

WELLESLEY DESIGN REVIEW BOARD
REGULAR MEETING
JANUARY 28, 2014; 7:00 PM
GREAT HALL, WELLESLEY TOWN HALL

Members Present: Johnathan Law, Ingrid Carls, Helen Robertson, Sheila Dinsmoor
Staff: Annie Ryan
Also Present: Bob Paladino, Kathryn Ostermier, Roger H. Randall, Rich Sitnik, Andrew To,
Matt King, John Savasta, Kaja Savasta, Peter Howley, Ann Howley, Dan Gordon

Mr. Law called the meeting to order at 7:06 p.m.

Discussion with Permanent Building Committee

Matt King and Andrew To of the Town's Permanent Building Committee introduced themselves and thanked the Design Review Board for inviting them for a discussion.

Mr. Law explained the purpose behind calling for a discussion between the boards was threefold:

- To discuss why PBC projects appear to come before the DRB for review very late in the project timeline and how that can be addressed;
- To discuss why some PBC projects seem to be awarded to the wrong kind of consultant, such as when an architecture firm is awarded a landscape architecture job;
- And finally, Mr. Law wanted to know more about the hiring process for consultants.

Ms. Robertson added that this discussion would help both groups work better together on projects.

Mr. King explained that the PBC follows Chapter 7 in the Massachusetts General Law closely. When a proposing board comes to the PBC with a construction request, typically that board has already completed a feasibility study for the desired project. The PBC then chooses to either use the architect who completed the feasibility study or issue a "request for proposal" to find a pool of candidates. The PBC relies on the feasibility study to determine the scope of work.

Mr. King explained that for the Fire Station floor project the PBC had hired an architecture firm that had extensive experience with designing and building fire station floors. For the senior center project which required extensive site and drainage considerations, the PBC had chosen a firm with strong site engineering qualifications.

Mr. King explained that all submitted proposals are reviewed and then ranked during a PBC session. The PBC will sometimes interview 2 or three firms to get a better sense of the personalities of the project teams. Mr. King added that most of the interviewed finalists tend to be very qualified. After the interviews, the PBC ranks the finalists and begins contract negotiations with the winning team.

Mr. King added that with the amount of construction in the town ramping up significantly in the coming months, there is some concern about whether the quality of applicants will be sustained. Thus far, Mr. King explained that the PBC believes it has had good luck with the majority of applicants. In some cases, projects have been bundled together to keep projects on track and within budgets.

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Mr. Law asked if the Town has an “on call” list for applicants.

Mr. King said that the Department of Public Works has an on call list and that the PBC has used that list on certain projects in the past, however there is not a PBC-specific list at this time.

Ms. Carls asked if projects by the Municipal Light Plant, Department of Public Works, and the Housing Development Corporation go through the PBC or if they are managed by the respective department or agency.

Mr. King replied that MLP and DPW projects do go through the PBC however HDC handles its own projects. He added that any horizontal construction such as roads and sidewalks are not handled by the PBC.

Mr. King brought up the recently constructed plaza at Wellesley Middle School and explained that it was an error on the PBC’s part not to involve the DRB earlier in that project.

Ms. Dinsmoor mentioned that when the senior center project was presented to the DRB, it also appeared to be relatively finished.

Mr. King explained that the senior center project was shown to the DRB as schematics and that in order to complete the required project applications they had to bring plans to a certain level of detail. He added that some projects end up bringing in a larger number of participants and stakeholders. For example—the school projects.

Mr. Law asked how many board members the PBC has.

Ms. King answered that there are five members: an attorney, an architect, and engineer, a contractor, and a citizen. These roles are specifically prescribed in the Town Bylaws. For the “citizen” role, the PBC typically recruits someone who is politically savvy within Wellesley and understands how the different boards and departments operate.

Ms. Robertson described the process that took place with the collapsed chimney of the Wellesley Hills Branch Library when the Historical Commission found an antique masonry expert to work on the project. She further explained that she wants to find a similar appropriate way for the DRB to be involved in projects in a meaningful way.

Mr. King replied that the PBC is diligent about explaining the content of the DRB to all project teams ahead of time and that they would like to find more ways to get the DRB involved in projects.

Mr. Law asked how the DRB could better assist the PBC.

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Mr. King replied that projects are typically fast-paced, so it can be hard to “stop and think”.

Mr. Law responded that the DRB’s goal is to ensure that the best possible product is created for Wellesley.

Mr. King added that the Middle School plaza was an example of how the DRB could have been better utilized.

