



CITY OF NEWTON, MASSACHUSETTS

Urban Design Commission

MEETING MINUTES

A meeting of the City of Newton Urban Design Commission (UDC) was held virtually on Wednesday, **December 13, 2023** at 7:00 p.m. via Zoom

<https://newtonma-gov.zoom.us/j/87220767599>

Ruthanne Fuller,
Mayor

The Chair, Michael Kaufman, called the meeting to order at 7:02 P.M.

Barney Heath,
Director
Planning & Development

I. Roll Call

Those present were Michael Kaufman (Chair), Jim Doolin, John Downie, and Bill Winkler. Shubee Sikka, Urban Designer was also present.

Shubee Sikka,
Urban Designer
Planning & Development

II. Regular Agenda

Sign Permits

1. 20 Kinmonth Road – Bristol Waban

Proposed Sign:

- One wall mounted principal sign, non-illuminated, with approximately 13 sq. ft. of sign area on the northern building façade facing Kinmonth Road.

Applicant/Representative: Matt Zuker

Presentation and Discussion:

- Mr. Winkler asked the applicant if the sign has a white background as shown in some images. The applicant responded that there is no white background.

Members
Michael Kaufman, Chair
Jim Doolin, Vice Chair
John Downie
Robert Linsky
William Winkler
Visda Saeyan

MOTION: Mr. Kaufman made a motion to approve the sign at 20 Kinmonth Road – Bristol Waban. Mr. Downie seconded the motion, and none opposed. All the members present voted, with a 4-0 vote, Michael Kaufman, Jim Doolin, William Winkler, John Downie in favor and none opposed.

1000 Commonwealth Ave.
Newton, MA 02459
T 617/796-1120
F 617/796-1142

2. 1144-1152 Beacon Street – Dunkin'

Proposed Signs:

1. One wall mounted principal sign, internally illuminated, with approximately 24 sq. ft. of sign area on the western building façade facing Needham Street.
2. One wall mounted secondary sign, internally illuminated, with approximately 24 sq. ft. of sign area on the southern building façade facing the parking lot.

Presentation and Discussion:

- The Commission recommended that the white background is blacked out, so it doesn't shine at night.

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MOTION: Mr. Kaufman made a motion to approve the signs with a condition at 1144-1152 Beacon Street – Dunkin’. Mr. Winkler seconded the motion, and none opposed. All the members present voted, with a 4-0 vote, Michael Kaufman, Jim Doolin, William Winkler, John Downie in favor and none opposed. The Commission approved the signs on the condition that white background of the sign is blacked out, so it doesn’t shine at night.

3. 1094 Beacon Street - Mobil

Applicant/Representative: No applicant/representative was present at the meeting

Proposed Signs:

1. Reface one free-standing principal sign, internally illuminated, with approximately 39 sq. ft. of sign area at the corner of Beacon Street and Walnut Street.
2. Reface two canopy mounted secondary signs, internally illuminated, with approximately 8 sq. ft. of sign area on the western and eastern façade facing Beacon Street and Walnut Street.

Presentation and Discussion:

- The Commission asked if a representative was present, and no applicant/representative was present at the meeting. There was discussion about the background of the sign. The Commission recommended that the white background is blacked out, so it doesn’t shine at night.

MOTION: Mr. Kaufman made a motion to approve the signs with a condition at 1094 Beacon Street - Mobil. Mr. Doolin seconded the motion, and none opposed. All the members present voted, with a 4-0 vote, Michael Kaufman, Jim Doolin, William Winkler, John Downie in favor and none opposed. The Commission approved the signs on the condition that white background of the sign is blacked out, so it doesn’t shine at night.

4. 1185-1197 Centre Street – Tango Mango

Staff informed the Commission that the applicant gave the wrong address in the application and hence will need to reapply with the correct address. Applicant has withdrawn this application.

5. 47 Crescent Street – Kismet Commerce

Applicant/Representative: Andy Layman, Sign Art

Proposed Signs:

1. One wall mounted principal sign, internally illuminated, with approximately 97 sq. ft. of sign area on the southern façade facing Massachusetts Turnpike.
2. One wall mounted secondary sign, non-illuminated, with approximately 50 sq. ft. of sign area on the northern façade facing Crescent Street.

