



DESIGN REVIEW BOARD

March 15, 2021

THOUGHTS ON DRIVE-UP WINDOWS

To: Planning Department; Board of Selectman
From: Design Review Board (DRB)
Re: March 09, 2021 drive-up discussion with members of the planning department

At the Design Review Board's meeting on March 19, 2021 the thinking behind proposed zoning language to allow drive-up windows for pharmacies and restaurants was discussed with Kristen Guichard and Robert Hummel from the planning department. The planning department has been asked by the Board of Selectmen to prepare zoning change articles for presentation at the upcoming town meeting. The BoS recommended that planning ask for thoughts from the DRB as to language to include within the zoning to help guide the design direction for proponents to follow.

The Design Review Board believes that drive-up windows do not contribute to the desired character of the Town of Acton, as exemplified by the Complete Streets program, the historic nature of the town's traditional villages, and the Kelly's Corner improvement initiative. DRB members wish to point out that in the recent past, additional drive-up window opportunities have not been approved by town meeting and believe that the current pandemic is not an appropriate environment within which to ask whether the citizens truly want to make such a change in the zoning. That said, the DRB recognizes that a portion of the citizens of Acton are in favor of the change. Given this, DRB members offer the following comments and recommendations for the proposed zoning language in order to arrive at a better plan for each additional drive-up and a better visual outcome should additional drive-up window opportunities be approved at the town meeting.

1. The planning department is crafting zoning language that recommends restaurant and pharmacy drive-up windows proposed for the town's village zones, as well as for the Kelley's Corner zone, shall require a special permit. The DRB is pleased that this will be a requirement and requests that the zoning language be tweaked to affirm such a special permit review will include a review by the DRB concerning the proposal. However, the DRB wishes to emphasize that drive-up windows introduce a car centric attitude for adding a lot of additional pavement which is not consistent with how the town has been working to improve the pedestrian focused aspects of each neighborhood. It is also the DRB's opinion that most of the sites within the village districts will not likely have sufficient land

to accommodate the introduction of the needed driveway infrastructure for a drive-up.

2. The planning department is crafting zoning language that recommends restaurant and pharmacy drive-up windows proposed for business, office, or industrial zones, such as the route 2A-Great Road corridor, shall be allowed as of right. The DRB is opposed to allowance of a proposed new drive-up as of right. Given the wide array of existing site conditions that each proposal will deal with, it is in the best interest of the town that each new drive-up proposal be reviewed carefully with respect to public safety concerns. As well, again due to the wide array of existing retail buildings, the DRB would like to see the drive-up windows be well integrated within the existing architecture of the host building. The ability for there to be some level of review by the DRB of the proposed drive-up visual impact can only be enforced if the zoning establishes a requirement for a special permit.
3. Rather than “jumping in with both feet”, the DRB would prefer to see the town proceed to “test out” the additional drive-up zoning starting with pharmacies only.
4. The DRB recommends that language be included within the zoning to direct that any three-dimensional addition or adjustment made to a building, such as a drive thru canopy, a roof overhang for weather protection, and the like be constructed in harmony with the architecture of the host building. The DRB recommends that fabric or plastic awnings systems not be allowed.
5. The DRB recommends that additional to the language proposed on signage specific to the drive-up window, no signage shall be allowed to be mounted to a canopy or roof overhang if such is proposed for a drive-up window.
6. The DRB recommends that a drive-up window not be allowed within 10 feet of an outside corner of a building on the side of a building that the zoning will allow for a drive-up window to be placed. The purpose being to keep the idling cars, while being serviced at a drive-up window, away from projecting into the front yard of a property or potentially interfering with a pedestrian walkway along the front face of the building.
7. Though the DRB could not offer specifics, members did emphasize that given the existing conditions a proponent will face in the village districts, due to the small sites and or peculiarities of the existing building stock, not all properties may be suitable for a drive-up, and it may just not be possible to grant a special permit to all who apply. Language in the code should be such to be clear that drive-ups are not necessarily an as of right outcome.

Respectfully submitted,

Design Review Board