



DESIGN REVIEW BOARD

Meeting Minutes
May 28, 2020
1:00 PM
VIRTUAL MEETING

Present: Holly Ben Joseph, (Chair), Peter Darlow, (Vice Chair), David Honn, Robert Hummel, Planning Department (Zoom Monitor)

Absent: Dean Charter (BoS Liaison)

1. Opening

Chair, Holly Ben-Joseph, opened the meeting at 1:00 pm.

2. Regular Business

A. Citizens' concerns – none

B. Approval of Meeting Minutes – It was moved and seconded to approve the amended March 4, 2020 minutes. They were approved unanimously as amended.

Action Item: Holly will revise the minutes and submit them to the Town.

3. Special Business

A. Presentation of The Apartments at Powdermill

Proponents in attendance: Joel Kahn, Equity Alliance LLC, Timothy Wentz, Gate 17 Architecture, and Randy Miron, Bohler Engineering
Virtual Guests: Terra Freidrichs, Tris W.

This is a large, LIP 40B apartment project located on the Assabet River adjacent to the Maynard town line. Joel Kahn gave an overview of the project and answered questions from the DRB. Timothy Wentz and Randy Miron also answered questions from the DRB. Please refer to the Project Review Memo dated 05/28/20, appended to these minutes for information and details specific to the presentation and DRB commentary.

B. Presentation of the Grandview Project

Proponents in attendance: Mark O'Hagan of MCO Housing Services



This is a 32-unit LIP 40 B project located at 361-363 Great Road. Mark O'Hagan gave a presentation and update of the project. Please refer to the Project Review Memo dated 07/24/19 and 05/28/20, appended to these minutes for information and details specific to the presentation and DRB commentary.

4. Adjournment

At 2:30 p.m., it was moved and seconded to adjourn the meeting.
The motion was approved unanimously.

Documents and Exhibits Used During this Meeting

- Meeting Minutes from March 4, 2020
- Comprehensive Permit Site Plan Set, Apartments at Powdermill, dated 2/10/20, prepared by Bohler Engineering

Page Titles:

Sheet L-1	Landscape Plan
Sheet L-2	Landscape Notes and Details
Sheet L-3	Demolition Plan
Sheet L-4	Overall Master Plan

Powdermill Apartments overall aerial rendering prepared by Gate 17

Architecture

Powdermill architectural drawings dated 07/05/20 prepared by Gate 17

Architecture

Page Titles:

A3.01	Elevation Sheet
A3.02	Elevation Sheet
A3.03	Elevation Sheet
A3.04	Elevation Sheet

- Grandview Documents Reviewed

Layout Plan dated 02/25/20; revised 05/19/20 prepared by Stamski and McNary

Landscape Plan dated 05/28/20 prepared by Places Associates

Respectfully submitted,

David Honn



TOWN OF ACTON
DESIGN REVIEW BOARD
Review Memorandum: Apartments at Powder Mill
Virtual Meeting
May 28, 2020

DRB Members in attendance: Peter Darlow (Chair), Holly Ben-Joseph, and David Honn

Proponents in attendance: Joel Kahn, Equity Alliance LLC, Timothy Wentz, Gate 17 Architecture, and Randy Miron, Bohler Engineering on behalf of Apartments at Powder Mill LLC.

Virtual Guests: Terra Fredrichs, Tris W.

Documents Reviewed:

Comprehensive Permit Site Plan Set, Apartments at Powder Mill, dated 02/10/2020, prepared by Bohler Engineering.

Page titles:

Sheet L-1 Landscape Plan
Sheet L-2 Landscape Notes and Details
Sheet 3 Demolition Plan
Sheet 4 Overall Master Plan

Powder Mill Apartments (overall aerial view rendering), prepared by Gate 17 Architecture.

Powder Mill Place architectural drawings, dated 07/05/2019, prepared by Gate 17 Architecture.

