



TOWN OF ACTON
DESIGN REVIEW BOARD

Review Memorandum: 31, 39 & 45 Martin Street
Room 126, Town Hall
September 7, 2016

DRB Members in attendance: Holly Ben-Joseph (Chair), Peter Darlow (Assistant Chair), David Honn, Kim Montella, Michael Dube and Janet Adachi (Board of Selectmen liaison).

Also present: From the applicant, Seal Harbor, Mark Gallagher and Mark Gallagher (father and son; the elder Mr. Gallagher made the presentation).

Documents Reviewed: Revised site plan and informational packages including narratives and drawings for proposed home styles. The home styles are named Foxglove Cottage (1394 square feet, 3 bedrooms, 2.5 baths); Kayla (1965 square feet, 4 bedrooms, 3 baths); Shetland (1885 square feet, 2 bedrooms, 2.5 baths); Aaron Solo (1841 square feet, 4 bedrooms, 2 baths); Foxglove Farmhouse (1728 square feet, 3 bedrooms, 2.5 baths).

The DRB had previously considered earlier drawings during a meeting on July 20, 2016 during which the applicant was not present. Please see the DRB's memorandum summarizing its initial comments during the July 20, 2016 meeting.

The existing site is comprised of three lots with existing single-family homes that are set far back from the street. All three of the homes are listed on the Acton Cultural Resources List (CRL) and in the Massachusetts Cultural Resource Inventory System (MACRIS). (Properties listed in MACRIS that will be altered require a MEPA review by the Massachusetts Historical Commission). The site is in the R-2 zone.

Mr. Gallagher, who recently developed Wildflower Meadows in Littleton, described the plans for the DRB. He proposes a road into the existing property, with four "spurs" off of the road on which homes will sit. Two of the existing homes will be moved to the streetscape and one will be moved to a spur. Mr. Gallagher said that the road in to the development will go over the existing driveway. He noted that the planned siting of the homes contemplates saving some of the mature, attractive trees on the location, though not all of them.

In total, the applicant proposes 32 homes of two, three or four bedrooms. Eight are intended to be affordable under Chapter 40B; 24 will be market-rate. Two of the market-rate houses will be handicapped accessible, as will two of the affordable houses. Some of the homes will be

duplexes, but the majority is expected to be single-family. They will range in size from 1400 square feet to 2350 square feet, not including basements or garages. Mr. Gallagher noted that homes in the 1800 square foot range are most attractive to the buyers he is targeting with this proposal.

There are five to six home styles contemplated. The styles range from Capes to small Colonials, which Mr. Gallagher suggested would blend well into the existing neighborhood. The architect is Wendy Walton of Artform Architecture, Inc. Ms. Ben-Joseph commented that the homes are “cute.”

Buyers will be able to choose from among the home styles. Mr. Gallagher said that Seal Farm will seek to site the homes in such a way that homes of the same style do not consistently appear one next to the other so that there will be some variety. In addition, Seal Farm will try to differentiate the houses by using different vinyl siding colors within the styles. KOMA or PVC trim is contemplated, as are vinyl windows that are argon-filled and use low-emissivity glass.

The land at issue consists of approximately 12 acres and the houses will be sited on approximately 4-5 acres of that area, with the remainder being undevelopable wetlands. Mr. Gallagher said he expects that there will typically be 15 feet between houses.

Mr. Gallagher said that the plan is for the Acton Community Housing Corporation to work with the Zoning Board of Appeals on the location and style of the affordable units during the comprehensive permit phase.

Mr. Gallagher said that the likely buyers may be under 55 years-old and looking to downsize. Seal Farm’s average customer is 56 years-old, he said.

The most significant change from the original plans is the removal of two group homes. They have been replaced with two duplexes that will not have garages. A planned turnaround was also removed from the plan. In addition, there will be no apartments. In addition, two of the other houses will not have garages because they could not fit. The plan includes additional parking that can be used by the Town of Acton as Jones Field is repurposed.

After Mr. Gallagher’s presentation, DRB members offered their comments and asked questions. Mr. Honn suggested that there were some “jarringly” different rooflines among the house styles and advocated making fewer models available and using more consistent rooflines.

Mr. Honn also expressed the opinion that the current plan gives short shrift to the existing, historic homes. He suggested that the applicant is missing an opportunity to use them to set the tone of the project. While one of the existing homes may not be salvageable, Mr. Honn suggested designing around the other two.

Mr. Gallagher responded that two of the houses will be moved to the front of the development, and renovated but it is not economically feasible to adopt Mr. Honn’s suggestions. The applicant stated that the third house is structurally unsound and is proposed to be demolished.

Ms. Ben-Joseph advocated saving two mature trees at the top of the hill on the site. Mr. Gallagher said that some of the trees have dry rot and are dying. The applicant indicated he has consulted with arborists.

Mr. Darlow questioned whether the back of houses built into the knoll will be visible from the street. The applicant acknowledged that those units will have walkout basements that will be visible from Martin Street. Ms. Ben-Joseph suggested plantings be used to minimize that aspect of the view from the street. Later, Mr. Darlow suggested using less tall housing models on the knoll.

Mr. Honn suggested moving the historical homes so that they would be seen against a backdrop of trees at the end of a cul-de-sac. Perhaps the duplexes could be moved to the Martin Street streetscape. Mr. Gallagher responded that the neighbors did not want the duplexes on the streetscape and preferred to have one of the older houses up front. After re-examining the drawings, Mr. Honn suggested that, in fact, it appears that the older homes up front will have a backdrop of trees. Ms. Ben-Joseph suggested that the planned location for the older homes is likely the best if they must be moved.

With respect to the driveway into the property, the applicant stated that an existing retaining wall will be kept on the right side. Maple trees will be on the left side.

We thanked the applicant for his time and indicated we would submit a further memorandum reflecting our comments.

Respectfully submitted,

Design Review Board