Presentation and Discussion:

The Commission recommended denial of the principal sign because of the following reason:

- UDC’s point of view is that the sign doesn’t comply with the Ordinance. The Ordinance mentions that it must be either a street or a drive and there is no direct access to the business from Mass. Turnpike.

Mr. Doolin commented that the design of the secondary sign is good.

MOTION: Mr. Kaufman made a motion to approve the secondary sign and reject the principal sign at 47 Crescent Street – Kismet Commerce. Mr. Downie seconded the motion, and none

opposed. All the members present voted, with a 4-0 vote, Michael Kaufman, Jim Doolin, William Winkler, John Downie in favor and none opposed.

6. 1144-1152 Beacon Street – Newton Pediatric Dental

Proposed Sign:

1. One awning mounted secondary sign, non-illuminated, with approximately 19 sq. ft. of sign area on the eastern façade facing the parking lot.

Presentation and Discussion:

- The Commission asked about the proposed sign. Staff explained that Newton Pediatric Dental had applied for two more signs for sign review a few months ago, which UDC recommended for approval. This third proposed sign appears to be compliant with the zoning ordinance.

MOTION: Mr. Kaufman made a motion to approve the proposed sign at 1144-1152 Beacon Street – Newton Pediatric Dental. Mr. Winkler seconded the motion, and none opposed. All the members present voted, with a 4-0 vote, Michael Kaufman, Jim Doolin, William Winkler, John Downie in favor and none opposed.

7. 71 Needham Street – AT&T

Applicant: Nicole Handricken

Proposed Sign:

1. One wall mounted secondary sign, internally illuminated, with approximately 16 sq. ft. of sign area on the eastern building façade facing Needham Street (sign S1).
2. One wall mounted secondary sign, internally illuminated, with approximately 8 sq. ft. of sign area on the western building façade facing the rear parking lot (sign S2).

Presentation and Discussion:

- Staff commented that the applicant sent revised drawings a few minutes before the meeting started and staff has not had a chance to review the revised drawings. Staff shared her screen to review the drawings and they appeared to be compliant with the comprehensive sign package.
- Staff mentioned that the sign package requires the letter to be a maximum 2 feet 3 inches. The Commission commented that in this case, the logo will need to be no more than 2'-3".

MOTION: Mr. Kaufman made a motion to approve the resubmitted sign at 71 Needham Street – AT&T. Mr. Doolin seconded the motion, and none opposed. All the members present voted, with a 4-0 vote, Michael Kaufman, Jim Doolin, William Winkler, John Downie in favor and none opposed.

Design Review

1. 41 Washington Street Design Review

Applicant/Representative:

Ian Gleeson, Owner

Franklin Schwarzer, Attorney, Schlesinger & Buchbinder

John Pears, Architectural Designer
Blair Hines, Landscape Architect, Verdant Landscape Architecture

Documents Presented: Context plan figure ground, context photos, site plan, elevations, floor plans, 3D renderings, lighting plan, planting plan, landscaping plan.

Project Summary:

The project is located at 41 Washington Street on a 25,902 square foot parcel. The proposed condominium development consists of an addition to an existing 1891 Victorian home for a total of 16 dwelling units. The applicant is seeking a Comprehensive Permit under chapter 40B from the Zoning Board of Appeals.

Presentation and Discussion:

The applicants summarized the design and commented:

The 25,902 square foot site is in a residential neighborhood surrounded by mostly single family and some two-family homes and is in SR3 zoning district. Being on Washington Street, it has good MBTA bus service that provides express routes to downtown Boston Back Bay. It is approximately half a mile from the Mass Turnpike. And it's located roughly equidistant between Newton Corner and Brighton's Oak Square. It's also a short walk to Hunnewell Park and Burr playground.

The site is improved by a large 3-story Victorian home which was built in 1890, which sits atop a substantial stone lower level which is mostly exposed creating a 4-story structure. The tower element, the porch and the porte-cochere are particularly notable and that's one of the prime design goals for the project from beginning was try to retain as much of the existing historic structure as possible. The proposed design only involves the partial demolition of the rear elevation to allow for an addition.

The owner has filed a comprehensive permit under Chapter 40 B for 16 home ownership units and this is kind of a unique project. Because of that it provides the type of housing that hardly exists. It's multifamily housing consisting entirely of two- and three-bedroom units.

