



CITY OF NEWTON, MASSACHUSETTS

Urban Design Commission

MEETING MINUTES

January 13, 2021

A meeting of the City of Newton Urban Design Commission (UDC) was held virtually on Wednesday, January 13th, 2021 at 7:00 p.m. via Zoom <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/85810847200>.

Ruthanne Fuller,
Mayor

The Chair, Michael Kaufman, called the meeting to order at 7:03 P.M.

Barney Heath,
Director
Planning & Development

I. Roll Call

Those present were Michael Kaufman (Chair), Jim Doolin, John Downie, Bill Winkler, Visda Saeyan, and Robert Linsky. Carol Todreas joined the meeting at 7:07 pm. Shubee Sikka, Urban Designer, was also present.

Shubee Sikka,
Urban Designer
Planning & Development

II. Regular Agenda

Sign Permits

Mr. Kaufman asked if the Commission felt there were any applications they could approve without discussion.

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

The Commission agreed to approve the following signs without discussion:

2. 300 Needham Street – One Medical

• Proposed Signs:

- One wall mounted principal sign, externally illuminated, with approximately 33 sq. ft. of sign area on the western façade facing Needham Street.
- One wall mounted principal sign, externally illuminated, with approximately 33 sq. ft. of sign area on the southern façade facing Christina Street.

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MOTION: Mr. Kaufman made a motion to approve the sign at 300 Needham Street – One Medical. Mr. Downie seconded the motion, and none opposed. All the members present voted, with a 6-0 vote, Michael Kaufman, John Downie, James Doolin, Robert Linsky, Visda Saeyan and William Winkler in favor and none opposed. The decision is hereby incorporated as part of these minutes. According to the Newton Zoning Ordinance, staff concurs with the recommendation to approve the signs as proposed.

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1. 104 Needham Street – Free-standing sign

- Applicant/Representative:

David Baker, R.K. Center Representative
Laurance Lee, Rosenberg, Freedman & Lee, LLP
Ron, Sign Design Representative

- Proposed Sign:

- One free-standing principal nonconforming sign, internally illuminated, with approximately 59 sq. ft. of sign area perpendicular to Needham Street.

MassDOT has issued an order for street taking on Needham Street to widen the street and to install a bike lane. As a result, the freestanding sign on the property will need to be relocated. The existing free-standing sign has been in its current location since 1963 based on records found at the Inspectional Services Department.

- Presentation and Discussion:

- Applicant summarized the proposed free-standing sign and the reason for moving the sign (see above).
- Commissioners confirmed the height of the sign is 16 feet.
- Commissioners asked why “R.K. Centers” is needed twice on the proposed sign. The representative responded that they recently purchased this property and the owner would like its name and phone number to be visible from the street. It’s a typical branding sign that is used by the owner for management and leases purposes. The Commissioners confirmed that R.K. Center does not have an office in this building. The Commission also confirmed that Gym Source is the only tenant in this building. The Commissioners commented that it is confusing to see a sign for R.K Center since there is no other opportunity to lease any space at this location. The representative mentioned that another reason for “R.K. Center” name and phone number is because they are managing the property and incase if anyone wanted to know who is managing the property, it is clearly visible. The Commissioners asked if one of the “R.K. Center” sign can be removed. The Commissioners commented that management signs typically would be posted on the building and not the free-standing sign. The Commissioners suggested to move the phone number to the top panel and remove the bottom panel. The Commissioners commented that the management sign and phone number could find another location on the building façade as a small sign if the fire department needed to reach the management company. R.K. Center doesn’t mean anything to anyone, and it is not helpful, it is very confusing. The applicant suggested that they can eliminate the lower portion of the sign “R.K. Center and the phone number” and move it to the building. The Commissioners agreed with the suggestion.
- The Commissioners asked about illumination of the sign. The applicant said that the white and orange portion of the Gym Source sign will be lit. The light is going to come through the white and orange portion of the sign. The Commissioners asked if the top will be lit. The applicant responded there will be push through acrylic at the top and only “RK Center” letters will be back lit, only the back of the letters will be lit
- The Commissioners asked if the new sign will cover the sidewalk and applicant responded that it will not, the sign will be setback from the sidewalk.
- The applicant commented that it is a wide-open curb currently at the property, there is no definition to the entrance. Mass DOT is bringing in granite curb and making it 24

feet wide entrance and there will be bicycle and sidewalk configuration. The Commissioners asked where the new curb will be in relation to the crosshatching on the site plan. The applicant responded it is moving back from the existing granite curb (shown on the site plan), not all the way back.

