

**ZONING BOARD OF APPEALS**

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March 26, 2019
7:30 pm
Juliani Meeting Room
Town Hall

Zoning Board of Appeals Members Present: Robert W. Levy
J. Randolph Becker
Derek B. Redgate

ZBA 2018-64, 680 WORCESTER ROAD LLC, 680 WORCESTER STREET
ZBA 2018-65, 16 STEARNS ROAD LLC, 16 STEARNS ROAD

Present on behalf of the Applicant were Geoff Engler, 680 Worcester Road LLC and 16 Stearns Road LLC, William Bergeron, P.E., Hayes Engineering and Jim Velleco, Architect, Grazado Velleco Architects.

Present on behalf of the town was Cliff Boehmer, Architect, Peer Reviewer, Davis Square Architects, Judi Barrett, Consultant, and Christopher Heep, Town Counsel.

Mr. Engler said that the Applicant's presentation tonight reflects changes that were made in response to Mr. Boehmer's comments.

Mr. Velleco said that the last time he was before the Board, he explained significant changes that were made to the plans for 680 Worcester Street with new elevations and floor plans. He said that neighbors and the Board asked for additional graphics to show height comparisons between the existing adjacent single family homes and the proposed building. He displayed an aerial photograph of the 680 Worcester Street area. He said that the houses are approximately 28 to 30 feet high from the sidewalk elevation. He said that the garage level of the proposed structure will be three feet lower, so there will be 24 feet of building showing.

Mr. Velleco discussed the mass of the proposed building at 680 Worcester Street. He said that massing of the building was stepped in response to Mr. Boehmer's comments.

Mr. Velleco discussed height comparisons between the proposed structure at 16 Stearns Road and houses in close proximity. He discussed the elevation of the neighboring homes. He said that the proposed structure will be 14 higher but a long way away. He said that they will lower the land at the site so that it will be accessible for cars. He said that because it will be lower than the neighbor's site, there will be a retaining wall with a fence.

Mr. Velleco displayed views of the 680 Worcester Street project from the west and the rear of the building from Stearns Road. Mr. Becker said that a lot of the trees in the google photograph are no longer there. He said that he would like to see the west elevation including the retaining wall. He said that he was not sure if the elevation drawing showing the retaining wall was an accurate representation. Mr. Engler said that the garage and the retaining wall be deep in the site, so they will not be seen from the west. Mr. Becker said that his concern is that there will be a building above grade and a faux stone wall below that, the blocks of which are quite large. He said that will have an impact on the architecture because it will take away from what is up above. Mr. Engler said that there can be ivy or other elements on a retaining wall for visual interest. Mr. Redgate said that the sense of the existing site driving from the west with the retaining wall blocks on it jumps out as being higher. Mr. Engler said that the plans have been engineered and the Applicant is confident that this is the best orientation and grading. Mr. Bergeron described the design of the retaining wall. Mr. Becker said that his preference is to see something that looks softer than a stone wall. Mr. Velleco said that there are options for different textures of the stone wall and vegetation. He said that the difference in grade occurs approximately 30 feet back from the road and you should only be able to see the guard rail coming from the west.

Mr. Boehmer said that the letter that he wrote in February was based on drawings from July. He said that most of the issues about the massing of the building at 680 Worcester Street have been addressed. He said a list in his letter of exhibits that are normal for design and construction are still outstanding. He said that, in addition to issues with massing, he was concerned about part of the building sitting on an easement and an exterior deck that was close to the neighbor on Stearns Road. He said that his focus is the impact on the neighbors. He said that the plans that were submitted at the end of January seem to address most of his concerns.

Mr. Boehmer said that it will be important to see plans about the retaining wall. He said that the wall does need to be there to make the site work. He said that moving the building further to the east would create issues with the neighbor. He said that there could be softening of the look of the wall through landscaping. He said that there is a broader plantable area northwest of site before the curb cut.

Mr. Boehmer discussed the lack of windows on the tower at the western side of the building. Mr. Engler said that will be addressed.

