

PLANNING BOARD MINUTES
MEETING OF MARCH 1, 2006

A regular meeting of the Lexington Planning Board held in the Selectmen's Meeting Room, Town Office Building, was called to order at 7:30 p.m. by Chairman Manz with members Hornig, Canale, Harden and planning staff McCall-Taylor, Schilt and Tap present. Mr. Galaitsis was absent.

Ms. McCall-Taylor observed that tonight was Mr. Harden's last meeting as a Planning Board member and on behalf of the Town thanked him for his five years of service. Ms. McCall-Taylor presented him with a proclamation from State Representative Jay Kaufman recognizing his years serving as a Planning Board member and his involvement in Lexington's 2020 Vision process.

***** ARTICLES FOR 2006 TOWN MEETING *****
PUBLIC HEARING

Article 7, CD-7 to CD-13, 727 Marrett Road, Starwood Hotels and Resorts Worldwide: At 7:45 p.m., Ms. Manz opened the public hearing on the petition of Starwood Hotels and Resorts Worldwide to rezone its property at 727 Marrett Road, the site of the Sheraton Lexington Hotel, from CD-7 to CD-13, Planned Commercial Development. The development team was present, consisting of Mr. John Farrington, attorney; Mr. Scott Thrun, Director of Real Estate Marketing, Starwood; Mr. John Fotiadis, architect, Costas Kondylis and Partners Architects; Mr. Robert Weidknecht, landscape architect, Beals & Thomas, Inc.; Mr. Alex Campbell, architect, Fruchtmann Associates Architects.

Mr. Farrington briefly described the history of the hotel site. In 1989, the Sheraton made plans to renovate and expand the hotel, but they were never implemented. Starwood purchased it from The Flatley Company and now wants to demolish the old building and replace it with two smaller hotel buildings. Starwood believes the new hotel complex would be an attractive community resource, which would generate an estimated \$1,000,000 in tax revenue beginning in 2008 with a yearly projected increase of three percent. Building permit fees paid to the town would be about \$200,000.

Mr. Thrun presented an overview of the service and lifestyle experience the two brand name hotels would offer travelers. He said that: the buildings will be set lower into the ground and the interior height reduced; the plans call for less disturbance to the knoll at the northwest end of the site than was called for in the 1989 plans; a common green area between the hotels; "energized" interiors with links to the outside; different exterior cladding materials; a connection (as yet undefined) to the Minuteman National Historical Park; fewer parking spaces.

Mr. Weidknecht provided site overviews with an aerial photograph, cross-sections, and elevations as well as renderings. He said that particular attention was paid to the view from historic Fiske Hill. The knoll and a rock outcropping near the shared common area are treated as features. Mr. Fotiadis described how the architecture and materials refer to the historical and cultural setting of the hotel: the "village green", the stone and clapboard exterior of the Westin building, the quiet exterior lighting and views from the open area into buildings with a restful aspect, and a water feature near each entry.

Planning Board Questions and Comments

The Planning Board observed that the plans responded in part to comments made in February but noted that more blasting would be required as the buildings are set deeper into the site, so the cut and fill ratio would change. They were assured that blasting would be minimized by "ripping" as much as possible.

Mr. Thrun outlined a conservative estimate of revenues the Town could expect from the project. The Board urged the team to provide a detailed fiscal impact analysis.

Mr. Hornig pointed out key figures in the application's narrative section that do not match those on the plans. He was assured that would be rectified. Mr. Canale questioned the addition of some proposed non-hotel uses. Mr. Farrington replied that they are for services that travelers are likely to want. Mr. Canale said that these should be spelled out in the table of uses.

Visual Impacts: Asked where the building mechanicals would be, Mr. Weidknecht said that most would be at grade and screened. As to the elevator shaft, there would be a five to six feet over-travel shaft. Screening views of the hotel buildings from historical Fiske Hill and other points remained a concern of the Board. Mr. Weidknecht noted that because of topography, the most effective screening would be to plant trees within the Minuteman National Park property. Unfortunately this would invoke review of the plans by multiple federal agencies within whose purview the activities involved in such planting would fall. Even archaeologists could be called in. It was suggested that vegetation be planted within the Town right of way bordering part of the site. The hotel windows will have non-reflective glass, another view mitigation.

