

Design Review Board Meeting
Virtual Meeting by Zoom
February 8, 2021
6:00 PM

Board Members in attendance: Rue Sherwood, Ken Savoie, Linda Riley, Bob Weatherall, Laura Gresh
Staff in attendance: Ethan Parsons, Planning Director; Kristen Grubbs, Town Planner
Neighbors: Nancy Bergner and Cheryl Ferris

Owner / Applicant not present

Plans submitted include elevations for 2 proposed buildings and architectural site plan.

Plans show 4 parking spaces on Blaisdell Terrace side and 2 on Pleasant Street side.
The 2 units on Blaisdell Terrace have garages and the 2 Units on Pleasant Street do not have garages.

Bob commented on the architecture lacking creativity and sensitivity to the site/neighborhood. This lack of creative design of units shows a desire to spend as little as possible.
He suggested moving parking spaces on Blaisdell Terrace behind the buildings creating more green space on the street side.

Ken said alternatives to having parking on Blaisdell Terrace should be explored with the possibility of including garages on Pleasant Street units.
He noted a plan showing the units in relation to neighboring houses is not included. He suggested using GIS maps available.

The height of the buildings was noted -- one at 32 feet and the other at 29 feet and that proposed buildings are taller than houses of surrounding neighborhood.
Bob said with foundation the Blaisdell Terrace facing building appears closer 40 feet in height from Blaisdell Terrace. The foundations adds 4-5 feet to the total height.
Members questioned why the foundation was so tall and thought the height of buildings was not appropriate for the surrounding neighborhood.

Also noted was the placement of the Pleasant Street building and how it relates to the streetscape. Bob asked Ethan to inform the Zoning Board of our concerns of a lack sensitivity and appropriate scale of these units for the neighborhood.

Rue commented on plantings and suggested choosing native plantings and not the non-native and uninteresting choices as shown.

Neighbor Cheryl Ferris commented that the developer's change in plans adding a 40B unit permits building 4-units on what is really a one-unit lot.

Linda said she remembered original plans we saw months ago showed "aging-in-place" apartments. The proposed three-level buildings are not desirable living spaces for many seniors. She said one-floor living is desirable for seniors and this would be possible with a change in entryway with a unit on the first floor and one on the second floor.

Summary:

- Location of parking spaces could be improved to create a better streetscape on both Blaisdell Terrace and Pleasant Street.
- Many comments stressed the inappropriate scale of the buildings for the neighborhood.
- The proposed design of the three-level buildings lacks creativity -- the facades could be re-worked with a more innovative design – not just tall boxes.
- Seeing only the plans without the developer present is not adequate when we have questions and need more information.

The members request more involvement from the applicant to address questions that arose during this meeting and that the ZBA to require the applicant to be present at a future DRB meeting to answer questions.

The Board agreed to meet on February 22nd.

Other business:

Linda said there is a need for handicapped accessible units to create independent living situations. This shortage of housing for people in wheel chairs keeps people in nursing homes when they could live independently with appropriate amenities. Housing in close proximity to a train station is also desirable. These can be small efficiency units with common areas or tiny house neighborhoods. She is talking with an out-of-state investment firm to explore this further.

Meeting adjourned at 7:19 p.m.

Bob motioned to adjourn.

Rue seconded the motion.

All voted in favor

Meeting Minutes prepared by Laura Gresh

Minutes approved: February 22, 2021