



CITY OF NEWTON, MASSACHUSETTS

Urban Design Commission

MEETING MINUTES

March 18, 2021

A meeting of the City of Newton Urban Design Commission (UDC) was held virtually on Wednesday, March 18th, 2021 at 7:00 p.m. via Zoom

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/87376480179>

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, Bill Winkler, Robert Linsky, and Carol Todreas. 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.

The Commission agreed to approve the following signs without discussion:

2. 71 Needham Street – Apotheco Pharmacy Newton

Proposed Signs:

- One wall mounted principal sign, internally illuminated, with approximately 30.7 sq. ft. of sign area on the eastern building façade facing Needham Street.
- One wall mounted secondary sign, non-illuminated, with approximately 8 sq. ft. of sign area on the western building façade facing the rear parking lot.

3. 94 Wells Avenue – Elaine Construction

- One free-standing principal sign, non-illuminated, with 15.5 sq. ft. of sign area perpendicular to Wells Avenue.
- One wall mounted secondary sign, internally illuminated, with 22.6 sq. ft. of sign area on the western façade facing Wells Avenue.

MOTION: Mr. Kaufman made a motion to approve the signs at 71 Needham Street – Apotheco Pharmacy Newton and 94 Wells Avenue – Elaine Construction. Mr. Winkler seconded the motion, and none opposed. All the members present voted, with a 6-0 vote, Michael Kaufman, John Downie, James Doolin, Robert Linsky, Carol Todreas, and William Winkler in favor and none opposed.

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1. 431 Washington Street – Sunrise Senior Living of Newton

- Applicant/Representative: Franklin Schwarzer, Schlesinger and Buchbinder, LLP
- Proposed Sign:
 - One free-standing principal sign, fence mounted, externally illuminated, with 29.6 sq. ft. of sign area facing Washington Street.
- Presentation and Discussion:
 - Applicant summarized the free-standing principal sign (see above) and that the fence is in violation of the fence ordinance. Applicant said that they realize that the Commission won't vote on this matter but would like to get informal feedback about the sign.
 - The Commission asked the staff that this is a free-standing sign because it is mounted on a wall. Staff confirmed that since this sign is mounted on a fence and not mounted on the building, it is considered a free-standing sign.
 - The Commission asked if the fence ordinance applies to a business district. The staff confirmed that the fence ordinance does apply to business districts.
 - The Commission commented that it seems that this fence wall should be subject to the special permit and the applicant shouldn't have to come to UDC for an appeal. UDC recommended that they should just be able to get a fence permit from ISD. Staff commented that they informed the applicant that they need to apply for a fence permit and if it is granted then the staff recommends the free-standing sign for approval.
 - The Commission commented that coming to UDC for an appeal will be difficult. The UDC recommended that the applicant get a fence permit for the legal part of the fence and make this part of the fence a free-standing sign. One of the members commented that UDC can grant exceptions, but the criteria that is used to grant exceptions will probably not apply in this case, it's not a hardship.
 - Some of the members commented that they went on the tour for Sunrise and they were very impressed with the facility.
 - The applicant clarified that in terms of the sign design, if the Commission finds it acceptable. The Commission commented that the sign is good.
 - Staff recommended the applicant contact the Commissioner of ISD regarding the fence permit.

4. 1261-1269 Centre Street (821 Beacon Street) – StretchMed

- Business Owner: Jamie and Bonnie Lee
- Applicant/Representative: Jeff Kwass, ViewPoint Sign and Awning
- Proposed Signs:
 - One wall mounted principal sign, internally illuminated, with approximately 37.5 sq. ft. of sign area on the southeastern building façade facing Beacon Street and Centre Street.
 - One wall mounted secondary sign, internally illuminated, with approximately 37.5 sq. ft. of sign area on the southern building façade facing Beacon Street.
 - One wall mounted secondary sign, internally illuminated, with approximately 37.5 sq. ft. of sign area on the eastern building façade facing Centre Street.
- Presentation and Discussion:
 - Applicant summarized the principal sign and both the secondary signs (see above).