At the last ZBA meeting on November 29, there was negative feedback from the members:

- Building was too large
- The site layout was awkward
- There was too much parking
- Not enough open space

The architect commented that the site is nestled in a nice residential neighborhood. There is a handsome existing structure that sits on the site commanding a kind of a high point on the site and sloping down towards the back and down towards the road quite nicely located. For this reason, the concept for the entire design is really based on maintaining and restoring the existing mansion. It's tired, and it does need new everything. So, it would be an internal gut and an external refurbishment of everything, new windows, new siding, clapboards, and new trim roof.

The architect commented they wanted to really celebrate the mansion and because this is a largely one- and two-family neighborhood, the idea was to add on at the back. Any addition to the side was inappropriate for two reasons: those two sides are articulated in a way that the other two sides aren't. Back of the mansion is not particular its finest façade.

Parking is a challenge, so there is a driveway from Washington Street all the way to the back of the site. The site drops approximately 20 feet from the high point at Washington Street to the low point at the rear property boundary. At the low point, vehicles will need to take the right turn and park under the building. Due to this reason, there is a lot of asphalt. There is a retaining wall that will help to hide the parking from the neighbors.

This project's very unusual for Newton since it has no studios, no one bedroom units, and it only has eight, two-bedroom and eight, three-bedroom units. So, it's a family-oriented building, based on its number of bedrooms. That's also why there are 24 parking spaces proposed, which allows to give one parking space to each one of the two-bedroom units, and two parking spaces to the three-bedroom units.

All construction will be wood frame. The mansion will be restored, replacing windows with new thermal panes, and replacing siding, trim, and roofing in kind as required. This will continue to present as a single-family home from the street. The architect commented that because of perspective, the roof looks quite a lot lower, it works in our favor here because it makes the back building look smaller but it's really the same height as the mansion roof. Architecturally, the same 1212 pitches were emulated on the new facade as the mansion. Similarly, mansion has different types of bays, some are delightful like the little triangular one in the top pediment. The architect commented that they picked up the notion of bays and put that on the addition as well.

The architect admits that there is a lot of asphalt, it is going to be pervious asphalt. And he suggested that the condo association has it written into the bylaws of the condo association, there will be a condition that the pavement needs to be maintained because the pervious, or impervious nature of this paving is only maintained with annual vacuuming to take off any salt or sand off the surface, otherwise it gets clogged.

In the rear, there is parking that goes under the building, a trash enclosure and recycling in the corner. And a wonderful opportunity for little toddler playground play.

The expanded mansion will provide one unit per floor in the mansion (4 units) and three units per floor in the addition (12 units). The massing of the addition is designed to connect behind the mansion and maintain that alignment for the first approximately 30 feet before forming an "L" further back on the site. This design allows the focus to remain on the existing mansion when viewed from the public way. The floors of the addition will align with the mansion floors, and an elevator and two enclosed interior staircases will be provided creating a fully accessible and sprinklered apartment building.

The landscape architect commented that this design had three primary objectives:

1. To enhance the streetscape along Washington Street. Currently there are no trees there. So, the idea here is to create three large shade trees that would be alone the public way. And then to have some low foundation planting, and accent plantings at the base of the

manse, as well as a group of low growing evergreen trees that are immediately between the parking at the edge of the building and the sidewalk, to just kind of help to tuck that parking away from prominent view. Architect's overall approach is to have the existing mansion display itself on the street. And so, the landscaping is trying to not get in the way of that.