Traffic Impacts: Relative to traffic mitigation there were questions as to the status of mitigations that were proposed as part of the 1987 CD-7 rezoning, such as. the payment to the town of \$150,000 in connection with intersection improvements at Marrett Road and Massachusetts Avenue and the yearly reporting on the mitigation plan instituted at the hotel. The Flatley Company agreed that 34,000 square feet of its land could be used for a drainage detention basin in connection with the intersection project.

Mr. Farrington reported that Starwood vans employees to and from Alewife station, has a car pool program and encourages the use of bicycles. The Board asked for a mitigation plan. Mr. Farrington replied that Starwood's transportation demand management (TDM) is ongoing in the form of transporting its employees at its own expense and encouraging alternatives to single-occupant vehicles. Mr. Thrun said it would like Lexpress to include the hotel on one of its routes. The Board urged them to begin talks with Lexpress and reiterated its request for a TDM plan. Ms. McCall-Taylor noted that new Traffic Mitigation Group should review the proposal.

Mr. Canale asked if the buildings would be energy efficient (green). The architects replied that they are aware of green principles and use them as they deem appropriate.

Audience Questions and Comments

Mr. Nyles Barnert, Board of Appeals, asked if they had a traffic study done. The response was that the study from 1989 pretty much covered conditions in the current proposal too. Mr. Weidknecht noted that most of the cars using the driveway through the site constitute cut-through traffic. An emergency gate system is proposed, which will stop this. Mr. Barnert also urged them to talk with the Minuteman Vocational High School officials. Mr. Bunce replied that they work with the school. Students who are interested in the hotel business work at the hotel as part of their program at Minuteman Tech.

Mr. John Frey, Tree Committee, asked for less cutting into the knoll to create the village green.

Ms. Sara Arnold, Transportation Advisory Committee, expressed the committee's desire to take part in any TDM dialogue. She said that Liberty Ride goes to the hotel site using the main entrance. Working the hotel into Lexpress's existing route structure is problematic because the bus is going in the "wrong" direction as it goes by the hotel and making a turn to enter the site would be dangerous.

Ms. Dawn McKenna, Tourism Committee, said that the committee favors Starwood's proposal, but that the two structures look like office buildings. The Tourism Committee is ready and willing to help the architects design buildings better suited to a hotel. Speaking for herself, Ms. McKenna said that Starwood

should agree to an annual payment to support Lexpress, in perpetuity and with an escalator clause.

Mr. John Rosenberg, 64 Bloomfield Street, spoke in favor of Starwood's proposal, saying that Lexington needs this hotel space and has an opportunity here to get a brand-name facility, as well as substantial tax revenue.

Ms. Manz closed the public hearing at 10:00 p.m.

***** ADMINISTRATION OF LAND DEVELOPMENT REGULATIONS *****

SUBDIVISION OF LAND

PUBLIC INFORMATION MEETING Murray Hills Preliminary Conventional Subdivision Plan, land off Blueberry Lane, Winning Estates RT: Ms. Manz opened the public information meeting at 10:05 p.m. Present were Ms. Phyllis Etsell, of Winning Estates LLC, applicant; Mr. Richard Lakutis, landscape architect, Landtech Associates; Mr. H. Hamilton Hackney III, attorney; and Mr. David Romero, engineer, Commonwealth Engineering. Two people signed the attendance list but a few more were in the audience.

Mr. Romero presented a four-lot conventional subdivision plan for land between 18 and 20 Blueberry Lane, consisting of three new dwellings with access in the form of a dead-end road, with twenty-foot wide pavement, in a 40-foot right of way off Blueberry Lane. One lot (Lot A) would remain vacant. Utilities, which he described as 'typical systems', would be constructed in the right of way. Existing structures and pavement would be removed and a restoration plan provided with the definitive plan.