Mr. Law added that it was very late in the day when that particular project was brought before the DRB.

Michael Zehner then asked Mr. King and Mr. To if the process could somehow be more streamlined so that as soon as a board or department proposing a project submitted to the PBC the DRB could be notified, as described in the Town Bylaws.

Mr. King explained that until the costs for the project have been determined and funding secured, it is not technically a PBC project. Costs are not determined until a winning design bid has been chosen. The specific scope and cost of a project are determined through the feasibility study that is submitted initially.

Mr. Law explained that as long as the DRB is able to see projects at a schematic design level, then they will be able to give their professional input.

Mr. Zehner asked if the PBC or DRB members had considered how a protocol for notifying boards could be better implemented.

Mr. King said that there was no debate that the PBC needs to notify the DRB about projects.

Ms. Dinsmoor added that during the DRB’s discussion with the Town Government Study Committee, the topic of a database that tracked every project and alerted boards to what other boards were working on was discussed.

Mr. Law thought it would be helpful if the DRB looked at the project hiring process for PBC projects. In his opinion, the Middle School plaza project should have gone to a landscape architecture firm.

Mr. King replied that perhaps the DRB could weigh in on the hiring process when the PBC is collecting references.

Ms. Carls asked if it would be helpful for a member of the DRB to attend the PBC when it discusses hiring for a project.

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Mr. King did not think that that would be necessary for every project, but perhaps could be useful on specific projects such as the library example with the chimney.

Mr. King explained that ultimately it would be very helpful for the PBC if the DRB could accommodate its projects earlier in the process and that the PBC would aim for reviews during the schematic phase.

Wellesley Middle School, 50 Kingsbury Street, 15-01 PBC

Documents:

- Wellesley Middle School Window Replacement Plan Set, dated 1/21/15, by CSS Architects

Discussion:

Kaja Savasta from CSS Architects introduced the window replacement project for Wellesley Middle School, on behalf of the Permanent Building Committee. She explained that her firm had submitted 60% construction drawings for the project to replace existing, single-glazed and steel windows from two buildings on the campus from 1950s and 1960s.

Ms. Savasta first presented the proposed windows for the building that was constructed in 1950. The new windows have narrow site lines which preserve the original design of the building. They are aluminum frames in either off-white or cream. Screens for the windows will be located on the outside of the window and the panes will be double-glazed. Ms. Savasta explained that the screens would only cover the projecting vent portion of the window. She added that the trim on the outside of the windows will limit the appearance of caulking lines.

Mr. King explained that there is no central air circulation in the school currently, so some windows will be modified to support small portable A/C units.

Ms. Savasta explained that windows needing A/C units would have separate metal panels to allow for the unit.

Ms. Savasta next moved on to the proposed window replacements for the 1966 building. The existing windows are steel glazed and the proposed replacements would have an identical style and still project out. The exact window proposed has already been used for the Middle School's science wing. These science wing windows are green, but Ms. Savasta explained that they could also install the new windows in cream or off-white if the Board preferred.

Ms. Savasta next explained that the glass block-style window on the gym would be replaced with translucent fiberglass.

Ms. Robertson asked if all the windows would be cream colored, and no green at all.

Ms. Savasta said that that was the direction that the PBC was leaning towards.

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Mr. King added that color has been a major discussion amongst PBC and that in the past they have started to move towards green.

Ms. Robertson explained that she preferred the green for the 1966 building because it resulted in a clear and more elegant façade. The cream colored frames made the building appear too disjointed.

Ms. Carls and Ms. Dinsmoor agreed with Ms. Robertson's statement

Ms. Robertson moved to recommend approval of the project as presented with the condition that the proposed window frames for the 1966 building be painted "Hartford green", and that the proposed window frames for the 1950 building be painted cream . Ms. Dinsmoor seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously (3-0).

9 Hundreds Circle, 9 Hundreds Circle, 15-02 LH

Documents:

- Randall Residence Large House Review Plan Set, dated January 5, 2015, by Mellowes and Paladino, Inc., Dan K. Gordon Landscape Architects, and Cheney Engineering Co, Inc.

Discussion:

Architect Bob Paladino of Mellowes and Palladino, and Landscape Architect Dan Gordon of Dan K. Gordon Landscape Architects, introduced their Large House Review application for 9 Hundreds Circle on behalf on property owner Roger Randall.

Mr. Paladino explained that the home was similar in scale to surrounding homes and that the design sought to minimize the apparent size of the new structure. Mr. Paladino explained that the house exhibits many of the architectural features of surrounding homes including peaked roofs and dormers.