- The Commission asked if the signs are backlit, will the white portion be all lit up at night? The Commission commented that the white background is not consistent with the rest of the building.
- The Commission suggested that a tone down color for the background so its not so stark white so it might look a little better with the brick and the letters would stand out a little more. The Commission recommended that the background color of the sign can be closer to the buff colors of the pilasters, it may look good as the background instead of white.
- The Commission recommended that it may also help to shorten the sign a little. The applicant commented that they don't know what is behind the existing signs, so they are proposing a sign of the same size. The Commission commented that it will be worth looking to find what the existing condition is. The Commission commented it will help if the signs are not going edge to edge between the pilasters. It will help to see some of the brick around the edges of the sign coming down.
- The staff commented that although the applicant is replacing the existing "Liberty Travel" signs, the proposed secondary signs are not consistent with the zoning ordinance. The Commission asked why these are all not principal signs and staff responded that a principal sign can only be split into 2 signs, not 3 signs. One of the members commented that this is not a hard corner, it is a rounded corner so these three signs should be allowed. The intent of the ordinance is to take the principal sign and wrap it around the corner.
- Some of the commissioners commented that it appears that this business is over signed. The two flanking signs should be smaller, there should be some hierarchy here rather have a band of signs that seems overwhelming. Three of the same signs seem to be overwhelming. They are so close together; they are almost like an advertisement or a billboard rather than a sign.
- There was discussion about the entrance to the business. The applicant pointed its at the center.
- The signs are crowding the frame of the building, they are not sitting within a frame.
- The Commission asked if the two flanking signs are needed, what if there is only 1 sign above the entryway. The applicant responded that the main appeal of a corner location like this one is to be able to communicate your business to the street, and the proposed signs help to achieve that.
- The Commission asked about what the business is. The business owner responded that StretchMed provides a service which is one to one assisted stretching, it's like a combination of chiropractor, physical therapy and personal training, helping people with mobility issues, motion issues, flexibility, strengthening, sports injuries. He also commented that they have certified, educated stretch therapists. It's a very popular program. The interior layout is a very low key, 4 stretch tables and very soft and calming environment. The business owner also commented that the idea for three signs is that the sign is visible from all three viewpoint. The decision to move into this space was to have the sign visibility at this location from all angles.
- The Commission commented that these signs are very different from other adjoining signs, for example Starbucks and then there are awnings.
- The applicant commented that they are replacing the existing sign boxes with new boxes.
- The Commission commented that the logo could extend beyond the box. Visually, the sign will appear to be smaller even though it won't be smaller.

- The Commission commented that the applicant can submit revised sign design based on UDC's suggestions by email to staff and if UDC likes them, it can be recommended for approval and if UDC doesn't approve them, then the applicant may need to come back next month.
- There was discussion about why these signs can't just be replacement signs. The staff pointed out that the sign ordinance stated that nonconforming signs can be maintained but shall not be enlarged, reworded, redesigned or altered hence these proposed signs need to be compliant with the ordinance.
- The applicant commented that they will work with the business owner and have some design ideas and send it to staff to send it to UDC.
- The Commission commented that it may be helpful to take down 1 existing sign to see what is behind them, it will also help to see where the electrical connections are.

