



CITY OF NEWTON, MASSACHUSETTS

Urban Design Commission

MEETING MINUTES

A meeting of the City of Newton Urban Design Commission (UDC) was held virtually on Tuesday, August 13, 2024 at 7:00 p.m. via Zoom

<https://newtonma-gov.zoom.us/j/82295226313>

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

Staff gave the following three updates to the Commission:

- 303-321 Washington Street – Newton Corner Dental Care – Applicant submitted revised window signs with dimensions, and they appear to be less than 25% of the window area.
- 650 Washington Street – Newtonville Gas & Auto – Applicant informed staff just before the meeting that they would like to move forward with three signs, reface of the free-standing sign and 2 wall mounted signs. They will not move forward with the canopy signs.
- 1229 Washington Street – Buggy – Applicant has submitted property owner authorization.

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

1. 191 Sumner Street – Carvalho & Roth

Applicant/Representative: Jeff

Proposed Signs:

- One wall mounted principal sign, non-illuminated, with approximately 32 sq. ft. of sign area on the eastern façade facing Sumner Street (sign B).
- One wall mounted secondary sign, non-illuminated, with approximately 15 sq. ft. of sign area on the northern façade facing Lyman Street (sign A).
- One wall mounted secondary sign, non-illuminated, with approximately 32 sq. ft. of sign area on the southern façade facing the rear parking lot (sign C).

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

www.newtonma.gov

Presentation and Discussion:

- The Commission asked the applicant to clarify the location of all three signs. Staff shared her screen to show the site plan showing location of all three signs and building facades showing the three signs.

- Commission asked if the applicant is allowed two principal signs. Staff responded that the applicant would need to provide dimensions to be allowed two principal signs. According to the sign ordinance, frontage on the second street must be at least 75% of frontage on first street, which doesn't appear to be the case here.

MOTION: Mr. Kaufman made a motion to approve the signs at 191 Sumner Street – Carvalho & Roth. Mr. Winkler seconded the motion, and none opposed. All the members present voted, with a 4-0 vote, Michael Kaufman, John Downie, Bill Winkler, and Jim Doolin in favor and none opposed.

2. 303-321 Washington Street – Newton Corner Dental Care

Applicant/Representative: Frank Meroney

Proposed Signs:

- One wall mounted secondary sign, internally illuminated, with approximately 10 sq. ft. of sign area on the eastern façade facing Bacon Street and Washington Street.
- Two window signs, non-illuminated, with approximately 11 and 12 sq. ft. of sign area, on the southern and eastern façade facing Washington Street and Bacon Street.

Presentation and Discussion:

The Commission had clarifying questions about the location of all the signs, existing, proposed and window signs. Staff shared her screen to show the location of all proposed signs.

Applicant also commented that the business has expanded into a new space and hence would like to have more signage. Staff also clarified that the applicant has submitted revised window signs which are less than 25% of the window area.

MOTION: Mr. Kaufman made a motion to approve the revised signs at 303-321 Washington Street – Newton Corner Dental Care. Mr. Winkler seconded the motion, and none opposed. All the members present voted, with a 4-0 vote, Michael Kaufman, John Downie, Bill Winkler, and Jim Doolin in favor and none opposed.

3. 650 Washington Street – Newtonville Gas & Auto

Applicant/Representative: Amy Murray

Proposed Signs:

1. Reface one free-standing principal sign, internally illuminated, with approximately 33 sq. ft. of sign area.
2. One wall-mounted secondary sign, non-illuminated, with approximately 36 sq. ft. of sign area on the northern façade facing Washington St. (Newtonville Gas & Auto).
3. One wall-mounted secondary sign, non-illuminated, with approximately 25 sq. ft. of sign area on the western façade facing the canopy (Foreign & Domestic – All Major Repairs).

Presentation and Discussion:

Staff summarized that the applicant has changed the signs they would like to move forward with: Reface of the free-standing sign, two existing wall mounted signs. Staff also commented the two wall mounted signs cannot be on the same wall, hence applicant is proposing to move one sign to the western façade. Applicant commented there will be no canopy signs anymore, just blue and red canopy reskinning and there will be down lighting. Commission asked about lighting on the canopy. Staff informed the Commission since there are no signs on the canopy, so it won't be restricted by sign ordinance, but lighting ordinance may apply. Applicant responded the lighting is very shielded and very pointed right at the canopy.

There was discussion about blanking out the white background on the free-standing sign, so it does not shine at night, so only the red letters shine through at night. Applicant commented she will go back to the customer to change the colors since red color does not light bright. Commission asked if they will be willing to switch the letters to white and the background could be red or blue and the applicant agreed.

MOTION: Mr. Kaufman made a motion to approve the signs at 650 Washington Street – Newtonville Auto & Gas with a condition. Mr. Doolin seconded the motion, and none opposed. All the members present voted, with a 4-0 vote, Michael Kaufman, John Downie, Bill Winkler, and Jim Doolin in favor and none opposed. The Commission recommended the free-standing sign for approval with a condition that the letters are white, and the background is either red or blue.

