

Draft Minutes

Middlesex Planning Commission

Public Hearings for:

Permit #20-01 (Planetary Matters, Inc. – Site Plan Review for a new commercial building)

Permit #20-19 (Planetary Matters, Inc. – Site Plan Review for a proposed restaurant/pub)

Permit #20-20 (C. Ellison & T. Lannes – request change in conditions granted for PRD, Permit #19-06)

Wednesday, June 24, 2020

6:30 PM

Due to restrictions on public gatherings as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, these hearings were held remotely via the town's Zoom account and telephone.

All site visits were waived.

Planning Commission Members Present

Sandy Levine

Elias Gardner

Theo Kennedy

Mitch Osiecki

(Dick Alderman – Absent)

Guests:

Mike Pelchar (resident & PMI applicant)

Paul Stafford (PMI)

Russ Bennett (PMI)

Casey Ellison (applicant)

Twylla Lannes (applicant)

Alison Cornwall (PMI abutter)

Michael Levine (resident)

David & Holly Pembroke (PMI abutters)

Lisa Parrish & Peter Brown (PMI abutters)

CTO at 6:30

Planning Commission members and guests were introduced.

First Hearing: Permit #20-20.

Applicants Casey Ellison and Twylla Lannes were sworn in by chair Sandy Levine.

No abutting landowners were present. No one in attendance requested party status (for purposes of offering testimony or asking questions of applicants).

Presentation: Casey Ellison explained that original size of cabins approved in 2019 turn out to be a little too small, owing to them property being off-grid. Clarified that while only one cabin is being proposed for construction at this time, they would like to ask for modification for both cabins at this time, to spare time and expense of an additional hearing later. No objections.

They would like to amend application to allow two cabins, each up to 1500 square feet. The cabin being proposed at this time is 1 ½ stories.

Theo asked for clarification of the document Mitch shared with members today (plans for proposed cabin 1).

Casey confirmed that septic permit has been issued, but has not been circulated to members of the PC.

Also confirmed that ANR has signed off that project has no impact on wetlands.

Sandy would like to review permits. Mitch has copies and will distribute to members shortly.

Motion: Theo moved to approve modification of conditions to allow cabins up to 1500 square feet, contingent on satisfactory review of wastewater permit. Elias seconded.

Casey explained that current septic design is over-engineered for current dwelling. They have received a certification letter stating that new proposal for cabins will not exceed capacity of current system.

Mitch stated that, based on conversations with Carl Fuller, ANR's regional wastewater systems specialist, size of cabins (in area) does not affect rated capacity of WW system. WW capacity is determined by the number of bedrooms, and the requested modification of permit doesn't change the number of bedrooms.

Theo, Elias, Sandy and Mitch voted in favor. Dick absent. **Motion carried 4-0-1.**

Second Hearing: Permit #20-01.

Russ Bennett, Paul Stafford and Mike Pelchar were confirmed as applicants.

Sandy asked if any guests present wished to request party status to offer testimony or ask questions of applicants. Alison Cornwall and David & Holly Pembroke, all abutting landowners, requested party status. Lisa Parrish & Peter Brown are not abutters, but are residents with a general interest in the project. Applicants and guests were sworn in.

Presentation by Russ Bennett: Russ explained that PMI is in discussions with a group of farmers seeking to develop a retail facility. The group they are working with is an organization similar to Red Hen, in that they pay their staff a livable wage and philosophically aligned with other Camp Meade tenants.

The operation they are discussing would include a visible packaging operation, as well as an education and outreach component. The lower floor (described as an above grade basement) would include an aging room open to public view. Upper floors might include meeting spaces, possibly additional offices. Use of top floor is unspecified at this time. A restaurant might eventually be a possibility.

Location of the proposed structure was described SW corner of campus, near the site of an old cabin that burned a couple of years ago. Access for commercial traffic would be via the abutting "White House" property, away from the campus green.

Alison Cornwall asked if she could get a copy of the plans. Russ will share those.

Russ explained that they are considering two variations in design. He said that the design they prefer as more aesthetically pleasing exceeds the typical height restriction of 35 feet. Mitch mentioned that Middlesex Zoning regulation allows the 35 foot height limit to be exceeded in certain situations. It would be appropriate for the Zoning Board of Adjustment to review the height issue during their Conditional Use review of this project.

Question from Alison Cornwall: Where will septic system be sited?

Answer: Current plans is to use the campus green as the leach field. This project will be undergoing Act 250 review, at which time this issue will be addressed. Russ stated that current septic usage is at less than half of capacity. They do not believe the proposed project will require additional capacity beyond current system.

Sandy asked for a brief review of specific requirements listed under section 5.5 of zoning regulations, specific to site plan review:

Site features: As described in presentation.

Access: As described in presentation.

Circulation: As described in presentation.