Page titles:

A3.01 Elevation Sheet
A3.02 Elevation Sheet
A3.03, and A3.04 Elevation Sheets

The proposed Apartments at Powder Mill project is set on property adjacent to the Assabet River at the border of Maynard and Acton on Powder Mill road. The site is comprised of two parcels, the larger parcel is in Acton and is approximately 2/3rds developed and 1/3rd undeveloped river edge woodland that is classified as pristine. It was originally developed as a series of industrial buildings that have recently fallen into disarray. The Maynard plot has two existing residential properties that will remain and a drive to the factory building that will be abandoned. No construction or improvements will take place on the Maynard

side of the site. The site falls under the jurisdiction of the Rivers Act, and therefore protection setbacks within the pristine portion of the land will be adhered to. The surrounding area is commercial and the senior center is in close proximity.

The proponents are proposing to construct an apartment complex with several multi-family apartment buildings, garaged parking, and some surface parking with amenities. This is being developed as a friendly 40B for the over 55 age group. Every resident will have enclosed parking with direct access to their apartments on each level of the garage. The siting of the buildings takes advantage of the river view.

The front building is a smaller residential building which is a 5-story apartment building over a one-story parking garage. This building will have 75 units and 42 (?)garaged parking spaces. There are 42 surface parking spaces at the front of the building. There will be direct access from the parking garage into the building as well as a front entry for visitors who park in the lot outside. The height of the building to top of parapet is 72'-4".

The second building is U-shaped with the long end a 6-story parking garage (375 spaces) facing the street that steps down to 5-story multi-family apartment building. There are a total of 155 apartment units. The height of the 6-story garage is 70', and it is 60' for the 5-story portion to the top of the parapet. The siting and shape of the buildings takes advantage to maximise views to the river.

The unit types are one bedroom one bath, two bedroom two bath, and three bedroom two bath apartments. All of the apartments will be market rate and they are considered market to luxury-sized.

The third building on the site is a single story club house which is facing the river. It sits at the end of the drive and there is a roundabout and HC parking out front.

The other amenities of the site are a pool, grilling stations and firepit set within the courtyard space of the U-shaped building, a community garden, a small dog park and a stone dust path around the outside of the U-shaped building that doubles as emergency vehicle access. On the river side, the path is outside of the 25' setback buffer for the river. The path will also connect with an existing cart path and will be open to the public. Eventually this may be part of a river trail.

In terms of siting of the roads and buildings, all of the construction is located on previously built land, maintaining the pristine portion of the site as is. As mentioned earlier, the Maynard portion will also remain as is. The buildable portion remaining is a rectangular shape that juts into the property at an angle from Powder Mill Road. Two driveways provide access, one leading to the large building complex and clubhouse at the rear of the site, and the other leading directly into the parking garage of the smaller building which abuts the street. There is open space between the single family residences and the 7-story garage which should help to ameliorate the impact of the large massing of the the proposed buildings.

The impervious surfaces have been decreased by 53,000 square feet.

The building facades as proposed are a mix of materials and textures primarily brick stucco and glass. The windows are oversized and of various sizes. The materials change at varying heights within each building facade. Additionally, the facades are broken into smaller proportions by offset vertical elements that are topped with a variety of parapets and pediment detail. Each unit has balconies and sliding glass doors. The garages are open air, and the visible side of the 6-story garage facing the street has similar architectural elements as the apartment buildings. The parapets undulate up and down as well. All of this is to break up the massing of the building and to make the building complex visually interesting to the target market.

The landscape design is preliminary but shows main concepts; careful attention will be made to the reestablishment of the riverbank plantings.

