

**MEMORANDUM**

DATE: OCTOBER 19, 2012

TO: LAND USE COMMITTEE OF THE BOARD OF ALDERMEN

FOR: OCTOBER 23, 2012 WORKING SESSION

FROM: CANDACE HAVENS, DIRECTOR OF PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT  
James Freas, Chief Planner for Long Range Planning

CC: PETITIONERS  
JOHN LOJEK, COMMISSIONER OF INSPECTIONAL SERVICES



*In response to questions raised at the Land Use Committee public hearing, previous working session meetings and/or staff technical reviews, the Planning Department is providing the following materials for the upcoming working session. This information is supplemental to staff analysis previously provided for the public hearing.*

#213-12

49, 55, &amp; 71 NEEDHAM ST.

**Special Permit/Site Plan approval to construct two multi-tenant commercial buildings with a mixture of retail, service, and restaurant uses with an aggregate total gross floor area of 19,200 square feet of commercial space and a 64-space rear parking lot.**



**Project Design**

- **Building Design:** In the public hearing memo, the Planning Department recommended that the architectural design incorporate means of distinguishing each storefront space utilizing variations in color, materials, or similar features to produce the illusion that the buildings were constructed individually, over time. The petitioner indicated that this was his intent at both the public hearing and before the Urban Design Commission.

The building design accomplishes this objective in a number of ways. First, the project uses a variety of exterior materials including brick, fiber cement panel, metal shingle, and synthetic stucco (EIFS) to distinguish the different storefront facades with the higher grade materials on the end units and EIFS on the center units. Distinct awnings over the center units distinguish each of these. The northernmost building is further marked by a raised parapet. Taken together, these design features serve to disguise the overall mass of the building, making what would otherwise be a large building and instead bringing it to a more human scale consistent with the smaller commercial buildings that characterize this end of Needham Street.

- **Site Design:** The Urban Design Commission reviewed the proposed site design and generally had positive comments. The Planning Department concurs with those findings and further finds that the site design is consistent with the conclusions drawn in various recent studies of the corridor that new buildings shall be located on the street with parking lots directed to the rear of most sites. The Urban Design Commission also offered specific comments relative to the landscaping at the front of the project. The applicant has submitted a new site plan and a landscaping plan consistent with these comments, shifting the proposed trees in the front of the site so that they are fully located on the subject property and not within the street right of way.
- **Signage:** The Urban Design Commission found the proposed freestanding sign to be unnecessary and recommended as an alternative some form of directional sign with the Village Shoppes identifier on it, but not individual tenant signage. The visual clutter of multiple tenant identifications on this sign would be difficult to read by motorists on Needham Street and ultimately would not be in the public interest. The Planning Department concurs with this finding. Without the freestanding sign, no special permits relative to signs are necessary; therefore the Planning Department recommends denial of the requested sign-related special permits.
- **Rooftop:** A question was raised with regard to the design of the rooftop area, particularly with regard to the screening of rooftop equipment. The applicant has submitted drawings demonstrating that a person standing on the street would not be able to see the rooftop equipment by virtue of the proposed parapets. Based on discussions with the applicant, there appears to be little way to screen

the equipment from the multi-family residences neighboring the property without significant project redesign. Simpler solutions such as fencing or structures create a maintenance issue that might ultimately create a greater negative visual impact than the equipment by itself. Generally, the roof as proposed would be consistent with much of the existing landscape currently on view from these residences. The applicant has proposed installation of a white roof, which would improve energy efficiency for the buildings and likely present a more attractive rooftop for neighbors than the typical black roof on most commercial structures. There is no evidence that a white roof creates any significant level of glare.

### **Transportation & Parking**

Comments have been raised with regard to potential traffic impacts and the number of parking spaces associated with this project. Studies on both of these topics have been submitted by the applicant demonstrating that there would be no significant impact on traffic congestion and that sufficient parking will be provided for the uses proposed. Based on the evidence presented, staff concurs with these conclusions.

- **Traffic:** The transportation study projects minimal impact on the roadway system as a result of the proposed development. Traffic modeling of the currently proposed development program shows a 32-trip drop for the Average Weekday Daily trips and similar drops across peak weekday and weekend timeframes.
- **Parking:** The applicant submitted a parking demand analysis demonstrating that the proposed 64 parking spaces would be sufficient to serve the needs of the proposed development. The study ultimately relies on a shared-parking study utilizing the Urban Land Institute's shared-parking analysis methodology, which is widely accepted in the industry and has been accepted by the City in other projects.
- **Pedestrian:** This project proposes to make a significant improvement to the pedestrian environment, creating a much higher quality pedestrian area in a location that is currently poor, including a good connection to the apartments behind the site. As a result, pedestrians as a share of travel modes accessing this site should increase over current conditions.
- **Turning:** A question was raised relative to whether there was sufficient distance between the entrances for the purposes of vehicles entering or leaving the proposed development and adjacent properties. The City Transportation Division found all distances to be sufficient.

### Technical Requirements

- **Fire Department Access:** The Fire Department has confirmed that the site design meets their requirements for emergency vehicle access.
- **Construction Management Plan:** The petitioner has submitted a construction management plan.
- **Lighting:** The applicant submitted a photometric plan demonstrating that for the majority of the property, the lighting will meet or exceed the standard. In particular, sidewalk and ramp areas are well lit and there is minimal light spillover onto adjacent properties. There are a few small areas where lighting falls just under the standard, but nothing that appears to present a safety hazard.
- **Historic Commission Review:** The Newton Historical Commission reviewed the demolition of both buildings at 55 and 71 Needham Street and found each building “not preferably preserved.”