

Methuen Historic District Commission
January 8, 2009 at 7:00 P.M.
Great Hall – Searles Building
41 Pleasant Street
Methuen, MA 01844

MEETING MINUTES

1. Call to Order of Regular Meeting

Chairman Dufresne called the meeting to order at 7:05 PM.

2. Roll Call

Raymond Dufresne, Chair	Present	Joseph Fisichelli	Present
Joseph Bella	Present	Christine Metzemaekers	Present
Peter Cameron	Present	Katherine Robinson, Alternate	Present
Robert Fabino	Present		

Others in Attendance

Alene Reich, Historic Planner, City of Methuen	Richard Guselli, Guselli Agency
Steven Jenkins, Family Dollar	Steven Fisichelli, Methuen

3. Acknowledgement

Chairperson Dufresne acknowledged the dedicated service of retired Commissioner Martha Welch.

4. Acceptance of September 25, 2008 Minutes

MOTION to accept the minutes of the September 25, 2008 meeting. Seconded.

UNANIMOUS VOTE.

5. New Business

Public Hearing: Richard Guselli

260 Broadway: installation of sign

Applicant presented plans for new signage. Chairperson Dufresne requested discussion of materials and colors. Applicant described the sign, which will be constructed of high-density sign foam and painted to match the building.

There was no public comment for or against the application.

Commissioner Fabino questioned the “roof” element of the sign. Applicant clarified that it will be painted or shingled as a roof. Chairperson Dufresne questioned colors. Applicant explained that paint colors would match the building.

MOTION by Commissioner Fabino to approve the application as submitted. Second by Commissioner Metzemaekers.

UNANIMOUS VOTE.

Commissioner Fisichelli asked to be recused from discussion of the remaining applications.

6. Public Hearing: Allen Industries, Family Dollar. Represented by Steven Jenkins, Family Dollar. 246 Broadway: signage

Applicant presented basis for the sign project, a new retail use at 246 Broadway, and discussed the sign and lighting. Applicant provided color samples and a 1” foam sample (2” foam to be used for sign) in addition to drawings previously received.

Commissioner Fabino asked for explanation of the lighting.

Chairperson Dufresne provided an update to new commissioners about prior decision on this property: previous approval of demolition at 248 Broadway had depended on development of both 246 and 248 Broadway. Suggested that discussion of this fact wait until all projects at these two properties had been discussed. (*Next two applications dealt with the properties at 246 and 248 Broadway*).

Commissioner Fisichelli asked to re-enter hearing and speak. Confirmed that his intention remains to create a “village” atmosphere at 246 and 248 Broadway. At this point, focus is on consistency in signage as changes are made at 246 Broadway and 248 Broadway is built. Commissioner Fisichelli reported that development of two properties must remain separate as per the building department.

Chairperson Dufresne asked Commissioner Fisichelli to explain plans for renovation at 246 Broadway.

Commissioner Fisichelli described plans for new signage, paving, landscaping. Façade improvements for 246 Broadway must wait until funding is available and new design concept is developed. Chairperson Dufresne and Commissioner Fisichelli discussed current project’s ability to fit future development plans.

Chairperson Dufresne suggested that vote on signage at 246 Broadway be held until the time designated on the agenda.

Commissioner Fisichelli asked for clarification of advertised times for public hearings.

Alene Reich confirmed that the public hearing was advertised for 7 pm and abutters were sent the agenda with specific times listed.

Chairperson Dufresne and Reich proposed skipping ahead to “Other Business” until the meeting was on schedule.

7. Other Business

Commissioner Metzemaekers asked about new or continuing violations. Commissioner Fisichelli confirmed that Greener Cleaners and Nick's Family Pizza have both complied with signage rules.

Chairperson Dufresne asked about the antennae at the Central Fire Station. Alene Reich expressed that her impression was that it was an issue of public safety, but since it was installed before she began in the position in October, she would follow up to confirm.

Commissioner Fabino remarked that the Vintage Rose has moved locations and moved its approved sign with the business.

Commissioner Fisichelli suggested that a disclaimer be added to future agendas that the times listed are suggested and that votes will not be held until the time listed. Reich to add disclaimer on future agendas.

Resumed # 6. Public Hearing: Allen Industries, Family Dollar. Represented by Steven Jenkins, Family Dollar. 246 Broadway: signage

Hearing resumed. Chairperson Dufresne invited public participation. There was no public comment for or against the application.

Commissioner Metzemaekers questioned lighting options, suggested gooseneck lamps. Applicant responded that the space available does not lend itself to gooseneck lamps. Applicant spoke to strengths of florescent lighting. Chairperson Dufresne suggested uplighting to mask the tubes. Applicant cited safety benefits of downlighting, also discussed that the lights would be turned off shortly after closing, explained that company is sensitive to energy conservation and light pollution.

Commissioner Fabino asked about the color of the light housing. Applicant replied that housing will be painted red.

Chairperson Dufresne asked about alternate Historic District colors, citing Cambridge and Somerville stores as examples. Commissioner Metzemaekers agreed that the colors are very bright. Chairperson Dufresne asked if applicant would be amenable to darker colors.