Mr. Boehmer said that moving the public space to the northwest corner was a good idea because it will have no impact on neighbors and adds visual interest on the top floor.

Mr. Boehmer said that the building would benefit with more of a setback from the street. Mr. Engler said that this is now seven months into the hearing process and the engineering and location of the building have gone through meticulous review.

Mr. Boehmer said that, given that the site is on Route 9, there is a variety of buildings, some of which are tall. He said that he did not have an issue with the height on the west side. He said that the top floor needs more work, maybe a minor setback on the eastern end of the building, change in glazing or stronger banding. He said that the change in color and materials and screening of parking works. –

Mr. Boehmer said that Route 9 is a wide road and is more accommodating of styles of architecture.

Mr. Levy asked Mr. Boehmer if he had any remaining concerns or comments. Mr. Engler discussed having Mr. Boehmer review the plans for architectural details once they are more advanced. He said that the plans that are before the Board are not and do not need to be construction level plans.

Mr. Becker said that the Board needs to understand the push points so that they can be considered when writing conditions.

Mr. Redgate said that the project started out with a four story rectangular building that has been changed to a stepping effect with a new floor. He asked Mr. Boehmer if that is architecturally acceptable versus a way to maintain the density or number of units. Mr. Boehmer said that he did not have an issue with the west end being taller than the east end because of where it sits, the width of the road, and it being on the far end of the building with less impact on the neighbors to the east. He said that he did not have an issue with the massing of the building.

Mr. Levy asked if there are any other tall buildings on the inbound side of Route 9. Mr. Engler said that there is a condominium building up on a hill. Mr. Becker said that was an existing nursing home that was converted into condominiums under a Chapter 40B project. He said that there may be some taller buildings in the Wellesley Office Park.

Ms. Barrett asked Mr. Boehmer to comment on the face of the building from Stearns Road. Mr. Boehmer said that it appears to be simple clapboards and does not have the level of detail as the north face. He said that it probably would benefit with more detail around the windows. He said that he did not have an issue with the massing. He said that it will benefit from more landscape. He suggested adding some smaller scale elements to break the horizontal lines. Ms. Barrett said that her concern is that the building has two public faces, one facing Route 9 and the other facing the neighborhood. Mr. Boehmer said that the elevation facing the neighborhood could use further study. Mr. Levy asked Mr. Boehmer if he thought that any changes could be handled with conditions. Mr. Boehmer said that he was open to the ongoing review that Mr. Engler suggested.

Mr. Boehmer said that it should be insured that the mechanical equipment is adequately screened. Mr. Heep said that the Board can insert a condition to require that.

Mr. Levy asked Mr. Boehmer if he was concerned that this might be the tallest building on Route. Mr. Boehmer said that there is a large commercial building to the west. He said that this is a transitional site.

Mr. Boehmer discussed the 16 Stearns Road project. He discussed the step down from the immediate neighbor, breaking up the massing with conventional forms that are consistent with the neighborhood, and placement of the L shaped building moving the massing as far away from neighbors as possible for a building this size. He said that it fits quite well. He said that there was an issue with the previous plans regarding the entrance to the parking garage but that was addressed and did not have a big architectural impact. He discussed headlight impact on the neighbors, grade change, and lack of broad strip of planting. Mr. Engler said that there will be a six foot fence on top of the wall.

Mr. Boehmer discussed the perspective view from the ball field and significant change in character from the Stearns Road side to the park side. He said that the uphill side was scaled with gables and elements to fit in with the neighborhood but you could not do that on the downhill back side. He said that the back side has some bays with gables, protruding decks, and banding but the drawings do not reflect that depth of the

building. He said that he was not concerned that it will be a two faced building or with the scale of the building. He said that varying the color scheme could help to emphasize what is already there.

Mr. Boehmer discussed impact to the neighborhood and change of Stearns Road. He said that there are eight existing homes on the street and this will be 24 units, which is three times the density of the street at the end of the street. He said that Stearns Road could benefit from improvements to the street itself. He discussed the possibility of further studies to address Stearns Road in the future. He talked about shared street environments. Mr. Engler said that there was exhaustive study done by traffic engineers and the neighbors have made it clear that they do not want changes to Stearns Road. Mr. Becker said that there will be pedestrians and vehicular traffic on a street that did not anticipate this volume. He said that the street will change if the building is in place. Ms. Barrett discussed concerns about accommodating multiple users of the street and public space.