- One of the Commissioners asked about the site plan. The last parking space on the left has only a 17'-8" back up space which is not enough. The applicant commented that is the reason they have proposed a planter and a decorative base around the bottom, to protect the sign. The applicant also commented that spaces 1, 5, and 6 will be used by employees, who will be the first ones to park and last ones to leave. Gym Source generally has 1-2 customers at a time.
- One of the Commissioners asked about the width of the sign. The applicant responded it is 80 inches. The Commissioner pointed that it appears there is plenty of space at the end of space 8 to have an 80-inch-wide sign at that location. The applicant responded there is not enough space, the sign won't be visible from Needham Street and there is a lot of infrastructure (gas line, electrical feed, telephone pole) on that side of the building. The Commission asked about the width of the existing Gym Source sign. The applicant responded it is 5 feet by 12 feet. One of the members commented that it is best to not impinge on the first parking space and make it difficult to enter and exit that space when it seems there is a location next to parking space 8 (at the head in part of space 8). The applicant responded that because of the utilities at that location, they will lose a parking space to move the sign because the sign will need to be in place of the parking.
- The Commission asked about the purpose of the hatch mark next to van parking space 4. The applicant responded it is required by ADA code. The Commission said to check what that dimension needs to be, it probably needs to be 8 feet and not 9 feet. The Commissioners commented that if it is possible to decrease the ADA space and clearance space to a total of 16 feet then 2 feet could be added to space 1 which would make a little easier to use that space. The applicant responded the Newton Zoning Ordinance requires ADA parking spaces to 9 feet by 19 feet.

The Commission recommended to eliminate the lower portion of the sign "R.K. Center and the phone number" and recommended to move that part of the sign to the building.

MOTION: Mr. Kaufman made a motion to approve the sign at 104 Needham Street – Free-standing sign. Mr. Linsky seconded the motion, and Mr. Downie opposed. All the members present voted, with a 6-1 vote, Michael Kaufman, Carol Todreas, James Doolin, Robert Linsky, Visda Saeyan and William Winkler in favor and John Downie opposed. The decision is hereby incorporated as part of these minutes. According to the Newton Zoning Ordinance, staff concurs with the recommendation to approve the signs as per the recommendation.

3. 24-26 Elliot Street - Redi

- Applicant/Representative:

Brendan Donovan, Fast Signs

- Proposed Signs:

- One wall mounted principal sign, internally illuminated, with approximately 60 sq. ft. of sign area on the northeastern building façade facing the parking lot.

- One wall mounted secondary sign, internally illuminated, with approximately 6 sq. ft. of sign area on the northern building façade facing the parking lot.
- Presentation and Discussion:
 - Applicant summarized both the principal and secondary signs (see above).
 - The Commission asked about the location of both the principal and secondary sign. The Commission commented that the principal sign should face the street and the secondary sign should face the parking lot. The Commissioner said that it is mentioned in the Zoning Ordinance that a principal sign should face the street. Staff checked the Zoning Ordinance and didn't find that definition. The Commissioner mentioned that it may have been in the old Ordinance before graphic changes were made.
 - The Commission commented about the sign with a light box. The Commission recommended the applicant chose one of the two:
 - Either reverse the colors so that dark is the background and the light pops through, if that doesn't work with the logo and branding
 - Then the Commission recommends that the white area is blacked out on the inside of the box so that at night only the letters will be illuminated.
 - The applicant mentioned they are looking to reuse the existing sign light box.