Board Questions and Comments

Ms. Manz asked if the Lexington Conservation Commission had approved the road. Ms. Etsell replied that the ANRAD process is currently underway. Mr. Canale asked why the applicant did not submit a cluster plan. Ms. Etsell replied the applicant prefers a conventional development. Asked about intentions for Lot A, Mr. Romero said that is open for discussion.

Other comments had to do with a narrow strip of land shown on the plan, which is forbidden by Lexington's regulations; the lack of proof circles on the plan; drainage on and from the site. Staff expressed concern about how drainage on the site, which is surrounded by wetlands, would be handled. Mr. Hornig requested an easement for public access to the Winchester open space, but indicated that a vehicle easement appeared impractical because of the terrain. The Board asked about provisions for snow storage, tree retention and asked the development team to move the roadway to the edge of the property, and to show the 200-foot resource area on the plan. It requested more information about the removal of existing impervious surface.

Ms. McCall-Taylor reported that the Town Engineer finds the placement of pipe at depths over 17 feet unacceptable. It is a safety hazard.

Board members agreed that with so many unanswered questions about the wetlands this subdivision plan is difficult to evaluate.

Audience Questions and Comments

Mr. Justin Margolskee, 23 Peach Tree Road, testified that level of the groundwater in the neighborhood is very high and stormwater does drain onto the site from Blueberry Lane. Mr. Stephan Voss, 20 Blueberry Lane, said that when he added onto his house, water was found within four inches of the surface. He went on to describe the natural beauties of the land and said that, if preserved, it could be part of an "emerald necklace" around the ponds and brooks in the area. He suggested that creating such an amenity would be an excellent use of Community Preservation Act funds.

The Board advised the applicant to withdraw the preliminary plan due to the lack of a wetlands delineation and to conflicting reports about groundwater, then return with another that addresses the concerns expressed by the Board, Town staff and the people present tonight. Mr. Hackney stated that the applicant has responded to the points in the Planning Director's letter to Mr. Murray, dated January 27, 2006, about data missing from the preliminary submission. He indicated that he believes the Board has enough information. Ms. Etsell said that the applicant prefers a vote of the Board.

On a motion duly made and seconded, it was voted 3-1 (Mr. Hornig) to disapprove the Murray Estates preliminary subdivision plan on the grounds that they had insufficient information of which to base a decision.

Ms. Manz closed the information meeting at 11:00 p.m.

***** SPECIAL PERMIT WITH SITE PLAN REVIEW *****

Jefferson Union Conversion ,31 Fletcher Avenue, Stop Work Order Imposed: Ms. McCall-Taylor reported that the Building Commissioner has issued a stop work order on the demolition of the Jefferson Union Building on Fletcher Avenue, as the amount of demolition exceeded that permitted. The Historical Commission is considering imposing a two-year moratorium on permits on the applicants.

Asked if the Board's Special Permit could be rescinded, as preserving the building was an important factor in the Board's decision on the project, Ms. McCall-Taylor said she would ask Town Counsel.

***** ARTICLES FOR 2006 TOWN MEETING *****

Article 4, Inclusionary Housing: The Board reviewed a draft of the Inclusionary Housing amendment motion, dated February 26, 2006. A definition of "unit" was added along with other changes. On a motion duly made and seconded, it was voted to approve, pending staff's incorporation of the changes made tonight, putting the document on the Town's web page.

Article 7, Rezone 727 Marrett Road, Starwood: The Board informally discussed their reactions to Starwood Hotels and Resorts' most recent preliminary site development and use plan for the Sheraton Hotel site. The size, especially the height of the two hotel buildings, was a concern for all, as was the lackluster architecture and absence of a traffic mitigation package from the developer. But the need for a good hotel in Lexington was acknowledged, and hope expressed that site design and architecture more sensitive to the area, especially to the National Historical Park, would be forthcoming.

Ms McCall-Taylor remarked that the Planning Board's primary concern should be land use and zoning.

***** PLANNING BOARD ORGANIZATION, SCHEDULE *****

The Board agreed to meet at 6:00 p.m. on Monday, March 27, in the Planning Department office, prior to the first night of Town Meeting.

On a motion duly made and seconded, it was voted to adjourn the meeting at 12:00 a.m.

Richard Canale, Acting Clerk