



BELLINGHAM PLANNING BOARD

10 MECHANIC STREET BELLINGHAM, MASSACHUSETTS 02019

MEETING MINUTES Thursday, October 13, 2022, at 7:00 pm Bellingham Municipal Center Arcand Meeting Room and Via Zoom

MEMBERS PRESENT:

William F. O'Connell, Jr.	Chairman
Brian T. Salisbury	Vice Chairman
Dennis J. Trebino	Member
Philip M. Devine	Member
Nick Mobilia	Member
Robert Lussier	Alternate Member

ADDITIONAL OFFICIALS PRESENT:

James S. Kupfer, Town Planner – via Zoom
Amy Sutherland, Assistant Town Planner
Tina M. Griffin, Recording Secretary – via Zoom

Mr. O'Connell called the meeting to order at 7:00 pm

WS DEVELOPMENT – HARTFORD AVENUE – WAREHOUSE

Mr. Salisbury opened the meeting and read the application to all present.

The applicant, WS Bellingham IV Associates LLC, and owner, Bellingham N. Main Street II LLC, Hartford Ave. Associates LTD, WS Bellingham IV Associates LLC, & Varney Bros Sand & Gravel propose to construct a 700,000 sf industrial building for warehouse and distribution use with associated improvements on approximately 175.6 +/- acres of land in Bellingham, shown on Assessor's Map 24 Lot 12 and 10, Map 30 Lot 73-1, and Map 31 Lot 3, zoned Industrial. This application falls under the Zoning By-Laws §240-16, Development Plan Approval, §240-54, Stormwater Management, §240-138, Water Resource District Special Permit, §240-60, Flexible Parking Options Special Permit and §240-119, Major Business Complex Special Permit. The plans were prepared by Bohler Engineering.

Mr. O'Connell stated that this is the very first meeting for this item. This will be an overview tonight but is going to be a long process.

Mr. Trebino made a motion to open the Public Hearing. Seconded by Mr. Salisbury. Motion accepted and a Roll Call Vote was made, as follows:

Roll Call Vote:

William F. O'Connell, Jr.	aye
Dennis J. Trebino	aye
Philip M. Devine	aye
Nick Mobilia	aye
Brian T. Salisbury	aye
Robert Lussier	aye

Motion passes unanimously

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Applicant, Jeffrey Curley from WS Development, introduced himself and the team he has been working with for this project. WS Development already operates 3 Shopping Centers that exist in the area of this proposed project. The Stallbrook Shopping Center, Charles River Center, and the Crossroads Shopping Center, which is the Home Depot Plaza and where the proposed project is being incorporated into.

A few years back, WS Development had purchased the land to build a fourth shopping center, which would have been behind Home Depot. That project started in the local permitting process, at the State level. Then it fell into some hard times and took a turn downward into 2010 and 2011. We have emerged back from that and have worked with the State on traffic solutions that will be needed for future development there. We continued to keep in contact with the Town staff and brought forward a scope of roadway improvements through the 126 corridor.

This project will present as the economic development component and jointly on the Town's behalf prepared, a design for the roadway improvements are partnered with the Town to submit to the State for a MassWorks Grant that's pending before the State, to pursue some of the funding for the roadway improvements. This project is no longer being proposed as a Shopping Center, and instead we are focusing towards building a Distribution Warehouse.

The meeting was then turned over to Austin Turner from Bohler Engineering. Mr. Turner said they are the Civil Engineering and Land Development Consultants for this project. I am going to give an overview of the project tonight, just to get their team introduced and answer any questions that anyone has. What we are seeking from the Board throughout this process will be a development plan approval. We do have a special permit for us being a major business complex and also being located in the Water Resources district for the earth we will be moving, as well as the flexible parking permit. We have a couple different waivers we've requested with the Board for different detailed site features within 300' of the property. Another waiver being requested was related to providing curb inlets to every catch basin. We have designed those structures to accommodate the flows that are going there, and we are not expecting surcharging. Some structures are located centrally to parking areas that don't have curbs around them and doesn't make much sense to have a curb outlet, where there are no curbs. Those are the two waivers that we recently submitted to the Board.

Access to this site will be by the way of the existing signalized site driveway at the Crossroads Shopping Center onto Route 126. We will be using that driveway in its current configuration as it's currently striped with the geometric improvements that are existing today. We will be extending that driveway to come into the property, with some minor modifications to the parking arrangement located nearest to where Home Depot has their lumber canopy. We had a discussion with the Conservation Commission last night. The driveway being shown into the property has been designed and engineered to come around into some existing water resource areas, so the geometry being shown is to protect the existing resource areas that are in that location. Having extensive history on this property we have explored it from a stormwater perspective, from a geotechnical perspective, and have extensively relied on that data when putting this design together. We have a comprehensive stormwater management system from a utility perspective. We will also be extending and connecting into the infrastructure that exists in The Crossroads Shopping Center. That includes both water, and sanitary sewer that will be pumped from the project to the existing gravity system at the Crossroads Center. Telecom electric is also going to come down the main driveway and extend off the services that are available at Crossroads.