5. 845 Washington Street (261 Walnut Street)– Mida

- Business Owner: Douglas Williams
- Applicant/Representative:
 - Scott Lombardi, Mark Development
 - Travis Blake, Sousa Design Architects
- Proposed Signs:
 - One canopy mounted principal sign, internally illuminated, with approximately 16 sq. ft. of sign area on the southeastern building façade facing Washington Street and Walnut Street.
 - One perpendicular blade secondary sign, internally illuminated, with approximately 9 sq. ft. of sign area on the southern building façade perpendicular to Washington Street.
 - One perpendicular secondary blade sign, internally illuminated, with approximately 9 sq. ft. of sign area on the eastern building façade perpendicular to Walnut Street.
- Presentation and Discussion:
 - Applicant summarized the principal sign and both the secondary signs (see above).
 - The Commission asked where the principal sign is shown on the comprehensive sign package. The staff commented that sign package shows that it is mounted on the face of the canopy.
 - The Commission commented that moving the sign above the canopy doesn't appear to make any difference in terms of visibility of this sign from I-90, commuter rail or the bridge.
 - The Commission commented that the ordinance has a ban on signs above the roofline and there is a reason for that. The Commission understands that this canopy is not the roof of the building but there is a reason for that. This sign has a similar feeling of a sign sitting on a roof.
 - The Commission commented that they are not in favor of the sign above the canopy. The Commission commented if the letters extended above and below the fascia, that might be appropriate.
 - The Commission commented that the reason why the UDC asked for the sign to be moved from the top of the canopy to the middle of the fascia during the sign package

discussion was because of the apartment and that is still the case. Although, the unit is not rented, eventually there will be a resident in that unit who will look at the back of this sign. The Commission asked about the height of the letters and the height of the fascia, the applicant responded it is 30 inches and 2 feet respectively.

- The Commission also commented that the sign band helps to make the distinction between the ground floor retail and residential on upper floors. If the sign is above the canopy, it doesn't help to make that distinction.
- The Commission commented the sign should be moved to the fascia. It also makes the fascia look better otherwise it is blank and not interesting, putting the letters on the fascia will probably make it more festive.
- The Commission commented that the two blade signs are good as proposed.
- The Commission asked about the height between the bottom of the blade sign and the sidewalk. The applicant responded it is 8'-4". The staff also commented that it meets the height clearance required by DPW is 89".

MOTION: Mr. Kaufman made a motion to approve the signs at 845 Washington Street (261 Walnut Street) - Mida. Mr. Linsky seconded the motion, and none opposed. All the members present voted, with a 6-0 vote, Michael Kaufman, John Downie, James Doolin, Robert Linsky, Carol Todreas, and William Winkler in favor and none opposed. The UDC recommended approval of the wall mounted principal sign on the condition that the sign is centered in the middle of the fascia and the height of the sign to be no taller than 36 inches.

Design Review

1. 386-394 Watertown Street Design Review

- Representatives: Ron Jarek, Mariana Dagatti, Leonardo Coelho, MGD Plus
- Documents Presented: Locus plan, site plan, landscape plan, floor plans, elevations, perspectives, and context materials
- Project Summary:

The petitioner is seeking a Special Permit from the City Council for the property located at 386-394 Watertown Street to construct a three-story structure with two stories totaling ten residential units above first floor commercial with a total of 16 parking spaces (8 on grade and 8 underground). The unit types range from one-bedroom to two-bedroom.

- 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 Nonantum will benefit from this project. The façade along Watertown Street is handsome, it fits in to the neighborhood, and it will be a good addition. The front façade is clean, straightforward, and nice but the rear façade feels like a big, blank wall, it will help to break the massing with a couple of colors.

The UDC reviewed this project in 2017 before the special permit was granted. The UDC appreciates all the changes made by the applicant based on UDC's recommendations at that time.

Building Massing, Height and Architecture

- There was discussion about the common deck from the lobby space. The UDC commented that functionally it doesn't look like a great space since it is looking into the adjacent building. The UDC observed that on the common deck there are two pairs of doors and a single door and questioned the reason for so many doors. The applicant responded that it is to create a feeling of openness. The UDC recommended that applicant consider changing the multiple doors to a single door and change rest of the doors to windows.
- The UDC asked if there is an amenity space for the building. The applicant responded that there is lobby area on the first floor and there may be some recreational space in the basement area. The applicant also commented that although this will be a boutique residential building, 10 units can't support the same level of amenities that a larger building may be able to support.
- The UDC recommended to show a placeholder for the signs at the next discussion. There will probably be only one retail sign and it will help to identify where the sign can be placed. The UDC recommended to place the numerical address on top of the "Parkview" sign shown on the renderings.
- There was discussion about the rear façade. The UDC asked about the material for the rear façade. The applicant responded it will be EIFS. The UDC commented there is some extensive blank rear wall, currently represented with a single color. The UDC recommended to have less unrelenting color scheme, it may help to break up the rear façade with a couple of colors (not too many though). There is a definite front of house and back of house look to this building. The UDC understands that from a financial standpoint, the applicant needs to make some changes to reduce the cost of brick and limestone, but it is a severe and unfortunate change. It will be nice if something could be done to enliven the back part of the building. There is indifference to the neighborhood behind that will see these big blank walls, colors will help to break the massing and will be a nice gesture to the neighborhood.