Mr. Gordon described the landscaping and grading alterations proposed for the project. Many of the significant oaks and smaller trees would be preserved, and stone retaining walls would help make the terrain more accessible for pedestrians and vehicles.

Mr. Law asked if the retaining walls would be versa-lock walls.

Mr. Gordon answered that the walls would be natural stone. He added that the proposed screening trees would be spruce and holly.

Mr. Paladino explained that the home relates to the surrounding homes well since the proposed new façade for the home would be more in line with the adjacent homes.

Ms. Carls noted that the proposed roof for the house is 8 feet taller than the original house. She explained that she was concerned about the increased height and its effect on the neighborhood.

Mr. Paladino explained that the house on one side of the proposed home is even larger. This new house would be more in keeping with the heights of surrounding homes.

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Ms. Robertson commented that she liked the design of the proposed new home, but that it is twice the size of the houses on either side of it, and that the threshold for TLAG allows for homes that are plenty large and elegant.

Mr. Paladino explained that the attic is taking up a large portion of the TLAG calculation and that it is not intended to be livable space.

Mr. Law asked how the TLAG threshold was determined.

Ms. Ryan explained that threshold was set for each of the Single Residence districts, and that it took into account total square footage for the propose home, attics above a certain height, some portions of basements above grade, and garages greater than 600 square feet.

Ms. Dinsmoor asked if the architects had considered the impacts on neighbors, and if the closest abutting structure was the new garage.

Mr. Paladino confirmed that the garage was the closest structure to the property line.

Ms. Dinsmoor commented that the scale of the home did appear to be significantly larger than the existing home.

Mr. Law invited members of the public who wished to comment on the project to come forward to address the Board.

Peter Howley, a direct abutter to the subject property explained that the owner and architects had not reached out to any of the neighbors to discuss the project, and that the house had been vacant for four years.

Ms. Carls asked why the house needed to be so much taller than the existing home.

Mr. Paladino explained that this was to avoid the need for "knee-walls" on the third floor

Ms. Robertson commented that the scale of houses has changed since the original home was built.

Mr. Paladino added that the roof does not necessarily need to be as steep as what is shown.

Ann Howley, also a direct abutter to the subject property, explained that the existing house fades into the landscaping and is not prominent from the street. For that reason, almost anything proposed by the applicant would be different than what exists today. However, Mrs. Howley conceded that what is being presented this evening is dramatic.

Mr. Howley added that their property was down the hill slightly from the subject property, and that they would be looking up to the new home.

Ms. Howley added that they would have appreciated more notice from the applicant and owner so that they could have provided comments earlier on.

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Mr. Law asked the architect if the ceilings could be lowered by a minimal amount such as 5 inches. Lowering the ceilings minimally could result in a major overall reduction for the apparent height of the building.

Mr. Paladino explained that the second floor of the garage was never intended to be living space.

Ms. Robertson and Ms. Carls both agreed that ceiling heights should be lowered so that the roofline could be brought to a more reasonable height.

Ms. Robertson added that the roof as shown is not in proportion with the rest of the house.

Roger Randall, the home owner asked to speak to the Board. Mr. Randall explained his reasoning behind the steeper pitch for the roof. Structurally, the roof needs to be steep enough to handle several feet of snow.

Ms. Robertson replied that with minor adjustments to each ceiling height, the spaces within the home could still be very gracious while also significantly reducing the TLAG.

Mr. Randall replied that he is concerned with the market rate of the house and would not want to reduce ceiling heights to a point that the house would be substandard and lose value.

Mr. Law commented that Mr. Randall will have more success with getting his project approved if he finds ways to reduce the TLAG and address the Boards issues with the height. The Planning Board will be more likely to approve his project with the endorsement of the DRB and that these changes will not decrease the value of the home.

Mr. Law added that he believed the landscaping was very nice and he appreciated the use of real stone over a versa-lock style wall.

Ms. Robertson asked if permeable pavers would be used on the auto court.

Mr. Gordon said that his team could look into this.

Mr. Law said that the Board would not make a recommendation this evening but will be happy to review the project at a later time when its concerns regarding TLAG and roof heights and pitches had been addressed.

Previous Minutes

Mr. Law moved to accept the meeting minutes from the 12/3/14, 12/17/14, and 1/14/15 meetings. Ms. Carls seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously (4-0).

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Mr. Law adjourned the meeting at approximately 9:06 pm.

Annie Ryan
Wellesley Planning Department

Minutes Approved: 2/11/15