



TOWN OF ACTON
DESIGN REVIEW BOARD
Review Memorandum: 516 Massachusetts Avenue
In Person Meeting
June 23, 2021

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

Proponents in attendance: Mark O'Neil, Bill Dickinson, Architect for proponent

Documents Reviewed:

Dickinson Architects, LLC preliminary drawing sheets for 516 Massachusetts Ave, dated 6/23/21.

- Context Plan of immediate Neighborhood
- Context Main Street facing Building Elevations of immediate Neighborhood
- Conceptual 40B Site Plan, (prepared by Stamski and McNary, Inc, this sheet dated June 3, 2021)
- Concept Exterior Elevations, four views on two sheets
- Concept Floor Plans; Basement, First Floor, Second Floor, Attic on two sheets

The proposed project site is located near West Acton Village on an 8,710SF plot of wooded land that has been owned by the O'Neil family for a number of years. The site, which in the 19th Century was home to a cigar factory, is surrounded on two sides by town owned wetlands and sits adjacent on its western side to the 520-526 Massachusetts Avenue Condominium and as well sits adjacent to the West Acton Historic District. Mark O'Neil proposes to develop a friendly 40B four family residential building on the land, three units will be market rate and one will be a subsidized affordable unit.

The four-family structure proposed will consist of four two-bedroom units, each shown to be organized on two floor levels. The units will range in scale from 1000SF to 1300SF. The building is pushed towards Main Street with the on-site septic and surface parking for 8 vehicles placed to the rear of the lot. The building will meet all zoning code dimensional requirements excepting for the size of the lot. Due to the use of all portions of the site, the proposed development will result in removal of most all of the existing on-site vegetation. To establish the level parking lot over the septic system at the rear of the site, an 8 foot tall retaining wall is proposed for the SE rear corner where the site topography currently drops steeply to the adjacent town wetlands.

The design intent is to develop a residential scale and style for the proposed building that is consistent with much of the existing older residential structures of the West Acton Historic District. Though the property is outside of the Historic District, the proponent's architect intends to detail the building exterior in a manner that would be acceptable if developed within the District.

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 development of the project is in a preliminary stage and appreciates that the proponent chose to meet with the DRB prior to other boards and committees in town.
2. Given the town is currently in safe harbor with respect to the percentage of existing and planned affordable housing, board members are surprised that a development is proposed that looks to utilize the 40B development process. Board members voiced skepticism as to why the town would be open to another project that will generate market rate residential two-bedroom units with only one affordable unit gain at this time.
3. DRB members suggest the proponent consider shifting towards smaller 600 to 750SF one level rental units serviced by an elevator to provide accessible units. If all rental, all units would be counted towards the town's 40B total. Perhaps as many as six can be fit within a building shell of similar scale. Town studies have determined this type of residential unit to be of highest demand. DRB members suggested the proponent look at the project proposed development for 25-27 School Street. David Honn offered to forward Bill Dickinson the drawings for 25-27 School Street.
4. Should the proposal remain as a four-unit condominium building, the recommendation is to adjust the affordable unit layout to fit onto a single level and look to make this unit handicap accessible.
5. In general, DRB members are comfortable with the proposed placement of the building on the site and with the proposed massing and traditional exterior detailing suggested.
6. With respect to the presented building design, the board recommends that the attic level gable be extended out over the two-story wing at the rear of the building to eliminate the flat roof currently suggested.
7. DRB members are concerned with the scale of the retaining wall at the SE corner of the parking lot and suggest that only 6 car parking spaces be developed to avoid the need to construct the wall that would inevitably impact the neighboring wetland.
8. Some DRB members are concerned about the visual impact of the parking lot (and possible outdoor lighting) to the neighbors. Due to lack of space on the site for screen it was suggested that the proponent work with the neighbor to develop screen planting on the neighbor's property if they agree

The DRB thanked the proponents for the opportunity to review the project proposal. The proponents thanked the DRB for their commentary and will consider them as they move forward into the next phases of the project with the Acton Community Housing Corporation and other town boards.

Respectfully submitted,

The DRB