Landscape, Streetscape and Public Open Space

- The UDC asked if there will be outdoor amenity space in the alleyway. The applicant responded that the alleyway is just a vehicular lane and not a pedestrian amenity. The UDC observed that there is a park across the street.

Design Consistency Review

1. 156 Oak Street - Northland Design Consistency Review

- Applicant/Representatives:
 - Alan Schlesinger, Schlesinger and Buchbinder, LLP
 - Kent Gonzales, Northland
 - Louis Kraft, Stantec
- Documents Presented:
- Project Summary:

On November 14, 2019, the Land Use Committee of the City Council voted to approve the Northland Project via Board Order #426-18. Per the Board Order Condition 10, "The

procedure for preliminary review of building permit plans set forth in Conditions t/7-8 may be utilized by the Petitioner earlier in the design process for one (1) or more buildings or public spaces in order to receive initial opinions on the consistency of schematic/architectural drawings. If the opinions of both the Director of Planning and Development and the UDC after such an initial schematic review are that the schematic drawings are in full compliance with the Project Master Plans and consistent with the Design Guidelines, the Commissioner of Inspectional Services may accept final building permit plans without further preliminary review so long as they do not include any additional design elements or change any design elements governed by the Design Guidelines as confirmed by the Director of Planning and Development.”

At its regularly scheduled meeting on October 14, 2020, Urban Design Commission appointed a Subcommittee for Northland Design Consistency Review. The Subcommittee met eight times from October 28, 2020 to February 18, 2021 to review the Northland submission. City’s peer review consultant, Utile also joined the Subcommittee for all eight meetings. The Subcommittee reviewed the project and made a recommendation to the full Urban Design Commission for final Determination (attachment A) at its regularly scheduled meeting on March 18, 2021.

The Subcommittee included James Doolin (Chair of Subcommittee), Michael Kaufman, John Downie, William Winkler, and Carol Todreas. Tim Love, Utile also joined for all Subcommittee meetings.

- Presentation and Discussion:

- The Chair of the Northland Subcommittee, Mr. Doolin summarized the process and findings of the Subcommittee. The applicant will need to return to Urban Design Commission for consistency review of several items that were either; a) not yet provided by the applicant for review, or, b) that were presented but deemed to require further design advancement prior to a consistency finding. The following items are included:
 1. Building 2: Needham Street façade, roof, and service access / treatment
 2. Kiosk
 3. Building / site lighting
 4. Comprehensive sign package and retail storefront guidelines
- The Commission requested the applicant to present east façade of Building 2. The applicant presented Building 2.
- The Commission observed that the applicant will come back after there is a tenant for the restaurant space in building 2.
- The applicant and the Commission commented that this has been a good process and that it is a public process that worked very well.

MOTION: At its regularly scheduled meeting on March 18, 2021, Mr. Kaufman made a motion to approve the recommendations made by the Subcommittee to the Urban Design Commission. Mr. Doolin seconded the motion, and none opposed. All the members present voted, with a 6-0 vote, Michael Kaufman, John Downie, James Doolin, Robert Linsky, Carol Todreas, and William Winkler in favor and none opposed.

III. ADJOURNMENT

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

The meeting was adjourned at 9:02 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by Shubee Sikka

Approved on April 14, 2021.