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

Site comments:

1. The DRB supports the location of this unique to Acton project. It is located close to a shopping center and the senior center. The buildings have been logically sited to take advantage of the views and recreation opportunities of the Assabet River. It's primary massing is set well back from the public street.
2. The DRB is very appreciative of the improvement to the site's pervious surfacing, the access to the river with a path and the connection of the path to an existing path along the river's edge. In addition, we support the idea to maximize development in the disturbed area while keeping the wooded area pristine. We also understand that limiting work within these tight borders has forced the amenities to be fit into rather tight spaces, and we hope with a few adjustments that the amenities can be connected in some way with a relationship to the river and to each other rather than being dotted around the site.
3. There is concern that the pool's location in the courtyard will be in shade most of the time since it is surrounded by 5-story buildings on 3 sides. The DRB recommended to do a sun-shade study of the area to determine the amount of sun the area will get, even if the pool is not the only amenity. (and will be open only 3 months of the year). The pool is completely isolated and cut off from the river. The DRB pointed out that when the residents are in these enclosed public spaces there is no connection with the river.
4. The DRB wonders if it is possible to provide a stronger link between the outdoor amenities of the pool area and the club house. As is sited now, the club house is not connected with any of the other outdoor amenities. The DRB understands the desire of the developers to have the clubhouse act as a welcoming building at the end of the drive with easy access to HC parking but would prefer to see better linkage.
5. One option the DRB pondered is whether the pool should be located where the clubhouse currently stands and the clubhouse be located within the main apartment building in place of a few units. This would serve to open up the view to the river when you drive in.
6. The DRB is concerned that the clubhouse, in combination with the apartment buildings, will block the view to the river upon arrival to the property. In addition, as it is sited now, the view upriver will be blocked by the main building. The DRB suggested looking for an opportunity at ground level to open up a portion of the building to provide visual connection from the court to the river.
7. Since the ground level parking garage, which is closest to the street, will have a strong visual impact, the DRB recommends that the architecture should either read as apartment units or that it be screened with either a green screen or heavy landscape plantings.
8. The DRB recommends to move the perimeter path outward, as close to the river as possible, (along the setback line) to provide space for landscaping between the bottom floor units and the public path. It would also be nice to add seating along the water and other amenities to connect to the river.
9. An audience member requested that town residents be allowed access to the path along the river (the proponents said access is provided) and that seating be provided.
10. An audience member asked about having an indoor pool, and the proponents said that indoor pools are complicated to construct.
11. It was asked if there will be bike parking and the answer was affirmative. In addition, the cross-town connect will be providing rides to residents.

Building Architecture Comments:

1. The DRB appreciates the siting of the buildings to maximize the views, the limiting of surfacing parking, the large windows and and interesting massing with key bays and balconies. However, the building feels foreign to this area, not of New England.
2. These will be the biggest buildings with the greatest mass in Acton. Most building in Acton adhere to the zoning maximum height of 36' or less. These buildings are almost twice the height. Given their scale, it is especially important that the architecture takes visual cues from other classic large-sized buildings of the region such as mill buildings. This is especially poignant as the buildings are sited along a river. The DRB pointed to a photo of the Maynard mill complex as one example of a successful river bank image. The DRB recommends the project team take a look at this and other mill buildings for inspiration. The beauty of the mill buildings is that due to their impressive scale they appear very clean and simple. Yet due to their immense scale they can in fact be fit out with plenty of detail that in context of utilizing a single facing material, generally only brick, the depth of detail feels subtle within the context.
3. Again due to the very large scale of the buildings, the DRB recommends that the building facades be simplified. There is plenty of interest generated by the unique massing established to follow the rivers edge, the many projected bays introduced, and the many vertically stacked residential decks. The current elevations proposed offer too many changes of material at a variety of heights, offer an incongruous combination of large punched window openings and stacked curtainwall windows, and way too many cornice top details.
4. The facades can be simplified, yet still offer plenty of detail, and therefore be significantly improved by:
 - Simplifying the material transition lines of the building. Keep the change from brick to stucco at one uniform height across the building. It is suggested as an option that perhaps the stucco finish is only used at the top floor level to establish an entablature line.
 - Or possibly eliminate the use of stucco and face the building completely in brick.
 - Utilize one interesting cornice line detail repetitively at the tops of the buildings, rather than the three to four varieties presented.
 - Utilize only punched window openings. Eliminate the use of the curtainwall. The proposed punched windows are oversized at 6ft high and the DRB thinks this is a very nice scale.
5. The DRB is concerned that the floors of the parking garage are sloped and that this will be an unattractive view from Powder Mill Road. If possible, the DRB recommends disguising the ramps with cut out windows or a green screen.
6. .
7. The DRB recommends the the proponents provide perspectives of the building from Powder Mill Road from both directions.