Mr. Becker asked about the drainage on the ground floor of 680 Worcester Street. He said that there is a split system and the drainage under the building goes to floor drains and the sanitary sewer system and rainwater that falls outside of the building goes to two recharge basins, as well as the roof.

Mr. Becker discussed parking ratios. He said that there were six spaces counted for each of the stackers with no empty space. Mr. Bergeron discussed assigning spaces on the stackers and how the stacker system will function.

Mr. Becker said that the Stearns Road side of building at 680 Worcester Street will be very open where cars can park over the drainage system and there is nothing to block headlights to Stearns Road. Mr. Engler said that the Applicant would be comfortable with a condition to address that.

Mr. Becker asked about access to the property manager. Mr. Engler said that the property will be too small to have on-site maintenance but there will be 24/7 call system.

Pete Buhler, 10 Stearns Road, said that he disagrees with Mr. Boehmer's assessment that the proposed architecture fits in well with the neighborhood. He said that the proposed structure looks nothing like the houses around it that were built in the 1930's. He said that massing is the biggest issue for both of the projects. He said that there will be a lot of impervious cover going downward into wetlands. He said that the proposed structure at 680 Worcester Street will be the tallest building and lacks the frontage of other buildings on Route 9. He discussed putting up a wall between 16 and 10 Stearns Road will change the dynamic of the open air at the front of the home. He said that the neighbors do not wish for any change to the neighborhood. He said that they are in favor of having affordable housing in the neighborhood but want it to be done safely. He discussed current safety issues with no sidewalks on Stearns Road. He discussed stormwater going into the wetlands, radon mitigation, results of the Shadow Study, and more clarity on construction of the retaining wall.

Scott Fraser, 4 Stearns Road, said that he appreciated Mr. Boehmer's comments about turning Stearns Road into the driveway for the project and Ms. Barrett's comments about the quality of the public space. He said that the Applicant seems to be driving a major change to the public space with consultation with the neighbors. He said that a lot of effort has been made to mitigate the problems with the sites but scale has not been discussed. He said that it does not have to be as big as it is proposed to be and reducing the size would eliminate or reduce associated problems. He questioned whether the projects need to be that big to make a reasonable profit.

Mr. Buhler said that they did have a meeting with Mr. Engler and his client during the eligibility process because they were denied eligibility for both of the properties the first time around. He said that they complained about the lack of interaction with the neighborhood and Mr. Engler and his client were told that they would not get site eligibility for the two projects unless he had a meeting with the neighbors, which did take place. He said that he later met with Mr. Derenzo for a brief conversation.

Mr. Buhler said that Stearns Road goes from 24 feet down to 21 feet wide. He said that the neighbors looked at the kind of truck that would be needed to remove bedrock and they are at least 10 feet wide. He said that they would have to stop on Route 9 for one to get out and one to get in. He encouraged the Board members to come back to the neighborhood and drive the streets. He said that 25 trucks will be removing 350,000 + cubic feet of earth.

Mr. Levy said that the Board always encourages applicants to speak with the neighbors. He said that all of the Board's interactions with the developer have been in a public forum which the public has been a part of.

Vincent Starck, 6 Stearns Road, displayed the rendering of the building as seen from Route 9, heading west. He said that there is one floor that should not be there. He said that it would not look as awkward and out of place as it does in the rendering. He said that he appreciated the work that was done to stage the floors but without the floor the building would be more in line with other buildings in the vicinity. He said that the rendering of the view of the building from the west on Route 9 was taken from above, not at street level. He discussed the façades of the building at 680 Worcester Street and their orientation. He said that if this building is supposed to integrate into the neighborhood, the focus should be on the side that faces the neighborhood, not the side that faces a four lane highway.

