



## DESIGN REVIEW BOARD

Meeting Minutes

March 25, 2021

5:30 PM

VIRTUAL MEETING

**Present:** Peter Darlow, (Chair), David Honn, Richard Kelleher, Tom Doolittle, Holly Ben-Joseph, Jon Cappetta, (PB Liaison), Matt Murphy Planning Department, (Zoom Monitor)

**Absent:** Dean Charter (BoS Liaison)

### 1. Opening

Chair, Peter Darlow, opened the meeting at 5:33 pm and read the Covid 19 protocol procedures for Zoom meetings.

### 2. Regular Business

- A. Citizens' concerns – Comments were opened for special business topics.
- B. Approval of Meeting Minutes – It was moved and seconded to approve the March 09, 2021 minutes as amended. The minutes, as amended, were approved unanimously. Holly B-J to submit minutes for posting.

### 3. Special Business

#### A. Review Acton Main Street Senior Housing Project

**AHA Main Street Senior Housing Design and Development Team attending:** Kelley Cronin - AHA Executive Director, John Winslow and Phil Reville – Winslow Architects, Kate Kennen – Offshoots, and Maura Camosse-Tsongas – Stone Soup Collaborative

**Citizen's attending:** John Hodge, Jill Hodge, and Tom Gillespie

Kelley Cronin introduced the project concept and a brief overview of the selection of the AHA to develop the parcels of land, formerly the Kennedy Landscape site, to create 40 Senior housing apartment units. Kelley also explained how the design and development team was selected. The project is adjacent to two additional undeveloped town owned parcels, one of which will offer the project a location for the septic field.



John Winslow provided a summary of the overall parameters that have driven the design concept to date and offered an overview of the key design elements the team has pursued to arrive at the site plan organization, the building planning, the massing concept, and the New England contemporary aesthetic that is presented in the project renderings. Phil Reville walked through the specifics of the building organization and planning layouts for each floor level as well as the context of specific site amenities.

Kate Kennen, acknowledging that her firm is very recently begun to actively work on the project, presented a concept plan idea for how the housing property will be organized as this pertains to working with landscaping approaches and materials to blend in with the local environment and street edge, while providing the residents with amenities and activity spaces.

DRB members asked questions on the design of the building architecture and the landscape concept and offered comments on the same, pointing out areas where further development or a variation of the proposed detail may want to be considered. In general, DRB members are very pleased with the design direction to date and overall believe the project as proposed is going in a very good direction. Please refer to the attached review memo of the project for a detailed summary of the DRB member comments.

The public had following comments:

- Tom Gillespie, chair of the Dog Park Committee, pointed out that the proposed use of the parcel closest to Route 2 for the Main Street housing septic system will not interfere with plans for development of this parcel by the town for a dog park. The Acton Board of Health has affirmed this.
- John Hodge wished to point out that the plans as presented do not line up with the building exteriors with respect to where the building footprint bumps out. The design team acknowledged the plans presented have not kept pace with the development of the building exterior. John is concerned this will lead to building units not matching with respect to available area. The architect team assured that they will work on the overall proportions of the apartment plans to arrive at equitable units that will be very closely matched.
- Judy Hodge asked about how the unit heating systems will be energized, hoping gas would not be utilized. The design team responded that heating and cooling will be air sourced only.

#### B. Review of 47 Conant Street Definitive Subdivision Proposed Plans

**Proponent:** Northeast Site Development, were not in attendance.

**Citizens attending:** Joan Cirillo, Nicole Magun, Nick Tom



DRB members reviewed the February 2, 2021 set of plans, prepared by Stamski and McNary, titled Definitive Subdivision Plan for Amanda Lane. The proponent has assembled an approximate 2 acre parcel upon which is one existing house close to Conant Street. The proposed subdivision will create two additional house lots on a steeply sloped wooded site behind the existing home. Much of the assembled land is comprised of wetlands. DRB members are concerned that the site does not naturally lend itself to the further development and in particular to fitting two new house lots so tight to the adjacent wetlands. The project as proposed is a significant impact that is not consistent with so much that Acton stands for environmentally as well as being consistent with the town's master plan and green policies. Please refer to the attached review memo of the project for a detailed summary of the DRB member comments.

The public had the following comments:

- Joan Cirillo, 45 Conant, an abutter who has lived in the neighborhood for close to 40 years, spoke at length on her concerns for the impact to the wetlands, impact to the neighboring wetland parcels, too much intervention to the existing steeply sloping site, and her concern for the neighborhood traffic safety with the introduction of the new private drive as well as her concern for emergency vehicle access. Joan is in agreement with much of the commentary she has just heard from the DRB, feeling this proposal is very unfortunate and very inconsistent with the development to date within the neighborhood.
- Nicole Magun, 41 Conant, an abutter to the project, echoed Joan's concerns for the inappropriate development of this site as proposed. In particular Nicole is concerned
- Nick Townley, 31 Conant, an abutter to the project, agrees with all that has been stated, including by Joan and Nicole. He points out how the proposed regrading of the steeply sloping site will impact so many trees on the property.