DRB members unanimously believe this project will be an asset to the Town and it's residents and support it moving forward. The project effectively will redevelop prime water front property from a languishing asphalted post-industrial site to a much needed rental housing to the under-served 55 and over community. The DRB thanks the proponents for taking time to present the project to us, and would welcome another visit when the building facades have been reconsidered and further refined, when the clubhouse and landscape designs are more fully developed with reviewed elevations and renderings of the complex from Powder Mill Road have been completed.

Respectfully submitted,

The DRB



**DRB Memorandum
Draft
Grandview Acton
361 – 363 Great Road**

July 24, 2019

May 28, 2020

This is a combination of two separate reviews of the proposed Grandview Project, a Local Initiative Project (LIP), "Friendly" 40B.

July 24, 2019:

DRB members in attendance: Holly Ben-Joseph (Chair), Peter Darlow (Assistant Chair), Kim Montella, and David Honn.

The project's proponent in attendance: Mark O'Hagan of MCO Housing Services

Documents Reviewed:

- Bullet Item Summary (1 page) prepared by MCO Housing Services
- 6 Page Untitled Plan Set (Dated July 18, 2019 by Stamsky & McNary) comprised of Architectural Rendering of Building from Proposed Parking Lot, Floor Plan showing 8 Condo Units per floor, Architectural Rendering of Building from Proposed Front Yard, Simple Site Layout Plan showing preliminary locations of building, driveway, parking area, and proposed drainage basin & septic areas, Overview Map of area with proposed preliminary site improvements superimposed on it, and same Overview Map with pictures of surrounding existing property improvements referenced thereon.

The existing site is currently comprised of approximately 4 acres on two lots with a small bungalow and semi-circular driveway on it. The topography generally slopes up towards the back of the site from Great Road (towards the North) and there is a slight plateau on the site where the proposed building is currently sited. The remainder of the site is wooded. The site is surrounded by several condominium complexes (Wampus Avenue, Meyer Hill, and Brook Run) as well as a couple of single-family homes and a small professional building across Great Road.

It is proposed to demolish the existing bungalow and erect a five (5) story building that will consist of 32 condo units (2 bed, 2 bath, 1600 – 1700 SF, garden-style units w/ balcony or patio, all handicap accessible, with covered parking on the first floor & elevator). 8 of the units are proposed to be affordable units (\$200K price point) while the remainder will be market rate (\$460K +/-, pricing according to the proponent). All units will be age restricted, meaning at least one of the Owners has to be 55 years old or older. The underground parking area will provide approximately 36 parking spaces and the exterior surface lot behind the building has approximately 40 additional spaces. There will be 4 stories of condos with 8 units on each floor.

The site is near some Town amenities such as shopping, playing fields, Bruce Freeman Rail Trail, and access

to Rtes 2 & 495.

The following are the DRBs comments on the development as presented on July 24, 2019:

1. The orientation and height of the building are concerning. The DRB proposes that the proponent attempt to orient the long side of the building more aligned with Great Road and look to push the building back from Great Road. If that's possible, the approach to the building will be more pleasing to future residents and the view of the mass of the building will be somewhat mitigated. Also, by moving the building back as far as possible, more existing mature trees and landscaping can be maintained which will also help. The DRB does understand that the topography may inhibit these requests.
2. The height of the building is of concern...as per the proponent, the height of the building will exceed 40 feet and the first floor level of the building will be set upon a plateau that is located approximately 25 feet above the average adjacent grade of Great Road. The DRB requests a scaled drawing study of the façade of the building in relation to Great Road (from both travel directions) to determine how the mass of the structure relates to the surrounding neighborhood area.
3. The DRB suggested reducing the number of surface parking spaces (currently well in excess of two spaces per unit) and reworking an entrance drop-off area that would accommodate shuttle vehicles. Further, pushing any surface parking to the back of the site will help to alleviate any steeper driveway slopes.
4. The DRB would like the existing mature trees/shrubs along Great Road to be maintained – the proponent agreed.
5. Since the location is close to existing shopping, playing fields and the rail trail, it would be nice to provide a way for the future residents to access these neighborhood features without having to walk along Great Road. The proponent did briefly discuss a potential walking path that could connect to the adjacent Wampus Ave. Complex to the northeast of the site. We encourage him to continue investigating this option.
6. Regarding the architecture, it is proposed to give the entrances more importance – they seem to be a bit lost as they are not celebrated in a scale consistent to the buildings height nor mass.
7. On the building interior, it was suggested to look into way of getting natural light and window views into the corridors and/or vestibules.

May 28, 2020:

DRB members in attendance: Peter Darlow (Chair), Holly Ben Joseph, and David Honn.

The project's proponent in attendance: Mark O'Hagan of MCO Housing Services.

Grandview Acton Documents Reviewed:

Layout Plan, dated February 25, 2020 and revised May 19, 2020, prepared by Stamski and McNary
Landscape Plan, dated May 28, 2020, prepared by Places Associates.

The design has progressed modestly with respect to the overall building design with a noted relocation of the elevator core from the North end to the South End of the building. Otherwise the proposed building remains essentially as previously reviewed in July 2019.

The site documentation has been progressed with development of site drainage, the project's on site septic system, initial thoughts on landscape, further definition of the surface parking area, inclusive of entrance ramps, clarity on parking amenities, site lighting, dumpster corrals, and retaining structures to allow for building the parking lot into the hillside, and the introduction of a walkway from Great Road up to the on grade parking area. The recently revised site drawings reflect commentary received from the planning board, the health department, the civil engineering peer review, and the first review meeting with the zoning board of appeals.

The following are the DRBs comments on the site development drawings reviewed May 28, 2020:

8. Adjacent to Great Road, along the existing bank, a reinforced lawn is proposed. Not knowing how well this can be maintained, due to the steeply sloping bank, it is recommended to consider using more of the wildflower pollinator mix as has been proposed for atop the septic system. It is understood the intent is to maintain the existing conditions as much as is feasible, thus this comment pertains primarily to areas that will be disturbed.
9. The selections of evergreen trees will not thrive, as these particular Blue Spruce species have recently been disease prone. It is recommended to shift to Fir varieties.
10. The DRB recommends taking a careful look at the plantings scheduled for the drainage basins that the building tenants will be looking down upon. Given many similar basins at other recently developed projects in town have turned out to be very ragged visually, there needs to be an effort to develop a groundcover that can be readily maintained.
11. The DRB recommends an effort be made to construct some leveled out space to offer the residents some opportunity for outdoor recreation, perhaps as simple as a flattened lawn for a barbeque and picnic area.
12. The proposed retaining walls, close to 10 feet in overall height above the first floor level on grade parking will have an important visual impact. The proponent has not yet determined how these will be treated, other than to state they will not be simply poured concrete walls as they are an important visual for the development of the property.
13. Reiterating a request to provide a visual study of how the building will be perceived when approaching from Great Road, the DRB is concerned of the significant overall height and mass of the four story façade sitting on the hillside. Especially should the existing trees along the edge of Great Road not be able to be maintained. One consideration offered to help mitigate the overall building height visually, is to introduce a secondary finish material such as a masonry first floor level, to help soften the severity of the current façade's overall height. The proponent agreed to discuss with his design team and have a look at this.

The DRB appreciates the proponent coming to the Board back in July of 2019 and again on May 28, and looks forward to working with him as the project continues to progress.

Respectfully Submitted
Design Review Board