MOTION: Mr. Kaufman made a motion to approve the signs at 24-26 Elliot Street with a condition that the white portion of the sign is blacked out from behind and recommended making the background grey to match the secondary sign. Ms. Saeyan seconded the motion, and none opposed. All the members present voted, with a 7-0 vote, Michael Kaufman, John Downie, James Doolin, Robert Linsky, Visda Saeyan, Carol Todreas, and William Winkler in favor and none opposed. The decision is hereby incorporated as part of these minutes. According to the Newton Zoning Ordinance, staff concurs with the recommendation to approve the signs as proposed.

Design Review

1. 306 Walnut Street Design Review

- Owner/Applicant: Jeff Cohen
- Representatives:
 - Steve Buchbinder, Schlesinger and Buchbinder, LLP
 - Franklin Schwarzer, Schlesinger and Buchbinder, LLP
 - John Pears, Architect
 - Anna Aruot, RODE
- Documents Presented: Locus plan, site plan, landscape plan, floor plans, street diagrams, elevations, perspectives, and context materials
- Project Summary: The property is comprised of two lots, one in a BU-1 zone and one in an MR-1 zone (the "Property"). The total area of the Property is 13,960 square feet. The developer is seeking to construct a new proposed mixed-use development at the Property. To do this the applicant will need both special permit relief and a change of zone for the Property to MU-4.

The applicant is proposing 27 residential apartment units and approximately 3,500 square feet of commercial space which would be utilized primarily as a yoga studio with other possible complementary uses. The proposed unit breakdown includes 2 studio units, 19 one-

bedroom units, and 6 two-bedroom units. The proposed building would be up to five stories and 60 feet in height. To break up the massing of the proposed structure, the upper floors are gradually stepped back. The development would contain 19 parking stalls. The reduction in required parking is designed to promote alternative modes of transportation and to reduce reliance on individual car trips to the site.

- Presentation: The applicant's representative provided a summary of the project (see above).
- Discussion: The Urban Design Commission had the following comments and recommendations:

The Urban Design Commission (UDC) commented that it is a very handsome building, it fits well into the neighborhood. The building is beautiful and will enhance the neighborhood. This is a very well executed proposal for MU-4 zone change.

Building Massing, Height and Architecture

- The UDC recommended to ensure there is space between the brick wall of the Masonic building and the windows of the proposed building. The applicant responded that majority of the core is along that edge, so staircases and elevators are on that edge.
- The UDC recommended to have a light-colored solid material on the building, adjacent to the masonry Masonic building. It's a nice "background" building, it is meant to be supportive of other buildings in the neighborhood. It is the right approach in this location. The contrast between the two buildings jumps out a lot. The UDC recommended to pick up some of the brick tones in a lighter color, off-white or lighter shade of red, maybe some aristocrat colors will help. Some banding may also help to make the building fit better in this site.
- The UDC commented that the building fits well in the neighborhood. The applicant has done a nice job of achieving it with the setbacks and the way the lobby is set in.
- The UDC recommended to make the deck railing solid and taller so it still feels like a commercial block.
- Roof-top amenity is an excellent idea. It is a good way to use the top floor.
- The UDC commented about the residential entrance. The commercial façade comes right to the Masonic building. It is appropriate to recess the residential entrance but there could be a trellis at the top level with some vegetation. It will help to continue the façade all the way to the Masonic building.
- The UDC asked about the materials for the rear façade of the building. The applicant responded that they haven't fully designed the rear façade. The UDC encourages the applicant to use similar, complementary materials to the front façade. They shouldn't look like completely different buildings. The applicant commented that it will probably be a similar material as the front façade.

Parking

- UDC is supportive of the parking strategy. The UDC recommended to think about the parking, if it will be screened or open. The applicant responded that there is about 5 feet in the rear and the project will have a landscape architect who will help to find an appropriate solution along the edge, using natural vegetation. The architect mentioned

that they have used vines in the past that grow throughout the year up on fences, trellises, or something similar in nature.

Sustainability

- The UDC recommended to provide solar panels and a good number of electric vehicles charging stations.

III. ADJOURNMENT

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

The meeting was adjourned at 9:00 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by Shubee Sikka

Approved on April 14, 2021.