Parking, Loading, Service & Outdoor Storage: **Notes don't address response. Will review audio.**

Layout & Site Design: As described in presentation.

Landscaping & Screening: Expect trimming of some existing trees, but not planning extensive clearing beyond that required to construct the building.

Storm Water Management & Erosion Control: Site consists of deep deposits of sandy soil, so storm water generally soaks right into the ground. Planning minimal impervious ground cover, so don't anticipate any issues with runoff.

Lighting: Minimal outdoor lighting anticipated, all lighting will be downcast. Owners don't wish to increase light pollution.

Signage: Plan to address specifics of signage at a later date, but intent is to keep signage minimal. Philosophically, owners don't believe large individual signs are needed or even desirable. They believe the best way to attract customers is by the having high quality and interesting tenants.

Zoning District Standards – setbacks? Owners have already done a boundary line adjustment with neighboring "White House" property in order to create a larger buffer from property boundaries. On all other sides of property, they have plenty of space to satisfy setbacks.

Setback from waterway is 75 feet, which property complies with.

Comment from Alison Cornwall: Would like assurance that a large building won't be visible from her property.

Response from Russ: Will be happy to review proposed siting of structure with neighbors. There are currently plenty of trees taller than the height of the proposed structure, most of which will remain.

Paul Stafford added that the octagonal shape of the proposed building was chosen in order to softly blend into the environment; this shape is intended to create a receding sight line.

No other questions from abutters.

No additional questions at this time from PC members.

Motion: Theo moved to adjourn to July 1 at 7:00 to consider a decision; Elias seconded. Theo, Mitch, Elias and Sandy voted in favor; Dick absent. **Motion carried 4-0-1.**

Third Hearing: Permit #20-19.

Theo commented that due to another commitment, he will have to exit the hearing at 8:00. Planning Commission will still have a quorum, so no issue.

As with previous hearing, Russ Bennett, Paul Stafford and Mike Pelchar are applicants.

Also as before, Alison Cornwall, Holly & Dave Pembroke, Lisa Parrish & Peter Brown granted Party Status.

Applicants and guests are still under oath.

Presentation: Russ Bennet, presenting on behalf of applicants, explained that permit proposes to site a restaurant/pub across the road from the Camp Meade/Red Hen location. The existing building was until recently the home of Sally's Second Act, a consignment shop that has found a new location in Stowe. The building is aging, but is still usable. The Planetary Matters team had been considering trying to source a Pullman Train Car for the location, which they would fashion into a restaurant/pub. This would tie into their longer-term vision of eventually locating a commuter rail train stop at this site.

They've decided instead to retrofit existing structure for this purpose. The proposed use will require a new septic system, but the existing structure still has a usable lifespan of at least 4-5 years.

One minor change to plans submitted with this permit application: they will likely add a small outdoor walk-in cooler (near where the dumpster is shown on the plan).

Russ offered that lighting will be redesigned from what is currently there, again with plans to use minimal, downcast lighting.

Comment from Dave Pembroke: He has concerns about whether project will draw increased traffic. Some of the larger events held at Camp Meade in recent years have resulted in significant foot traffic, including across residential properties along Route 2.

Holly Pembroke echoed concerns about foot traffic. Stated she loves growth in the village, but remains concerned about people walking along highway and on lawns of properties along the highway.

Russ reiterated that this will be a small pub and their expectation is that the site will have ample parking for the traffic it will generate.

Russ also mentioned that the COVID-19 pandemic has really changed how business is done at the campus. The owners are turning their focus away from large gatherings and toward a model of more frequent, but smaller gatherings.

Holly Pembroke also expressed concern about the speed of automobile traffic in the village.

Russ agreed that this is a concern he shares. He proposes that the Select Board be approached about the possibility of lowering the speed limit in the village. Russ also wants to introduce various “traffic calming” measures to help control speed.

Sandy commented that, while speed and traffic are concerns worth addressing, they are outside the scope of what can be addressed by this Site Plan Review.

Russ suggested that the PC could impose conditions requiring Planetary Matters to incorporate traffic calming measures.

Question from Peter Brown: Since site was formerly a gas station, is any remediation of the site needed? Is it considered a brown site?

Response: Owners have done some remediation and have begun researching whether other action is needed. There are no obvious problems evident, except one contaminant (not fuel) which doesn't currently meet standards for a residential structure.

Question: Are there any issues with setbacks?

Response: No, property has plenty of room and existing structure exceeds all setback requirements.

Sandy proposed also adjourning this hearing to July 1, at which time the PC may entertain imposition of conditions such as screening and traffic calming measures.

Motion: Elias moved to adjourn discussion to July 1 at 7:30 pm; Mitch seconded. Elias, Sandy and Mitch voted in favor. Motion carried 3-0-2 (Dick and Theo absent).

Meeting adjourned at 8:06 pm.