DPW Director, Don DiMartino has already begun the review process for this. He has been engaging in the development of this project had some very constructive feedback on the application.

From a lighting perspective, we have lights that are going to be shielded off and directional will be LED lighting, which means they are not going to be overly bright. This will provide appropriate lighting levels around the property that will meet all various standards.

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We have also been working very closely with the Town's Conservation Commission. This project proposes some significant dedications of around 40 acres of conservation. We are proposing this to be dedicated to conservation. This is a substantial benefit for the protection of those natural resource areas that are in place and exist today.

Ron Mueller, traffic consultant to the project, addressed the Board with a summary of what is being proposed as far as traffic concerns and the Town's roadway improvement project. One of the first things that became pretty clear is that the existing area in and around the 495 Interchange has some significant capacity and safety issues that need to be fixed before we can even begin to think about adding additional traffic with the development that accesses through the Crossroads Center. We have developed and consulted with Town staff and MassDOT to start a plan that is now before the Board. We have to existing problems first before we even think about adding more traffic to that area. That took a lot of work to be able to come up with this design plan.

Some of the items being proposed are to widen the area along the north side of the road to provide a double left turn lane smoothness. Right now, with the single through lane and a single left turn lane, this makes the movement slow. We are proposing to add another lane of traffic to create a double left front lane because that volume of left turning traffic is extremely heavy today. This will increase traffic flow with all new traffic signal equipment that is state of the art technology. One of the things that MassDOT requires in every project is to accommodate pedestrian and bicycle travel. We are proposing a shared use path along the north side of Hartford Ave that continues within our project limits from North Main Street all the way to the 495 Bridge. When we get to the Crossroads Center, again widening part for easier access into the shopping center. It will also require a little widening of the Crossroads driveway to provide a double left turn lane for turns into the Crossroads Center.

One important aspect is that we are going to relocate the ramps. Right now, you have a double left turn lane coming off the ramp that is only about 150' long and we are proposing to create 400' of double left turn storage capacity, while allowing right turning traffic to get by in a queue that builds up in these lanes. The project right now ends at the bridge; however, the alignment has been created so that we can add on to this project when the 495 bridge gets widened in the future. That is a long term goal, both by the Town and by Mass DOT. That project is not fundable at this point because of the costs associated with it and the fact that the bridge is structurally sound. That alignment would bring traffic back in, to meet the existing full-length cross section going over the bridge and it does so in a way that eliminates that jog that's out there today. That jog that's there now is most likely a contributing factor to some of the accidents that are happening in this area. These traffic improvements will help with future growth and population, as well as the number of development projects that are currently planned, or under construction. What we did to be ultra conservative with the traffic estimates, is we assumed the highest possible land use code for warehouse buildings there.

WS Development does not have a tenant lined up for this project yet, we wanted to make sure that all bases are covered depending on what type of warehouse they're proposing and to test the roadway system to make sure that even under the worst case scenario this project can be accommodated within the improvements that are being proposed.

Mr. O'Connell said he and some of the other members had a chance to look at the plans. We do appreciate the cooperation so far and we look forward to working with you and the State on this. As we go through this, some of the areas we want to work on will be accessing egress to the site for trucks and employee vehicles, etc. We heard you say that you are working with Mr. DiMartino on wastewater, water transmission and stormwater. I assume we can talk about the hours of operation at some point, signage, the need for the 800 parking spots and we will probably work parallel with the Conservation Commission as we go through this.

Also, you mentioned something earlier in the presentation that we might need to address. This is going to be a long-term project. You talked about the interchange between traffic lights which is going to be changed dramatically. Is there anything we can do in the short-term to extend that lag time and hopefully reduce some accidents, It's because people run that red light all the time. I think that's the cause for a lot of the accidents in

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that area. If we can somehow work with the State and our safety officer to see if we can change those lag times, I know the downside will be maybe longer lines. However, it may be safer and reduce accidents.

Mr. Mueller replied that they can try to do something to help with that. The Town controls the North Main Street and Crossroads Center section, as well as the Charles River and Stallbrook Marketplace. The State owns the two 495 sections. In order to make any changes to that system, you have to do it system-wide, because they are all coordinated. State involvement will be made in order to make any changes that may be worth discussing with them, to help prevent accidents and make safer traffic flow.

Mr. Salisbury had some additional traffic questions that he had concerns about. Mr. Mueller responded that these concerns have all been taken into consideration through the years of traffic studies being conducted and they are willing to look into and address concerns or constraints that should come up through the process and to help everything run as smooth as possible.

Mr. Salisbury also had questions about the view of the new building and who's going to be able to see it once it's built. Mr. Turner replied that it is quite a bit away, but as far as heights, we would want to discuss that once we are sure how we can access it, which is still being worked on with the Conservation Commission. You are probably going to see it from Interstate 495, but we are hoping for zero visibility from the North Main Street area. The area we are proposing to build in, is mostly down into a hole.

Some of the public came forward to discuss the trees, birds, and wildlife that have lived in that area for many years and are going to be disrupted and displaced. Mr. Turner advised everyone that this is more of a Conservation Commission matter and not Planning Board, but they have been working very closely with Conservation and will be doing a site walkthrough within the next few weeks to oversee these areas and find out restrictions that can't be disrupted in order to protect these areas and wildlife in that area.