2. The second objective is really to create a pleasing and functional landscape for the new residents. It is done firstly by continuing with planting, particularly accent flowering, planting, and shrubbery planting at the main entrance, which is along the left side of the building, as well as flowering plantings at the base of the building. The other important element is to support family living here, is the development of a little toddler play area. And the reason a toddler age play area is chosen because there are two playgrounds that are quite close. So, the thought is that school aged children are going to be up at the local school and might stay there to play. And there's another playground nearby. There is also a lift providing access for ADA compliance and there will also be stairs.
3. Third objective is to mitigate the impact of this new addition to the existing Manse on the adjacent residences. Save the basically for probably 40-50-feett-tall Norway Spruce that are at the back of the site, as well as some yellow wood, large Norway and sugar maples that at the upper left-hand portion of the site. These trees are very massive, they're probably about 60-70 feet tall. And are very important to the project because they really create an important scale element that would help to diminish the mess of proposed addition. Also proposing to plan an evergreen screen along the left property line, which would consist of both are providing planting and green giant planting. As per suggestion from the tree warden to utilize very vertical, applicant will plan to plant tall and fast-growing deciduous trees as well. There will be additional evergreen trees there, as well as infilling, evergreen trees along the rear property line. The applicant is proposing using a plant called the Green Giant, western red cedar, which grows extremely quickly which will help to create a green edge. There will be fencing at the rear of the site to help the screen the parking.

One of the things that had come up at the hearing had to do with the headlights of vehicles that would travel into the site. And one of the things that really will work is beyond the fact that when a vehicle turns into the site would go up about 12-14 inches, the headlights would at that point be shining beyond the fence line, and into the trees or other plantings there after that, since the driveway slopes at about 8 to 10 feet at its lower point that would direct the headlines into the pavement, and back at where the trash enclosure is in the car parking. So, the headlights will probably be well contained by the fencing. And by the characteristics of the site.

Currently, a flowering hedge of lilacs and Rose of Sharon kind of hibiscus is shown along the right property line, but the applicant is open to having it be an evergreen screen, depends on what the abutters to would prefer and their preferences will be accommodated in that location.

City's planning department had the idea of designating some type of pedestrian walkway that went from the sidewalk back to the rear parking area.

The Urban Design Commission had the following comments and recommendations:

Mr. Winkler asked if it is possible to access the little play lot with a ramp, even if it were a one switch back, then in order not to have a mechanical device? The applicant commented that they looked at that there's about a seven-foot grade change from the parking up there. And even at one foot in 12, about 84, and then you must have five-foot landings in it as well. It was over 100 feet of ramp.

Mr. Winkler commented that there's a red colored kind of band that's chasing around under the eaves but why was it decided to not chase that all the way around? It might help to hold it together a little bit. The architect responded that he has thought about it and the renderer made an error and put it on the connecting piece, and it looked kind of handsome but wondered whether that was appropriate. And it would be appropriate to discuss that with the historic commission (not discussed it yet), because most of the time, they have preferred not to be too closely literal in an addition. Mr. Kaufman asked if this house was in a historic district? The applicant responded it is not, but he would still like to get their opinion because the home is rather beautiful. The architect also mentioned that he could go either way but thought it might be a little presumptuous of him to do it. Mr. Winkler commented that the front mansion is also shingles and he first thought about shingles everywhere but then thought that it might be too much but chasing the red around very subtly would be a consideration.

Mr. Kaufman recommended to pick up some of the brownish tones from the stones instead of the blue gray color shown on the renderings. It may also help to paint the ends of the shed dormers a little darker so that the gable is more prominent. The architect responded that he likes both ideas.

Mr. Kaufman commented about the big picture. He's concerned about the site plan, which has an awful amount of pavement and parking, which is a direct mathematical equation related to the number of units. For 16 units, 24 parking spaces are needed. If there were 12 units, there will be a lot more green space and less parking spaces. The plan could use more green space.

Mr. Winkler recommended to have some good amount of landscaping in the front where the parked cars are shown on the side of the mansion. That will help to block a lot of view of the cars.

Mr. Doolin commented that there are a lot of very creative and sophisticated elements to this project. So, compliments to the team for their thoughtfulness and how the project presents to the street. Yes, you can solve some of this with screening, but it doesn't solve the core problem. This project looks institutional and it's bulky. It's strategically done from the street but not sure what's it doing for neighbors behind the site and on the two sides. Appreciate that the site drops down but that's a pretty tall building. It's taller than the mansion, by about eight feet or so. There is a problem with bulk that cannot be solved with landscape. Second, as the chairman was suggesting, if programmatic things change

modestly and that the trickle down of all those decisions, it will result in a very handsome project. And you would not be forced to do certain things that you have to do.

Mr. Doolin also commented about the site plan. Many of the projects UDC has been reviewing, the lots are too narrow for these kinds of projects. So, what happens in every one of these projects, there is a driveway, hard against the property line, almost with enough room for a fence, with arborvitaes lined up along the fence.

