throughs on Noanett Road. He showed the Gould Street proposed improvements. There will be a left turn from Highland to Gould Street. The Highland Avenue interchange will be rebuilt by DOT. Along with these other improvements, it will help. There will be bike lanes. The community is urging separate bike lanes at the same elevation as the sidewalks. They are working to see if that can be done safely.

Mr. Manning noted the volumes at 5 TV Place need to be managed. It is more challenging after 5 TV Place as Gould Street becomes narrower and it is more difficult to manage bike lanes there. They may go to sharrows at that point with share-the-road signs and symbols. The applicant got feedback regarding an issue at Hunting Road. He noted they may have to consider radar and speed signs. There were comments regarding sidewalks from the Noanett people. The sidewalks will be rebuilt from the Gould/Highland intersection to Noanett.

Tim Sullivan, of Goulston & Storrs, spoke about the zoning relief requested. There is an FAR of 1.25 for the project under the Highway Commercial 1 District. The north building will be 70 feet and 5 stories. The south building will be 42 feet and 3 stories. The parking garage structure is 55 feet in height. The restaurant and retail uses will be complementary to the lab uses. He noted there needs to be a special permit for restaurant use and if a single retail goes between 5,750 square feet and 10,000 square feet; a major project under Section 7.4; 1,689 parking spaces are required and 1,408 are being proposed and a waiver is also requested from design requirements for retaining wall deviations.

Mr. Block noted a number of updates to the plans have been received. He asked if any Board members had questions. Mr. Alpert stated this is a large project and he would like to hear from the neighbors. He wanted to note for the record some of the zoning relief being requested seems to be the maximum allowed. He stated it looks like a great project and the developer seems to have listened to the public. Mr. Crocker agreed with Mr. Alpert and would like to hear from the public first. Ms. McKnight stated she attended one community meeting and came away with a few concerns. She is glad to see some have been addressed like the long length of the building along the Highland Avenue frontage. She was concerned with the 5 loading dock stations, but the number has been reduced to 3. She asked if the 2 loading docks on the north building could come from the north drive off TV Place and go into the north facing façade of the building rather than the front of the building. She would like to see if that can be improved.

Ms. McKnight stated she sees a jogging path all the way around, which is allowed, but does not see a driveway sufficient for emergency vehicles, which the Fire Department wants, all around the south building. She asked if the paving material could be block pavers that allow the grass to grow through. She would like to see if that can be addressed. She is pleased to see a reference to the TDM Plan. In Newton they are asking for post occupancy parking and traffic checks. She will be looking for that. She asked if TV Place is a public way. Ms. Newman will check the Assessor's map. Mr. Block noted the application from Mr. Sullivan dated 4/5/22. He is requesting an allowance for square footage reallocation internally not to require a return to the Board if the parking requirements do not change. Mr. Block is not sure if the Board needs to require some standard, but he understands the request. The applicant also is requesting an allowance to complete the project in phases with an Occupancy Permit for one building if the other is not done. This is to be considered.

Mr. Block noted Town Manager Kate Fitzpatrick's letter dated 4/26/22 and asked if the setback for Gould and Highland is measured from the current layout of Gould and Highland. Mr. Joseph stated it is measured from the current property lines. Mr. Block assumes the Board will discuss how to revise the plans to measure from the new property lines with the project that may have changed due to state highway takings and layout alterations. He asked what time the lights inside the building and garage will be turned off. Mr. Schlager noted the energy management system controls the lighting. Sensors will go off 15 minutes after the last motion is sensed. He noted the office hours will be 7:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. If this fails, a backup sweeps all the sensors and shuts all the lights off at 11:00 p.m. The time can be adjusted to be sensitive to the neighbors. Mr. Block asked if any lights would remain on overnight and was informed no. Minimal lights will be set at 10% for the garage.

Mr. Block asked if the applicant is committed to the Gold Standard and was informed they are. Mr. Block noted the environmental impacts on page 16 of Mr. Sullivan's letter. He would like to see an itemized list of strategies at the next meeting. He asked if the solar canopies on the garage would increase the height. Ms. Newman will discuss that with the Building Commissioner. Ms. Espada arrived at the meeting at 8:40 p.m.

Mr. Block noted some details in the original plans in the 3/30/22 letter that reflect the impact of the parking with calculations of 1,408 spaces and with a ratio of 1:300 and it may be reduced further. He would like to know what the net total would be if further reduced and the impact. He asked if they could remove one level of the structured parking. Ms. Espada commented she is impressed with the community outreach, the way the project has developed and the green amenities on Gould Street. In general, the project is next to residential. The scale of the building is better off Highland but the building on Gould is still larger. The parking garage also. She is a little concerned with the loading docks and the one next to the driveway and the other screened wall. She noted the greenbelt across the site but there is a small site off TV Place. She stated it would be nice to connect it to make a larger greenway.