Mr. Starck discussed the height difference between the house on Stearns Road and the new building at 16 Stearns. He asked about reducing the height of the building by building it at street level. Mr. Bergeron said that it would be in the water table, there would be more blasting, stormwater management may not work, the garage floor would not work, and would not work with sewer because the garage drains have to go to the sewer.

Mr. Starck asked if a road from Route 9 to the new building has been considered. He said that it could alleviate a lot of the concerns about traffic on Route 9.

Brian Nichols, 676 Worcester Street, asked for confirmation of who owns a parcel of land shown on the aerial photograph.

Mr. Heep discussed the two letters that were submitted today by DPW Engineering for the two projects. Mr. Engler said that some DPW's comments discuss issues that have already been addressed. He discussed the status of the items listed in the DPW letters.

Mr. Becker asked about the controlling factor for width and location of the S curve as it goes into the building. Mr. Bergeron said that it was kept at 20 feet to allow for more landscaping. He said that they have shown VHB that an SU40 vehicle can maneuver the space. He said that Mr. Nagy reviewed it as well.

Mr. Bergeron addressed a DPW about looping the water main. He said that Fire Flow tests show that they do not need to do that. Mr. Engler said that the test was submitted for the record. Mr. Heep said that DPW was continuing to request that the water main be extended to the end of Stearns Road for future looping through the Sprague School parking lot. Mr. Bergeron said that there is no benefit to putting in 100 feet of

water main in a dead end road. Mr. Redgate asked that the Applicant respond to the requests in writing so that the Board can see which things the Applicant is willing to do or not.

Mr. Engler read the DPW comments for 680 Worcester Street.

Mr. Bergeron responded to the DPW comment about the foundation, saying that the Applicant will make sure that the footings will be outside of the easement. He said that neither of the projects will be in the groundwater. He discussed capacity for sewer main and peak flow. He said that they offered to do televising, sealing and getting better access. He said that easement access is from Francis Road. Mr. Becker said that the plans show tapping into the line at a place that is closer to eastern lot line than the current end of the pipe. He asked if there has been an agree with DPW about what happens with the piece of pipe that will be abandoned. Mr. Bergeron said that he spoke with DPW and they do not have a problem with removing the pieces to get closer to the lot line to get it further away from the building footprint. He said that the issue was the procedure that the Applicant would have to go through if he wanted to abandon the easement, which is not what is currently proposed. He said that DPW believes that it is asbestos cement pipe and there are construction conditions that have to be met.

Mr. Redgate said that the DPW letter talked about the municipal standard of 8 inch PVC sewer line. Mr. Bergeron said that is the standard if it is new construction. Mr. Redgate said that because of the use of the building as a commercial property, it would fall into a higher standard. Mr. Bergeron said that there is probably a couple of miles of 6 inch sewer line in the town. He said that there is not a program to replace them. He said that it is not a capacity issue. He said that disruption to backyards in a 20 foot tight easement with tree growth is not a preference.

Mr. Bergeron said that there are no wetlands on or adjacent to the site. He said that they will not be seeking any waivers under the local bylaw.

Ms. Barrett asked if the Board has enough information to act on the waivers. She said that waivers are typically reviewed at a public meeting. Mr. Engler said that it was the Applicant's intent was to close the public hearing tonight. He discussed scheduling another public hearing to respond to engineering comments, provide more information on the retaining wall and discuss waivers.

Mr. Levy asked that the Applicant submit the latest list of waivers.

Mr. Redgate said that he would like to see conclusions from the Town's three peer reviewers. He said that it would be helpful for the Board to know what the Applicant is agreeing to do, what he is not agreeing to do, and why.

Mr. Becker discussed holding a working session before the next hearing.

Ms. Barrett said that consideration of design and its relation to public use of space is important and is a valid discussion for Chapter 40B projects.

Mr. Engler said that the hearing would be extended to April 23, 2019.

Mr. Redgate moved, Mr. Becker seconded the motion, and the Board voted unanimously to continue the hearing to April 23, 2019.

As there was no further business to come before the Board, the hearing was adjourned at 10:12 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Lenore R. Mahoney
Executive Secretary

DRAFT