The public also expressed more concern with the traffic lanes and most likely having 18-wheelers in and out with such a large warehouse and how traffic is going to be worse in that area. Mr. Mueller went into more detail on the access road for these vehicles, how they will get on and off of Interstate 495 and referred back to the traffic study that was previously discussed, regarding the extra turn lane and longer off ramp at Interstate 495, instead of the one that is currently only 150'. Trucks will know that they are going to or from a warehouse and will have to remain in the one lane, so they are not increasing traffic, due to the extra lane that just the trucks will need to use for this warehouse. We are working to make the lane overpass a little easier for both drivers and residents along that corridor.

Kirsten Brown, that is Mr. Turner's associate said she has heard the comments from the Board and from the audience. They are going to draft some minutes of the items discussed and will look more creatively about trying to get a dedicated Lane into decipher the truck traffic only and try to somehow deal with employee traffic to facilitate it off-site as easily as possible. Perhaps a dedicated egress access to the warehouse for employees that comes somewhat into the property, other than the Crossroads Center, so that we are not putting traffic back onto the parking lot and allowing them to get out as easily as possible.

Mr. Devine said that in terms of options, I think the next step is establishing a peer review engineer to evaluate traffic and stormwater. Then through the traffic review we can have our Engineers get their design and maybe offer some comments based on the concerns and comments that have come up tonight.

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With no other questions being asked from the Board or public in attendance, Mr. Trebino made a motion to have a peer review established and to continue this meeting until the November 10th meeting date. Seconded by Mr. Mobilia and a Roll Call Vote was made, as follows:

Roll Call Vote:

William F. O'Connell, Jr.	aye
Dennis J. Trebino	aye
Philip M. Devine	aye
Nick Mobilia	aye
Brian T. Salisbury	aye
Robert Lussier	aye

Motion passes unanimously

Mr. Kupfer said the next meeting, the topic we will only be discussing is funding. There's no peer review discussion, as that won't be back yet. If public wants to attend to come out and understand the possible update on Grant funding. In terms of the applicant, the details in traffic, stormwater, etc., we would not be in a good position by November 10th.

HARTFORD AVENUE:

The next discussion is about Hartford Avenue. The Town Administrator, Denis Fraine and Selectboard Member, Michael O'Connor wanted to address Hartford Avenue. We have heard the rezoning come forward a few times on the Meehan properties in that area. We have had conversations with them. Both Ms. Sutherland and Mr. O'Connor have been certainly involved about this. We are thinking of maybe forming some sort of a subcommittee to work with the neighbors and talk about what ideas are out there that might work for the property owners as well as for the community. There are some residents that want to see it rezoned, due to their own properties that they feel they're never going to be able to sell. We know that there are neighbors that live in the Rawson Road neighborhood that are very concerned about anything happening there. We were thinking that maybe we'd take some time and sit to discuss, rather than just have Mr. Meehan come forward with another proposal that the neighborhood doesn't agree with. Not mentioning any neighbors' names, but some residents living along that roadway had concerns. One of them was going to be losing their pool because of the roadway widening and another was going to lose their septic system. One was going to have their door be within 2' of the roadway.

We think it should be 2 or 3 of those neighbors that live on that roadway, to represent the rest of the neighbors, As well as maybe 2 members from the Selectboard and Planning Board to discuss those issues. With the way the Meehan properties look, I think we as the Town need to represent the other neighbors and recognize that upon the widening of this project, they are severely impacted. I don't think that they themselves have the bandwidth or knowledge or timing to know exactly how to navigate that. That is why we are suggesting that getting some direction from the Planning Board would be key, as well as the Selectboard. The Planning Board can hear their concerns and make recommendations that would be appropriate and beneficial on that task. I think we would have Ms. Sutherland's help with the neighbors, to see who wants to be involved.

Mr. Kupfer suggests maybe starting once or twice a month. Unfortunately, we are only having one meeting in November. However, if only meeting once, then maybe we could add something during the month if we needed to. I think the goal is to try and find some common ground and something that that makes sense for the Town, with the neighbors and landowners, so that it can be brought forward at the May Town Meeting.

Mr. Fraine said that November might be too soon for the meeting, to know who would represent it and, in the meantime, Ms. Sutherland and myself can work on reaching out to the neighbors. MassDOT is bringing a lot of money into the project and everything else around it has to be mitigated.

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MINUTES:

Mr. Devine made a motion to approve the minutes from the September 22, 2022 meeting, as submitted. Mr. Mobilia seconded, and the motion was approved unanimously.

NEXT MEETING:

The next Planning Board Meeting will be held on Thursday, October 27, 2022 at 7:00 pm. This meeting will take place both in-person and via Zoom.

ADJOURN:

Mr. Salisbury made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 9:18 pm. Motion was seconded by Mr. Trebino and carried. Motion passes unanimously.

Respectfully Submitted,

Tina M. Griffin

Recording Secretary

Approved – 10-27-2022