4. 430 Centre Street – Evans Park at Newton Center

Applicant/Representative: Sandy Kurson

Proposed Signs:

1. One wall mounted principal sign, externally illuminated, with approximately 32 sq. ft. of sign area on the western building façade facing Centre Street.
2. One free-standing sign, fence mounted, non-illuminated, with approximately 15 sq. ft. of sign area facing Vernon Street. Applicant has informed staff that they don't want to pursue the fence sign anymore. Hence this sign is no longer part of the application. There was no discussion about this sign.

Presentation and Discussion:

Staff clarified that the applicant has withdrawn the fence mounted sign, which would be considered a free-standing sign.

Mr. Winkler recommended to lower the sign by six inches and move it to the right about 6 inches so that the masonry on the wall shows through, so it looks like a sign against a wall and not one that's hanging off the edge.

MOTION: Mr. Kaufman made a motion to approve the sign at 430 Centre Street – Evans Park at Newton Center with a recommendation. Mr. Winkler seconded the motion, and none opposed. All the members present voted, with a 4-0 vote, Michael Kaufman, John Downie, Bill Winkler, and Jim Doolin in favor and none opposed. The Commission recommended the wall

mounted sign for approval with a **recommendation** to lower the sign by six inches and move it to the right about 6 inches, so masonry is visible.

5. 1229 Washington Street - Buggy

Applicant/Representative: Craig Murphy, CRG Graphics

Proposed Signs:

1. One wall-mounted principal sign, internally illuminated, with approximately 72 sq. ft. of sign area on the southern façade facing Washington Street.

Presentation and Discussion:

Staff clarified that the applicant has withdrawn the fence mounted sign, which would be considered a free-standing sign.

Mr. Winkler recommended to lower the sign by six inches and move it to the right about 6 inches so that the masonry on the wall shows through, so it looks like a sign against a wall and not one that's hanging off the edge.

MOTION: Mr. Kaufman made a motion to approve the sign at 1229 Washington Street - Buggy. Mr. Winkler seconded the motion, and none opposed. All the members present voted, with a 4-0 vote, Michael Kaufman, John Downie, Bill Winkler, and Jim Doolin in favor and none opposed.

Design Review

1. 49 Dalby Street

Applicant/Representative: Niko

Documents Presented: Context plan, context photos, site plan, elevations, floor plans, and 3D rendering.

Project Summary:

The project is located at 49 Dalby Street on a 13,290 square foot parcel. The applicant is proposing to replace existing single-family home on an MR zoned lot with four units. The applicant will be seeking relief for setback and FAR.

Presentation and Discussion:

The applicants summarized the design. The Urban Design Commission had the following comments and recommendations:

Mr. Kaufman commented that these are attractive. He asked how far are the houses from the street? Applicant responded that they would need to adhere to the required setbacks, which is 25 feet from the property line.

Mr. Winkler recommended to flip the plan (for the front left unit) so that it was a mirror image of the unit behind, then the two garages would be next to each other, and there would be windows with habitable spaces facing the street. Take the front unit and mirror it so the garage

is inside the garage, rather than facing the street so the two garages are adjacent to each other so you would get more mileage out of windows and natural light facing the street. Applicant responded that's a good point and he will look into it.

Mr. Kaufman asked what relief were they looking for? Applicant responded its for number of units, oonly 2 units are allowed in MR zone. Also seeking relief for area, about 1,000 sq. ft. It's actually only 250 sq. ft. per unit (125 sq. ft. per floor per unit).

How large is the site? Applicant responded its 13,000 sq. ft.

Mr. Downie asked about dormers on the third floor. Is the third floor habitable? Applicant responded their intention is to make it finished storage, finish the attic. There won't be any bedroom or bathroom on third floor. Mr. Downie asked if it will be counted against FAR and applicant responded it won't because they have kept the average height to under seven feet. It's seven feet in the middle and then there's sloped roof and most of the third floor can't be used.

Mr. Doolin commented that the project looks good. Are these for sale? Applicant responded yes. Appreciate the rational thinking about separating buildings versus one building. Don't like that there is a lot of pavement in the middle of the lot. Applicant responded that the site plan is not 100% done yet and they intend to carve out more green space out of the paving. They would like to meet the by right open space and lot coverage requirements. Rendering was more intended for the buildings themselves, not necessarily the site plan.

Didn't see anything about neighborhood context, how do these buildings fit in the street after construction? As this project moves forward, it will be very important to see other buildings in the setting. Applicant responded that both buildings would meet by right building height requirements. By right, building height can be 36 feet and these buildings will be 35 feet tall. Neighborhood buildings are about 30 feet tall on average.

Encourage canopy trees. Applicant responded that behind this lot, there is a big parking lot, so they would like to maintain as much vegetation as possible, so the residents are not looking into a parking lot. Will save as many trees as possible and plant as well.

Will there be a perimeter fence around this project building? Applicant responded that there is a cedar picket fence. The fences on either side will be sort of decided by the neighbors. Will there be a fence on the front? Applicant responded probably wouldn't put a fence in the front. If anything, there may be a 4-foot-tall picket fence in the front.