Mr. Doolin asked about the height of the fence. The landscape architect responded it is currently proposed to be 6 feet tall but may increase to 7 feet height. The Commission recommended to keep the fence height to 6 feet as allowed by fence ordinance.

Mr. Doolin complimented the applicant on the tree survey and the kinds of information absorbed into the planning. But encouraged the applicant to remove every Norway maple on the property since they are not native and illegal to import into Massachusetts. Understand that a lot of Norway maples will be removed but encourage to remove the one in the toddler lot as well. The applicant responded that they would take that under advisement but there's quite a penalty for cutting down a large tree.

Mr. Downie asked about the roof on the back, the closest gable on the backside, not sure what it would be called, an edge? Why is it taller than the adjacent roof? The architect responded it's a tricky detail and will get resolved in the final drawings, it's a graphic inconsistency. Mr. Downie hopes that it will be resolved because it is not successful.

Mr. Downie also commented that where there's a bay window and a small balcony that sticks out between the two gables, that probably needs to be recessed rather than extending out to make the gables look separate. The whole roof in the back looks unresolved. So, trust that will get fixed in later iterations. And the other issue is that the second gable (if the one on the left is the first gable) on the right has no windows and why is that? How is it even possible with the floor plans? The architect shared the floor plans on the screen and commented that's the head wall for the bed and a bathroom. Mr. Downie responded that a bathroom could certainly have a window. That façade needs something, an entire blank gable doesn't seem acceptable. East façade also doesn't have any windows either and that's a concern. The applicant responded it's the same reason, there's a dressing room and the headwall for a bed. Not a fan of people putting beds in front of windows. Mr. Kaufman and Mr. Downie responded that you could do high windows or windows on either side of the bed. There are options to get windows, its unfortunate to have large blank facades.

Mr. Downie commented that he understands the idea of not having the shingles on the entire bulk of this project. But the applicant could certainly do the shed dormers as shingles to tie back to the to the original house, which seems to have the shingles up high anyway. The applicant responded that's a good suggestion and they could do it. And then maybe find other places maybe bays are shingled, just to sort of break up the monotony which would probably be Hardie plank. If it is Hardie plank, then it's going to need corner boards. Recommend that the color of the corner board is the same as the wall rather than a trim color because the front house is shingles, and the shingles just turn the corner. If there were hardy shingles, then some of them could turn corners. The applicant responded

that it might be good on the bays and Mr. Downie agreed. A lot of these issues are coming up because of the bulk.

The applicant commented that in this case, they have analyzed this, financially, trying to get down to 12 units, the attorney was really putting a lot of pressure on us to get it down to 12. And the financial analysis has been looked at by third parties and the price of the original project, and then the cost to maintain the mansion, the site has a lot of grade difference, and needing to do the parking so there is a lot of cost to the site. With a 40B, 25% is affordable, it won't be financially feasible.

Mr. Kaufman asked if there was bulk storage provided for the units? The architect responded that there is a partial basement and there is bulk storage provided there with elevator and stair access. The basement also has mechanical and bike storage.

Commission's point of view is that we are recognizing that the building versus the site is too big and too bulky.

Mr. Winkler recommended to make the columns appear bulkier, so they look like they are supporting the building. Understand that structurally they don't need to be bulkier but will help. The applicant responded could become a good amount deeper. And I think that would be good because you never see something perfectly in elevation. So, you're going to read the extra depth in perspective.

The owner commented that he has been making a few notes and summarized them:

- Create more green space
- Try and reduce the amount of parking
- Driveway is too close to the neighbors
- Building is too long
- Remove Norway Maple

III. Old/New Business

The Commission reviewed the minutes of April meeting.

MOTION: Mr. Kaufman made a motion recommending approval of the regular meeting minutes for July and August as submitted. Mr. Downie seconded the motion. All the members present voted, with a 4-0 vote, Michael Kaufman, Jim Doolin, John Downie, and William Winkler in favor and none opposed. The decision is hereby incorporated as part of these minutes.

IV. ADJOURNMENT

Mr. Kaufman made a motion to adjourn the meeting and there was general agreement among the members.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:43 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by Shubee Sikka

Approved on January 10, 2024