Applicant explained that Family Dollar is going through a rebranding and that the Cambridge and Somerville stores do not reflect the new image. Applicant explained that he if not in a position to offer darker colors, believes that they had followed the guidelines and need to stay within their timeframe to open.

Commissioner Fisichelli spoke in support of the applicant as a landlord. Asked that the commission not expect the company to compromise their corporate logo and image. Encouraged commission to support the new business in town.

Chairperson Dufresne suggested a matte finish for the sign. Commissioner Metzemaekers agreed. Applicants and commission were pleased with compromise.

There was no public comment for or against the application.

MOTION by Commissioner Fabino to approve on the condition that the sign be constructed of 2” foam; the lighting, with a red housing, would be above the sign; the colors would be as presented; and that the sign would have a matte finish.

Chairperson Dufresne invited Commissioner Fisichelli to add ideas, as the property owner. Commissioner Fisichelli stated preference for downlighting, and red housing for lighting. Second by Commissioner Bella.

UNANIMOUS VOTE.

8. Public Hearing: Joseph Fisichelli on behalf of Janice Fisichelli

246 Broadway: signage

Applicant presented an overview of the project: the renovated directory sign will create consistency, include the name “Mid-Town Mall”, and clearly identify the address. Changes to include enclosing the existing directory sign in white material, adding a visible “ATM” sign, and changing the lighting to ground level uplighting. Tenants have agreed to give up grandfathered, back-lit lighting in favor of the updated signage.

Commissioners Metzemaekers and Bella questioned the colors and discrepancy between drawings and presentation. Applicant clarified that the present signs would be cleaned and reused where possible and that new signs would be replicas of old signs, though not designed to be back-lit.

Chairperson Dufresne proposed that as a new sign, the commission had a right to review all signs. Applicant responded that the application is for the rehousing of the signage and that the individual signs are not part of the review. Applicant emphasized that elimination of backlighting was a benefit besides the upgrading of the signage housing.

Commissioner Metzemaekers lamented that the drawings showed design changes that were not planned for the application at hand. Questioned possibility of design changes. Applicant will confer with business owners about possibility. Chairperson Dufresne suggested green or black as possible colors for the top of the sign.

Commissioner Fabino complimented the project and the improvement to the area.

There was no public comment for or against the application.

MOTION by Commissioner Bella to approve the application with the understanding that the sign housing would be a white Aztec or similar material, that the plaza name and address be added, and that the backlighting would be eliminated in favor of uplighting. The commission recommended black and green as preferred colors.

Chairperson Dufresne gave the opportunity for further discussion. Commissioner Fabino asked applicant about timing for the project, to which the applicant responded that it should be completed in no more than 60 days. Second by Commissioner Fabino.

UNANIMOUS VOTE.

9. Public Hearing: Joseph Fisichelli

248 Broadway: new construction

Applicant reviewed background of the property and previous approvals, including the plans for a “family village” at the properties at 246 and 248 Broadway. With a new design for 248 Broadway and a Dairy Queen franchise approved, the project will move forward for construction in the spring.

Project architect Ron Laffey presented the site plan, floor plan, and elevations of the proposed building.

Chairperson Dufresne questioned the materials for the entrance roofs and the colors for the building. Laffey responded that the roofing material for the barrel vaults would be copper. The applicant approached the commission with a selection of paint swatches and indicated that he would return to the commission to review the palette and materials.

Commissioner Robinson asked if the signage would come under review at a later time. Applicant stated that the Dairy Queen menu board is standard issue from the company but will not be back-lit.

Commissioner Robinson asked about the stonewall planned for the landscaping. The applicant explained that ideally the wall would be constructed of the granite from the foundation of the house that was previously on the site. Laffey included that stamped concrete would be used instead of individual pavers for the patio.

There was no public comment for or against the application.

Chairperson Dufresne praised the design and its addition to the downtown area. Commissioner Robinson added that the building is attractive in the context and that she still has questions about materials and finishes, as well as the dumpster enclosure.

The applicant pointed out a proposed fence between 248 and 250 Broadway that will help to mask the dumpster. Laffey added that the dumpster will be covered, screened, and gated for maximum safety and aesthetics.

Commissioner Robinson voiced concern about the fact that plans for 246 Broadway were not also up for review. Asked if the applicant would revisit the plan.

Laffey explained that the new building at 248 is superior to the previous design, in which 246 and 248 were compatibly redesigned. Since the massing of the proposed building and the existing building at 246 Broadway are so different, 246 Broadway would need to be considered individually. Laffey also cited the need for more time to review the appropriate plan for the plaza.

The applicant stated that he is working on cost-effective projects for the plaza at 246 Broadway as gradual improvements that will be part of a long-term plan. The applicant proposed bringing all materials to the commission over time.

MOTION by Commissioner Robinson to approve the application in terms of its overall design, stipulated that details for materials and finishes come before the commission for review, including but not limited to: clapboards, windows, doors, stonewall, shingles, exterior lighting, dumpster, enclosure, and colors. Second by Commissioner Metzemaekers.

UNANIMOUS VOTE.

Meeting Adjourned at 8:30 PM.

Respectfully submitted,
Alene Reich