#### **4. Adjournment**

At 7:53 pm, it was moved and seconded to adjourn the meeting.  
The motion was approved unanimously.

#### **Documents and Exhibits Used During this Meeting**

- Draft Meeting Minutes from March 09, 2021
- Acton Main Street Senior Housing Design Review Board Meeting Presentation, dated March 25, 2021, prepared by Winslow Architects and by Offshoots. Refer to DRB memo for more detail.



- Definitive Subdivision Plan for Amanda Lane, dated February 2, 2021, prepared by Stamski and McNary. Set is comprised of seven plan sheets. Refer to DRB memo for more detail.

Respectfully submitted,

Peter Darlow



**TOWN OF ACTON  
DESIGN REVIEW BOARD**  
Review Memorandum: Acton Main Street Senior Housing  
Virtual Meeting  
March 25, 2020

DRB Members in attendance: Peter Darlow (Chair), Holly Ben-Joseph, David Honn, Richard Keleher, Tom Doolittle; Jon Cappetta (Planning Board Liaison); Matt Murphy (Planning Department)

Proponents in attendance: Kelley Cronin, Acton Housing Authority; John Winslow, Phil Reville, Winslow Architects; Kate Kennen, Offshoots; Maura Camosse-Tsongas, Stone Soup Collaborative.

Documents Reviewed:

- Acton Main Street Senior Housing Design Review Board Meeting Presentation, prepared by Winslow Architects, dated March 25, 2021, including:
  - Development Program
  - Site/Neighborhood Photos
  - Environmental Considerations
  - “Village” Building Site Plan – Summer Shadow Study
  - “Village” Building Site Plan – Winter Shadow Study
  - Site Layout and Grading Plan
  - Basement & 1<sup>st</sup> Floor Plans
  - 2<sup>nd</sup> & 3<sup>rd</sup> Floor Plans
  - 4<sup>th</sup> Floor & Roof Plans
  - Elevations
  - Perspectives
  - Landscape Concepts
  - Landscape Concept Diagram
  - Landscape Materials - Sun Meadow
  - Landscape Materials - Wet Meadow
  - Landscape Materials - Streetscape
  - Landscape Materials - Entry Gardens (Native)
  - Landscape Materials - Existing Buffer Planting
  - Landscape Materials - Resident Amenity Area
  - Landscape Materials - Transitional Woodland
  - Landscape Materials - Screening Planting
  - Landscape Materials - Restoration Area

The proposed Acton Senior Housing is located on Main Street (Route 27) between Route 2 and Hayward Road at the site of the current Kennedy Gardens. The site is composed of two parcels totaling approximately 2.2 acres; in addition, the development will use an adjacent undeveloped parcel immediately adjacent to Route 2 for its septic field.

The project proponents, the Acton Housing Authority, are proposing to construct an apartment complex of 40 units intended primarily for elderly residents with some units set aside for disabled residents. The housing is designed as modular units contained within four connected structures. The project also includes surface parking for 46 vehicles, including 4 accessible spaces located on a drop-off loop adjacent to the main entrance.

The project has recently filed for its eligibility letter and expects to go before the town for 40B approval in early summer.

The structures are designed to be a New England style vernacular building with a contemporary ethic. In addition to the 40 units of senior housing, the building contains approximately 3,500 square feet of community/office space and provides a community open space. The building is intended to be certified to passive house energy standards. The design was developed taking into account the immediate neighborhood and site lines from adjacent streets. An analysis of environmental aspects of the site was performed, with particular attention paid to solar exposure to allow use of solar panels on the roofs of the structures. Shadow studies of the structures were also prepared.

The design creates four separate buildings connected by a common corridor to provide a massing that is more appropriate for its site than a single large structure. The north/south orientation of the common corridor provides sun to every unit at some time in the day, as well as providing optimum solar orientation on the roofs (the ridge lines of the structures run east/west). The north/south orientation also presents the narrow face of the building to the street, which is more in keeping with the residential scale of the neighborhood.

The main entrance is in building 2, adjacent to the circular drop-off driveway and the accessible parking. The site rises significantly from Main Street to its rear corner; the design addresses this condition by stepping the buildings, with buildings 3 and 4 one floor level higher than buildings 1 and 2. The community space is in building 2 with a large terrace off the back. The primary vertical circulation is in the link between buildings 2 and 3, with stairs and two elevators; stairways are also located at the ends of the structure. Building 1 includes a basement with mechanical spaces for the entire complex; it is the only building with a basement. Building 1 has 4 units located on ground level.