Ms. Espada stated she looked at transportation and the bus line. The MBTA does not go through this area. It could be an opportunity to bring transportation to this area. She asked about the acoustics for the HVAC units on top and signage. Mr. Sullivan stated there are no specific signs yet. Ms. Newman informed the Board TV Place is a private way. Mr. Alpert stated there is a small section of land on the other side of TV Place. He asked if the parcel is part of the Muzi site. He does not see it as part of the project. He asked if 555 owns that and if there are any plans for it. Mr. Schlager stated it is 7,000 square feet of land. There are no plans to develop it at this time. It abuts directly to the Channel 5 building and is fully occupied by Channel 5.

Mr. Block noted the following correspondence for the record: an email from the Fire Department with comments; an email from the Police, dated 6/3/22, with comments regarding signage in surrounding areas; a letter from the Building Commissioner, dated 5/25/22, with comments; a letter from the Town Engineer, dated 6/2/22, seeking clarification on the water supply and measurements and the new layout on Gould Street with other comments; an email from the Assistant Health Director, dated 5/27/22, with comments regarding food establishments, trash dumpsters, grease traps, DEP approval for waste water and other comments; a memo from the Design Review Board, dated 5/16/22, asking for more detail on the landscape plan with comments regarding landscaping, additional screening and site lighting with approval for building design and massing and a letter from the Bay Colony Rail Trail Foundation asking for a commitment to develop the MBTA right of way to connect to Needham Heights. He thanked the members of the public for their comments. He opened the meeting for public comment but noted traffic and parking would be discussed at the next meeting.

Lois Sockol noted the applicant stated no lab would be built above Level 2. She asked if that was a binding statement. Mr. Block stated that is what the applicant represented, and it will be in the decision. Joni Schockett, of 174 Evelyn Road, asked if there is a square foot difference between the newly designed building and the old, designed building. Mr. Schlager stated it is the same square footage. Ms. Schockett asked if there is a possibility of building a second level of parking underground in each of the 2 parking garages to eliminate one or 2 stories of the parking garage to alleviate the height of the garages. Mr. Schlager stated he does not believe so at this time based on environmental conditions.

Marianne Cooley, of 85 High Street, asked if there will be minority and women owned businesses participating in the project and how does the applicant think about business as a whole and any commitments they will make to engaging those kinds of businesses in the overall project. Mr. Schlager stated they will, as a company, follow ESG goals that are strictly adhered to and constantly monitored but have not begun any marketing efforts yet. Ms. Cooley asked about within the project itself. Mr. Schlager stated they are committed to ESG goals with respect to diversity.

Ben Daniels, of 5 Sachem Road, lives directly across from the project. He asked how tall the Trip Advisor building is for comparison. Mr. Schlager stated Trip Advisor has 2 additional stories. It is 6 stories and 6 levels at 85 feet and 98 feet to the peak. Mr. Daniels stated what he heard tonight sounded like parking and fantasy land. People will not bike here. There is a lot of traffic cutting through Sachem Road. He hopes he hears something more thought through at the next meeting on how to reduce parking. He would like to hear the turnover of the cars at the next meeting. Mr. Alpert stated the gentleman had a question of cut through traffic and Police Chief Schlittler also had the same question. He stated a question for Ms.

Newman is if the Planning Board has the authority to do something about that or is it another authority in town. Mr. Block will have the Planning Director look at that.

Ms. McKnight stated Mr. Daniels brought up the Trip Advisor building. The lighting was terrible at Trip Advisor. The Board complained about it and it was turned down. She wants to make sure controls are in place for this project.

Rod Dangel, of 28 Hewitt Circle off Noanett Road, has an appreciation for the proposal but there is a massive issue. They need to have compassion for the neighborhoods. He appreciates Bulfinch working with the neighborhood. He noted Highland Avenue is owned by the state but he has not heard a proposal to take land from the Muzi site to widen the street. Has the Board talked to anyone at the state to work on approvals? Mr. Block will ask the Planning Director to reach out to the Town Manager's office to see the status. Mr. Dangel gave kudos to all members of the Bulfinch team for electric vehicles and photovoltaic.

Karen Quigley, of 22 Yale Road, appreciated Ms. McKnight's suggestion regarding post occupancy checks and there be some accountability. She noted there is an illusion as to how impervious the site was previously. She would like to know how impervious the site would be now and if it is an improvement. Is there a plan beyond signage and a temporary police presence to prevent cut-through traffic? She would like to hear more. David Mindlin, of 74 Hampton Avenue, stated he agrees with the previous speakers regarding cut-through traffic. He is not sure what kind of mitigation can be done. He lives across from Mills Field with kids and the playground area. He also thinks post permitting checks is a great idea.

