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Community Planning

MINUTES

Tuesday, January 4, 2022

Mr. Warren Pearce, Chairperson called the Tuesday, January 4, 2022 meeting of the Community Planning Commission to order at 7:30p.m. via Virtual Meeting (Zoom, participants may call 1-929-205-6099, meeting code 985 430 0926).

MEMBERS

PRESENT:

Warren Pearce, Chairperson  
Christopher Hayden, Vice Chairperson  
Ryan Carroll, Clerk  
David Rudloff

STAFF

PRESENT:

Danielle McKnight, AICP  
Town Planner/Community Planning Administrator

Mr. Pearce informed all present that the meeting is being recorded.

### **35 Main Street - discussion**

Mr. Pearce stated that they did look into the advertisement of the retail space and Mrs. McKnight had a discussion with the real estate agent. (See attached)

Mr. Hayden stated that he did take a quick look at it and it didn't really impress him that much, considering they've been working on this, for 2 ½ years.

Mr. Pearce stated that he thinks to some extent that they didn't really design for general use. They designed for strictly office space and retail sale use, not for things like a hair salon or dentist office that would have required more water use.

Mr. Hayden stated that when they said they will put mixed-use in, we expected, they were designing for the mixed use. They did say that they originally had a dentist that was looking at taking two spaces and that was going to be their anchor. So, if they've got enough capacity to handle a dentist, what's the rest?

Mr. Pearce stated that he was hoping that they would have got a little more response from people trying to rent it.

Mr. Jonathan Hall stated that they did have conversations back in June of 2020 with the dentist. They were trying to think outside the box because at that point they were at it for about a year and the dentist actually wanted him to condominium them, to sell the two spaces. He reached out to the building department, a couple of times and had an architect come up with a plan, because these days dental offices don't use a lot of water like they used to. He only has one person in the storage complex, with one bathroom, so they thought they could delegate some of their use towards the dental office. They were only going to open up the dental office 3 days a week until they got new clientel, but then the pandemic came and they disappeared. A skin center and a convenience store were also interested, but that never happened. He can't have a gym, restaurant or hairdresser because the septic system is not equipped to handle that kind of business.

Mr. Pearce stated that he can that a lot of people were hurt by the Covid pandemic, as far as development goals. He also knows that this has happened in other towns, while they waited for things to clear up, so people would actually go to these places.

Mr. Hall stated that they're also having a hard time finding help, so they're not expanding, they can't find work right now.

Mr. Pearce stated that he understands and he commiserates with Mr. Hall on what he's trying to do. You need to be able to use the space, you put a lot of money into building the space and it needs to get some kind of return, but by the same token, he has a little bit of trepidation about letting it go all to storage, and then 6 months, 8 months, a year from now things clear up and began to get a little more interest in this kind of use and we don't have it anymore. The only other caveat to that, though, is that one thing Covid has done, is push people into online shopping, so the stores that they were envisioning going in there were brick and mortar type stores and they're not as popular as they were before this whole thing came down. A decision on losing the opportunity to have these spaces and at the same time, realizing that you have to do something to move everything along. So, he asked the rest of the board what their thoughts are on that.

Mr. Carroll stated that he would echo what Mr. Pearce said that he's sympathetic to the inability to lease the space, at the same time he's not at the point where he thinks it's time to cut bait on retail in that area. He thinks that was an important line the board drew and he thanks Mr. Hall and the company for conceding that, but at this point he thinks that they'll never get it back once we let it go.

Mr. Rudloff stated that things are changing on that street. October Town Meeting is only nine months away and there's going to be a vote to install sewer. If the town does vote favorable for that, the properties on that street are instantly going to be worth more and that space might be more attractive. So, he's not there, to creating a full storage facility along that stretch of Rte. 28 and he'd like to see something different there.

Mr. Hall stated that they started marketing this in July of 2019 and we're talking about 10,800 sq. feet of retail.

Mr. Pearce stated to Mr. Hall that he can't really count 2020. He has to take that strike right off the map, like it just didn't exist.

Mr. Hall stated that the bank didn't go away and as Brian from Atlantic told Mrs. McKnight, there's a lot of other spaces available for rent on Rte. 28 that have chain stores, that have an anchor. So, until those get filled up, it'll be feasible to believe that they will be the last one.

Mr. Rudloff asked Mr. Hall if he would charge the same rate per square footage for storage, for retail.

Mr. Hall stated that it is very comparable. Atlantic had it at \$22.00, but went down to \$19.00 per sq. foot, and that's triple net. According to Brian that was comparable to what's already existing in the marketplace, so it wasn't a pricing thing. Sewer could get approved at Town Meeting, but long is it going to take to get it down the road. It could take three years to actually get it in the ground.

Mr. Rudloff stated that true with the actual infrastructure itself, but he's referring to the property value. If Mr. Hall wanted to sell that property, he could sell it for a lot more than it's worth right now.

Mr. Hayden stated that he agrees with the rest of the board. The timing was terrible for what's happened in the world today. It's quite interesting that he had made some complaints about there being no signage on Main Street and the next day there was a sign there. But, it's been up there for five weeks, so he's not quite sure what's going on in any leasing industry. So, he would agree that once sewer is hopefully voted in and we're going to put it in. That property is definitely going to be worth some money. All of the property on Main Street is going to go up in value, and the first to turn it around is going to make the best money on it. He still wants to see retail at this property.