The use of modular construction means there are only three unit types throughout the whole complex. All units can be converted to accessible, although only four will be constructed as accessible initially. Each building floor consists of four units, with the pattern repeated on each level. The units are primarily one bedroom, although there are two two-bedroom units as well. Buildings 1 and 4 use the gables for the top floor and reduce the counts to only two units on those floors; this is intended to maintain the New England vernacular building style. To achieve the intended contemporary farmhouse aesthetic, the overall design of the structure reflects many of the characteristics of the New England vernacular, such as the gable lines, bracketing, and material palette, but the design has been simplified to give it a more contemporary feel.

The landscape design is in early development; the concept is to use vernacular landscapes to anchor the vernacular building using predominantly native species. The landscape breaks down into a series of typologies:

- A streetscape zone along Main Street with street trees and a sidewalk or shared use path with tree species that would provide phyto-remediation to help improve air quality from the adjacent street

- A sun meadow between the streetscape zone and the building tying into the adjacent parcel, using wildflowers that would provide year-round interest
- Wet meadows to collect and infiltrate stormwater on site with wetland-adapted plantings
- A planting buffer along the west edge of the site utilizing the existing plantings of evergreen and deciduous trees, bolstered with additional tree and understory plantings to complement the existing
- A resident amenity area behind buildings 1, 2 and 3 including the outdoor space for the community space, using stone or concrete walls and paving that remind users of the native materials
- A transitional woodland area around building 4 to tie into the existing plantings along the adjacent properties, also including another wet meadow area
- Screening plantings along the north and east edges of the site to protect the neighbors, including a restoration area where Kennedy Gardens had encroached onto a neighboring property
- An entry garden along the east fronts of all four buildings, planted with ornamental trees and understory shrubs and plantings

The following are the DRBs comments on the development as presented:

1. The DRB is pleased to have an opportunity to provide input while the project is still in development.
2. The DRB liked the approach of breaking the structure into a series of smaller buildings, giving the overall development an appropriate scale and providing the opportunity to fit the buildings to the site and reduce the potential impacts of the project.
3. The DRB was concerned about the height of the structures, particularly buildings 2 and 3 which have a full attic that will be unused (as opposed to buildings 1 and 4 which locate 2 units within the gables). The additional attic space creates a significantly taller structure (above the 40' maximum height allowed under zoning) with blank space on the facades. Consideration for how to minimize this less desirable aesthetic impact was recommended. The architect indicated that including units in these attic spaces was considered, but there are problems with creating adequate egress from these floors. Similarly, lowering the roof lines would impact overall unit count and create problems for the modular construction approach. The attics could be used as storage for residents. Building 2 could potentially be used for units by extending the elevators and stairs from the link between buildings 2 and 3.
4. The DRB asked for confirmation that the solar collectors would not be shaded by the tall ridge lines of the adjacent buildings (this was confirmed by the architect). The DRB also suggested that the architects study the layout and attachment of the solar collectors to make them complimentary to the overall aesthetic that is being targeted.
5. The DRB recommended that the configuration of the stairways at the ends of the buildings be studied to provide daylight into the ends of the corridors for better orientation. The links between the buildings should also include significant amounts of glass.
6. The DRB suggested that the layout of the main entrance and community space in building 2 be studied to create a view from the lobby out to the terrace for better connection and engagement between the two areas. The exterior façade design should express this as a unique space within the building and should not look like just another set of units.
7. The view of the project from the Main Street corridor will be a particularly important aspect of the overall building aesthetics as it will be the introduction to the entire project; the elevation of that end of the building might want to be enhanced to reflect that importance. A perspective showing the building elevation from Main Street would be useful to envision the building from this view.
8. The DRB is concerned that the main entrance lacks prominence. There is potential for using the entry plaza for gathering by including seating and other amenities. Consideration should be given to extending the portico out to the vehicle drop-off point.
9. The DRB is concerned that too much of the foundation walls of buildings 3 and 4 will be visible as illustrated by the rendering of the back side of the structure. The project's architect indicated that a

similar treatment to the retaining wall on the front side will be used to minimize the exposed foundation.