Commission asked if the applicant was considering pervious pavers for the driveway? Applicant responded they haven't reached that far yet. Maybe put pavers in specific spots, like parking area. Pervious materials might help to eliminate trench drains too.

Mr. Downie asked if the units would have outdoor private outdoor space? Applicant responded yes, because we were adhering to all the by right setbacks, the rear units would have no less than 15 feet on in the rear, which means that the side setbacks are going to be no less than 10 feet. And then the front is 25 so each person, while it's not a ton of outdoor space, each unit

will have about 100 sq. ft. of exclusive outdoor space with six-foot fences in between. People really like the idea of being able to let their dog out to use the bathroom without having to actually take them outside or worry about it.

Going back to the elevations, it will help to tone down the white siding, maybe warmed up a little bit, so it would be a little closer to the intensity of the wood siding.

Commission asked about trash receptacles. Applicant responded that the garage is big enough to keep the trash receptacles inside.

Mr. Kaufman commented if the applicant has a chance to come back after making changes any changes, Commission would love to see it otherwise, hopefully applicant will take some of Commissions thoughts and suggestions and incorporate them.

III. Old/New Business

1. Sign Ordinance and Policy Changes

Planning staff that attended the meeting: Barney Heath, Zacher LeMel, and Nora Masler

Staff from the Long-Range Planning Division attended the meeting to present on the possible process and policy language for administrative review of signs that are being replaced in kind, as well as minor corrections to the sign ordinance.

Ms. Masler presented a PowerPoint presentation regarding administrative review of signs for replacement in kind and to hear Commission's thoughts on longer term changes to the sign ordinance and lay out the process for how those changes can be made.

Summary of the presentation:

- Heard from small business owners that reducing or shortening permitting processes in any way would be helpful while also appreciating the value added by Urban Design Commission.
- Also looking at streamlining sign review for signs which are very unlikely to raise questions or concerns from the UDC.
- UDC reviewed 93 business signs in the past year, 19.5 were recommended for approval with clarifying questions, 17.5 were recommended for approval with requests for changes, 2.5 were not recommended, and 24 were recommended for approval with no questions. So, roughly those 24 are the ones that will be targeted for administrative review and the plan is to target those signs specifically by limiting administrative review to replacement in kind signs.
- Ms. Masler reviewed some examples of signs that would fall under the category of signs that are replacement in kind. For example: The Waban Market at 2-12 Windsor Road, CVS Pharmacy at 1199 Centre Street, Walnut Dental at 1197-1203 Walnut Street, CG Color and Extensions at 35-41 Lincoln Street.
- The process will be admin review for signs that are being replaced in kind, specifically in the same location, the same size or smaller. UDC will continue to review the replacement on all free-standing signs, whether it is replacement in kind or not. If the previous sign didn't have the phone number and the email address on the sign, then it is not considered replacement in kind.

- Admin staff will also have discretion to bring any signs to the UDC for review.

Mr. Kaufman asked if all these changes to the sign ordinance is in response to the docket item by City Council. Ms. Sikka clarified that the changes that Ms. Masler listed don't need an ordinance change. These changes can be made through a letter that will be issued by the Commissioner of Inspectional Services.

Mr. Kaufman recommended that it will be helpful monthly to supply UDC with what signs have been approved administratively so UDC can see what's going on. Staff agreed with the suggestion.

UDC also recommended to review all signs that are internally illuminated with white background.

Below is a summary:

- **Administrative review**

- Supply UDC with signs that have been approved administratively monthly
- Anything internally illuminated and the background is white should come to the UDC if staff's request to change white background is not met administratively (not including signs that are not changing illumination).
- Anything freestanding goes to UDC

- **Larger sign ordinance changes**

- Add clear preamble describing **intent and purpose** of the sign ordinance,
 - For example, signs are intended to help a customer find and get to the business
 - Aesthetics of signage - don't want every sign to look the same and lack creativity, balanced with avoiding sign clutter or confusion
- **Remove**
 - Allowance for exposed illumination
 - Allowance for illumination with white background
- **Explore Options to regulate/alter**
 - Signs above the first floor - would be helpful to have more guidance on that.
 - This includes larger buildings looking to have corporate name on top of the building
 - Awning Sign definition
 - Could remove the word retractable and set dimensions
 - Concerned with awning and principal sign, both being allowed.
 - Signs on Mass Pike
 - Comprehensive Sign Packets/Sign Master Plan

- Sign packages for multiple tenant building - trigger requirement (2018 draft - any property with more than 5 tenants)
- Location of principal sign
 - Relative to the business
- **Organization**
 - Look at Somerville

UDC asked if the policy change must go to Council or is it just a policy within the department? Staff responded it's an internal policy. Once the memo is drafted and signed by ISD Commissioner, then it would be in effect.

2. Approval of Minutes

The Commission reviewed the minutes of July meeting.

MOTION: Mr. Kaufman made a motion recommending approval of the regular meeting minutes for July 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 8:41 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by Shubee Sikka

Approved on October 9, 2024.