Mrs. McKnight stated that she did want to point out that they did have an agenda on this discussion and if the board does come to a consensus about what should be done if there is a change made they would be asking Mr. Hall to actually apply to the CPC, whether that says a minor modification, or to amend the site plan, or in a public hearing. She did have a conversation with the building inspector about it and he said because self-storage is now a non-conforming use on Main Street he believes they would also have to go to the ZBA.

Mr. Hall stated that he had a conversation with Mrs. McKnight about a lot of their locations having resident managers. They have an apartment or house on the property that the management actually live in and it works well for them because after house the managers can take care of a situation if it should arise. He did ask if that was an auxiliary use because they're trying to think outside the box, to use the space without impacting the town, but it's not zoned for that use.

Mr. Pearce stated that they're trying to hold true to the concept that they started out with which to no fault of anybody's has morphed a little bit all on its own. If we were starting out today it may have looked a little differently, but we are where we are. So, he's looking for a definitive timeframe.

The consensus of the CPC is to have Mr. Hall come back in six months to discuss the modification.

#### **92 Concord Street – Site Plan Review – cont. P.H. 8:00PM**

Mr. Carroll moved, seconded by Mr. Hayden and voted 4-0: (Mr. Johnston absent)

that the Community Planning Commission vote to continue the public hearing for 92 Concord Street until Tuesday, February 15, 2022 @ 8:00PM.

Mr. Pearce asked for a roll call vote: Mr. Carroll, Mr. Rudloff, Mr. Hayden and Mr. Pearce in favor, none opposed.

#### **Accessory Dwelling Units bylaw – discussion**

Mrs. McKnight stated that this was left on the agenda by accident. We will be talking more about it at the January 18, 2022 meeting.

#### **Planning Administrator Update**

##### **Sewer Project – planning portion**

Mrs. McKnight stated that proposals were received and the evaluation was completed. They hope to have someone under contract soon, but it's still in process. The hired consultant will want to meet with the CPC and with the Economic Development Committee because part of this is outreach to business owners to get a good sense of where business owners stand, as far as their plans, their interest and to try to figure out who the best people would be to talk to, to get a good picture for how this could impact the commercial landscape in North Reading.

##### **Abacus – Updated Presentation Deck**

Mrs. McKnight stated that an updated presentation from Abacus was received regarding the Main & Winter Street project. She will be sending it out to the property owners with another cover letter, letting them know that these are the results, findings from this project, and send them as a last chance to invite them to reach out with interest, comments and questions. She is working with Mr. Eisen on a cover introduction to that presentation. She thinks they should also try to make the presentation to the Select Board.

##### **MBTA Community Housing requirement**

Mrs. McKnight is continuing to work with Town Council on the MBTA Community Housing requirements. She still doesn't have any answers and needs to set up a meeting with John Eichman to discuss this. She doesn't know if they will be considered compliant, or not. If they are not considered compliant, they are going to need to potentially look at a new zoning district, to allow more multi-family housing.

##### **Subdivision and Site Plan Review**

Mrs. McKnight stated that she will be getting started soon with New England Civil on the subdivision and site plan review regulation updates. This is something that we had asked for in our budget.

Summary – conversation with Brian Roache, Atlantic Retail 12/20/21:

- Unable to fill the space for two years
- Took on the space for marketing/leasing just prior to self storage opening
- Self storage not the most attractive anchor for retail so presents a challenge
- A few deals were discussed early on; a dentist's office that would have taken up a large portion of the space was on the table in February 2020. Pandemic caused the office to shut down another practice in another community, so this one fell through.
- Lots of salon dealers were interested, but septic was difficult – limitation on the gallons per day very challenging
- Indoor driving range was interested, but ceiling heights too low
- Indoor fitness users interested, but parking a challenge – their parking needs would use all available parking for the other retail users. Septic also a challenge for indoor fitness.
- Convenience store with alcohol sale interested on and off, but never committed
- There is substantial competition; nearby retail space more attractive and available space is plentiful on Rt. 28. Inertia Dental space is more attractive
- Doesn't feel rent being asked is too high – comparable to other space in area
- No retail anchor – having dentist would have kicked this off and encouraged others to fill the space, but right now it's difficult having these unanchored retail spaces.
- Property is listed on Costar, where it is still active. Is also listed on LoopNet in cycles. Listed on Atlantic website, lease signs in the window. Also on other sites within the brokerage community, which depend on the individual websites to choose to list or not. Outbound calls and mailers are sent out to the brokerage community too.
- Lack of a pylon sign a challenge but not a deal breaker
- Other quality space likely to be filled first, such as Inertia, 25-29 Main St. and those with more retail co-tenants
- Most likely to be a professional office, something less customer facing. If supply of retail space were more constrained, the situation would be different, but it is plentiful, so interest is not strong.

Shay Lane subdivision

Mrs. McKnight stated that she has not heard anything from them, yet, about the report that was received on 9 Shay Lane that Mr. David Giangrande was not satisfied with. She has tried to communicate that and she wanted to know if the CPC would like her to request that their engineer come in to meet the CPC, or just continue to work with Mr. Giangrande, on what the best approach would be.

Mr. Pearce stated that the issues that Mr. Giangrande brings up are going to end up being duplicated when the as-built is done. It makes sense to deal with it before the subdivision is finished. LJR Engineering has been hesitant to deal with this and that make him nervous. He would like to see Mr. Roy should address this and really then fix everything because he can. We can request that he come in, even if it's informally, to speak to us.

Mrs. McKnight stated that if he can't come in to a CPC meeting she would like to have another working meeting, like they had previously.

Adjournment at 8:37PM

Respectfully submitted,  
Ryan Carroll, Clerk

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Ryan Carroll', written in a cursive style.