Landscape Comments:

1. The DRB is concerned about the level of maintenance required for the meadows, and that the size of the meadow is very small for an effective and sustainable installation. The design team agrees with this concern and will work closely with the client to understand their maintenance capabilities and design within those parameters. The use of lawn is assumed for the amenity area; it may also be used in the entry garden and other select areas around the building.
2. The DRB strongly supports the use of native landscape materials, both for plantings and for walls and paving.
3. The DRB asked about the overall stormwater management for the project. The design team responded that the intent is to capture all on-site stormwater and infiltrate it through either the wet meadow areas or through drainage structures within the roadways that direct water to underground infiltration structures. The details are still under development for this aspect of the project.
4. The DRB strongly recommends that the parcels along Main Street west of the project, including the potential future dog park, be considered as a whole and be designed to create a continuous landscape statement across the entire frontage. Adding strolling paths utilizing all parcels would be a significant benefit for the residents. The project's proponent is willing to expand their scope to include the other separate parcels and will investigate if this is possible.
5. The DRB asked if the Kelley's Corner project was influencing the design of the streetscape in front of this project. The design team has been in touch with the town regarding the Kelley's Corner project and will coordinate as both projects evolve.
6. The DRB asked if planning for bicycle accommodation should be included in the design, such as outdoor parking and bike storage rooms. The project proponent thinks this should be looked into.
7. The DRB suggested that consideration be given to the location of the emergency generator with respect to the noise impact on the neighbors.

The DRB thanked the proponents for the opportunity to review the plans at this early stage. The proponents thanked the DRB for the comments and will consider them as they move forward into the next phases of design. The DRB requested a copy of the presentation used tonight for the board's records.

Respectfully submitted,

The DRB



**TOWN OF ACTON**  
**DESIGN REVIEW BOARD**  
Review Memorandum: 47 Conant Street  
Amanda Lane, Map 12, 56, 50-1 & 50-2

March 25, 2021 Virtual Meeting

Design Review Board (DRB) Members in attendance: Peter Darlow (Chair), Holly Ben-Joseph, David Honn, Thomas Doolittle, Richard Keleher, and Jon Cappetta, (Planning Board Liason)

Proponents in attendance: None

Documents Reviewed:

6320B- DEFINITIVE APPLICATION PACKAGE reduced.pdf

6320B SW Report + Maps reduced.pdf

6320B.DEFSUB.A.2 reduced.pdf

Sheet 1 – Title Sheet

Sheet 2 – Record Plan

Sheet 3 – Existing Conditions Plan

Sheet 4 – Site Development and Grading Plan

Sheet 5 – Site Plan and Profile

Sheet 6 – Construction Details

Sheet 7 – Erosion and Sedimentation Control Plan

6320B.PROOF PLAN.pdf

It is proposed by the project proponents to develop a private way serving three single family dwellings in a Residential Compound on a 1.94-acre site. Existing 2 story single-family dwelling and associated paved driveway located off Conant Street. The site is primarily forested with open space around the existing dwelling. There is a bordering vegetated wetland on the northeast portion of the site. There is a bordering vegetated wetland on the northeast portion of the site. The three residences are proposed to be accessed via a Common Driveway.

DRB comments:

1. They are saving the existing house, which is nearest to the street.
2. The northernmost residence is partially within the 100' buffer zone for the wetland and that therefore this project is required to be reviewed by the Conservation Commission.

3. There are very steep new slopes leading directly down to the wetlands. It is unclear how these slopes will be retained against erosion. It is unclear what is being done to remediate the impact on the wetlands in the long term and how to control runoff from the drive and other fertilizers from flowing into and polluting the adjacent wetlands. The developer should be asked to put into writing how road salts will be kept out of the wetlands and how erosion of the steep slopes will be prevented and how vehicles will be kept out of the wetland.
4. The DRB considers the elevation of the first floor of the two northernmost houses as unresponsive to the site. They are sitting on mounds of earth, with steep slopes, which will be hard to maintain. The extensive amount of fill and steep slopes might be lessened if a different house design was chosen, one that was appropriate to the site. For instance, consideration could be given to entering the two northernmost houses on the second floor. This might actually be a less expensive approach, reducing the amount of fill on the site and allowing some of the existing trees to be saved, which would be an amenity for the new owners and increasing the retail value of the project.
5. It is unclear what will keep vehicles (including fire trucks) from ending up down a steep slope in the wetlands if they should skid in the winter.
6. Due to the proximity to the wetlands and the steep slope leading down to them, no salt should be allowed on the driveway (note the increased risk for vehicles sliding into the wetlands) and no chemicals should be allowed on the lawns. The developer should be asked to put into writing how road salts will be kept out of the wetlands and how erosion of the steep slopes will be prevented and how vehicles will be kept out of the wetland.
7. Amanda Way does not currently exist. There are two street trees within the driveway that will have to be removed,
8. The lots are achieved by using narrow strips of land in concentric rings. This is possible because, unlike other surrounding towns, there is no minimum lot width at 47 Conant Street in Acton. This should be reviewed for appropriateness as a general Town policy.
9. A T-shaped turn around is proposed for fire trucks, rather than a loop turn around which in the tight site and steep slopes at the edge of the drive seems to be an unsound design.
10. The DRB recommends that the minimum number of trees be removed; only as necessary to do the work. The DRB recommends that the existing trees over 6" caliper be shown on the plan- both those that will be removed and those that will remain.

Respectfully submitted,

The DRB