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Redevelopment Board Minutes 10/03/2011

Minutes of Monday, October 3, 2011, 7:00 pm
 Arlington Redevelopment Board
 2nd Floor Conference Room, Town Hall Annex
 Approved: October 17, 2011

Present: ~Michael Cayer, Bruce Fitzsimmons (Chairman), Andy West, Christine Scypinski, Ted Fields

Mr. Fitzsimmons called the meeting order at 7:00pm

EDR Special Permit, Leader Bank, 1201-1203 Massachusetts Avenue
 Mr. Fitzsimmons then opened the Environmental Design Review Special Permit for a new Leader Bank branch at 1201-1203 Massachusetts Avenue. Mr. Fitzsimmons disclosed that he had represented the applicant as closing counsel, and had disclosed this to his appointing authority, the Town Manager and to Town Counsel. He reported that Town Counsel had determined that Mr. Fitzsimmons could hear the request since he had no financial interest. He also disclosed that the applicant, Leader Bank owner Sushil Tuli, had asked him to represent Leader before the ARB, but that Mr. Fitzsimmons had declined due to his role on the Board. He also disclosed that attorney Richard Keshian had asked Mr. Fitzsimmons' opinion on whether the proposed bank branch would need review.

Representing Leader Bank were owner Sushil Tuli, John Fanciullo, architect Jasbir Gandhi, land engineer Cliff Rober, Terry Wilkins from Barlow sign and attorney Richard Keshian. Mr. Keshian presented an overview of the proposal and distributed a landscape plan and revised drawing. Mr. Tuli explained his role in the Arlington community since 1991. Mr. Gandhi explained the architecture, the materials being cement siding, stucco and metal, the lighting, which would include two 15-16' tall pole lights and three lights on the front of the building and five lights on the building facade facing the parking lot. The sign would be LED internally illuminated, fully shielded, he explained, and would be smaller than the fixture shown on the cutsheet he provided. Mr. Wilkins from Barlow sign explained that the lights would be LED internally illuminated white channel letters with burgundy outline, 13 1/2' tall. The logo would be 2' 6".

Mr. West commented favorably on the materials and noted that the tower could be more fitting with the building if modified. The diagonal corner could be very powerful, yet the free-standing tower looked alien to the building. He requested that the tower be "tightened up" to the main building. He added that the indirect lighting, materials and landscaping were good. Mr. Fields and Ms. Scypinski also commented favorably on aspects of the proposal, but expressed an interest in seeing the tower height lowered and re-designed to be more reflective of its Arlington context. Mr. Fields asked if the tower height was for the building mechanicals. The answer was no. Ms. Scypinski observed that the proposed viburnums would not get sufficiently tall as screening plants. Mr. Cayer and Mr. Fitzsimmons also commented on the tower. Mr. Fitzsimmons suggested omitting the metal roof and bringing the tower back closer to the main building. He also asked about the required 5 bicycle parking spaces and for bumpers at the end of the parking spaces. He noted that the proposal was a terrific improvement over current conditions, considering there is currently no landscaping at all on the site. Mr. Fields asked whether the windows would be clear; Mr. Gandhi replied that they would be clear and unobstructed.

Mr. Fitzsimmons then asked for comments from the public. Ann LeRoyer, 12 Peirce Street explained that she was an abutter on the rear lot line, and she was delighted with the improvements. She asked how tall the lighting poles in the parking lot would be. Mr. Gandhi explained that the lights would be directed toward the parking lot and away from her property. Ms. LeRoyer noted that there was currently a chain link fence separating the properties that had been vandalized and broken. She asked whether it would be replaced. Mr. Keshian explained that there was no planned screening currently, and that new screening should improve the appearance. Ms. Scypinski asked them to consider evergreen screening. Mr. Tuli said the fence would be removed if it did not look good, and cited the landscaping and appearance of the other Leader Bank branches as examples. Mr. Tuli gave the branch hours. Nicholas Kriketos from the St. Athanasius the Great Parish Council introduced himself and asked about the tower design. He said he welcomed his new neighbor, and hoped that the design would be respectful of the church. Ms. Kowalski asked whether there would be advertising in the windows. Chuck Pappas, 1386 Pleasant Street introduced himself, was supportive of the proposed new use, and mentioned the bank's Belmont branch for an example of the window advertising the Bank typically uses. Mr. Fitzsimmons summarized the Board's direction, asking the applicant for a revised landscaping plan with the driveway dimensions and revised elevation drawings with the tower modified.

Mr. Fields then moved to continue the hearing to October 17 at 7:30pm. Ms. Scypinski seconded and all voted in favor.

Possible zoning articles for 2012 warrant

The Board then turned to discussion of zoning changes for possible Town Meeting warrant articles. The Board agreed in principle with amending the bylaw to preserve business uses in business districts, and after discussion agreed that Ms. Kowalski should develop draft language for possible amendments.

The Board then discussed the possibility of amending the bylaw to allow accessory apartments. Senior Planner & Housing Director Laura Wiener informed the ARB that even a well-intentioned effort can result in closing existing units if they cannot meet the building code, based on her experience in Watertown, MA, where Ms. Wiener was involved in a multi-year effort to make accessory apartments legal there. Many existing accessory apartments have only one means of egress, and abutters do not like to see an outside egress staircase added. Provision of adequate parking would also be a factor in developing an accessory apartment bylaw, Ms. Wiener noted. She also stated that some accessory apartment regulations require owner-occupancy. Making accessory apartments legal would increase the need for trained inspectors to ensure compliance with the code. In response to questions on whether accessory apartments can increase the tax base or increase affordable housing, Ms. Wiener replied that the property is assessed for the number of units it appears to have. She pointed out that for an accessory unit to count on the subsidized affordable housing inventory, it has to be deed-restricted at an affordable rent, and must be marketed openly; it cannot be rented to a family member.

The idea of making only new accessory apartment comply with a new law was discussed, but members commented that selective enforcement would be problematic. There would be no penalty to maintaining an illegal apartment. The Board asked Ms. Wiener's recommendation. She said she believed that Inspectional Services would not have the capacity with existing staff numbers to inspect for compliance with a new bylaw. Ms. Wiener would inquire with the Building Inspector for a rough number of how many illegal accessory apartments in Arlington are probably unsafe or could not meet code. The Board decided to continue to think about an approach to allowing accessory apartments upon receipt of further information.

The Board discussed a possible amendment to allow public art, and agreed to have planner Don Benjamin attend the ARB meeting on October 17.

Regarding the amendment to allow the Cooke's Hollow plan for cremated remains, Ms. Kowalski would discuss with the cemetery and conservation commission chairs whether they wished to pursue this article again. Mr. Cayer offered to discuss this article with Town Meeting Members.

ARB role in master plan

Ms. Kowalski then gave an overview of a planning board's role in a community master plan process. Mr. Fitzsimmons gave a list of skills for a master plan advisory committee. Ms. Kowalski would develop a set of milestones and timeline for a master plan. Ms. Kowalski mentioned a workshop for planning boards November 3 on creating a community master plan. Ms. Scypinski said that she would attend.

Regarding the July 7 meeting minutes, members would provide their written comments from that meeting to Ms. Kowalski for inclusion in those minutes.

Mr. Cayer then moved to adjourn, seconded by Ms. Scypinski and the meeting adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,
 Carol Kowalski
 Secretary ex Officio

Documents used: Leader Bank special permit application, site plan, elevation drawings, lighting cutsheet.