Maggie Flanagan, of 53 Sachem Road, worries with restaurants and retail the lights would not go off at 7:00 p.m. What would the cut off times be? The idea of putting signs for no cut through is ok but her getting out of the neighborhood would be a major issue.

Holly Charbonnier, of 94 Sachem Road, is concern with density of the project. They were pushing for a lower FAR previously. Parking is not included in the FAR. This is 1.1 million square feet of development in a partial residential district. The applicant has the ability to make the project smaller. She estimates 5,980 car trips per day. It is already difficult to get out of the neighborhood. Adding 550 cars an hour will be significantly worse. She appreciates the efforts Bulfinch has made so far but she wants to see if it can be made smaller.

Emily Pick, of 12 Mills Road, echoes Mr. Daniels and Ms. Charbonnier's comments concerning density. The biggest concern is traffic. Getting out of Mills Road is nearly impossible. They need to make sure traffic is closely monitored for the long-term. There are approximately 30 young children in the neighborhood and traffic is a big concern.

Doug Fox, of Marked Tree Road, stated the Board needs to make meetings more efficient. The proposal is beautiful. He thinks it should be a lot smaller. He does not see a need for more office or lab space. He feels they should start at 0.7 FAR .and see what they can get. This is not a lot of benefit for residents. He urges the applicant to think a lot smaller.

Deb Whitney, of 36 Hunting Road, thanked the Bulfinch Group for all the public meetings and openness. She is concerned with the size, the neighbors who are overlooking the new buildings, light and noise pollution. Her primary concern is the traffic. It is hard to get across Hunting Road at any time. The applicant needs to remember the playground, Mills Field and tennis courts. People send their kids out biking and it is very dangerous. A lot of people turn around in her driveway. It is very busy, and she is concerned with the size of the project.

Ashley Schiefly, of 52 Greendale Avenue, noted she is 1,200 feet away from 557 Highland Avenue. She thanked Bulfinch for the community meetings. She stated the applicant is not entitled to a special permit. The Board has discretion to deny the permit. She asked if the existing infrastructure can support this. The Board needs to consider pedestrians and bicyclists and make sure the sidewalks are adequate. She noted the abutters will bear the brunt of the construction noise. She feels the raised bike paths should be continued through Gould Street so families can use them. She asked if the project is compatible with surrounding communities. There needs to be additional green space and park space and there should be a connection made between the unused rail bed and the Bulfinch green space. The Board can get creative with the permitting process. The Heights is being paved over at an alarming rate. She wants the Board it get it right and make it compatible with residential uses. Ms. Schiefly noted there will be restaurant and retail uses. She requests the Board listen to the

neighbors. These could be amenities, but they need to be open to the public. The public is relying on the Planning Board to incorporate into the decision what Bulfinch has said.

Mr. Crocker echoed what the DRB said about screening on the roof tops. He has questions about EV charging. He would like clarity on where it will be, and will it be Level 2 or Level 3. Are there any locations outside the parking garage for EV stations? Mr. Schlager stated approximately 25% of each designated area would be equipped with Level 2 charging stations. There are about a dozen Level 3 stations throughout the garages. They are about 4 years away from completion of the build out. He feels there may be some Level 4 charging in the future. Mr. Crocker noted infiltration within the project and asked if there is any leading up to the property. Mr. Schlager stated each drive aisle will have an infiltration system and there is a detention basin by the overlook bridge.

Mr. Crocker stated there needs to be more green space. The town is losing a lot of it, and he does not feel there is enough green space. Commuter bicyclists already bike on roadways with cars. He feels there should be a family aspect of bike lanes. He commented the more the project complements the community the more the community will embrace it. He understands they are doing a fantastic job of getting to the LEED standard. Along with that comes light but he does not see the lights shutting off at 7:00 p.m. Mr. Schlager stated the auto lights will not be for the first-floor retail. There would be 5 or 8 retail tenancies. Mr. Crocker stated the community is looking for a project they can embrace. He expects what is said is what is followed through with. Mr. Schlager stated he has published 4 volumes of FAQs and it is on their website for everyone to look at. He stated Bulfinch has always followed through with commitments and will continue to.

Upon a motion made by Mr. Crocker, and seconded by Mr. Alpert, it was by a roll call vote of the five members present unanimously:

VOTED: to continue the hearing to 7/7/22 at 7:15 p.m.

Correspondence

Ms. Newman noted an insignificant change on the Farmers Market. There is a slight revision on how they will set the tables up.

Upon a motion made by Mr. Crocker, and seconded by Ms. McKnight, it was by a roll call vote of the five members present unanimously:

VOTED: to adjourn the meeting at 9:52 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Donna J. Kalinowski, Notetaker

Jeanne S. McKnight, Vice-Chair and Clerk