

**TOWN OF ACTON
DESIGN REVIEW BOARD
MINUTES OF SEPTEMBER 19, 2007 MEETING**

Approved Nov. 21, 07

7:30 p.m.

Room 126, Town Hall

NEXT COMMITTEE MEETING: Wednesday, October 6, 2007
Acton Town Hall, Rm 126, 7:30 p.m.

Present: Ann Sussman (Chair), Tom Peterman (Vice-Chair), Ruth Martin, Terra Fredrichs and Lynne Alpert.

Meeting was called to order at 7:35 p.m.

We reviewed the September 5th meeting notes and approved them.

REVIEW OF PROJECT – North ACTON FIRESTATION

Brian W. Humes, AIA – Jacunski Humes Architects
Fire Chief Craig
Dore Hunter, Selectman
John Murray, Acting Town Manager

Brian Humes gave a presentation on the proposed site plan and design of the Acton Firestation. He said that his firm specializes in municipal architecture with a specialty on public safety facilities (His firm designed the Acton Public Safety Building). He said that they are currently working on projects in Chatham, Dennis and Marion and that they endeavor to fit the architectural styles to the town. Their firm has no website to view photographs of these projects.

He emphasized that this site has significant design and site plan challenges. First of all, he discussed the deed restriction on the land where the ball fields are located. This land was deeded to the town through an estate, with restrictions that the land be used only for recreational purposes. This limits how the building and parking can be located on the site given that this land cannot be utilized, and also to keep the land accessible for continued recreational use. He discussed parking requirements for the fire station, access to the recreational fields, as well as potential space for storage at the back of the proposed fire station, facing the ball fields. There will be a separate entrance for the ball field, expanded parking with a circular drive going to the fields and an exit further from the intersection.

Brian brought to the meeting:

- Proposed site layout and building design – the building as now proposed as 4 bays for trucks on the ground floor, the first floor would have a public meeting room and training space, the upper floor would have living and sleeping quarters, library, computers and storage
- Elevations - difficult site with steep grades and the need for substantial fill and retaining walls.
- The bays would be glass fronts with southern exposure to reduce heating costs.
- The roof line would try to incorporate gable/pitched roof for design interest
- A tower would top the building, provide a landmark and is based on traditional design when hoses were stored in a tower.
- There is no building area to place the building on the corner of Main and Rt. 2A

Comments by the DRB:

Tom raised many challenges that the site presents:

-the limited space due to the property that is deed restricted and zoning bylaws (setbacks) that go against having flexibility in designing on this site. Tom felt it is difficult to manage the steep grade – a 10-foot grade differential between the front and back of the building and it would require a large concrete retaining wall.

Tom suggested that perhaps the building could be swiveled around on the site.

Tom questioned the need for a public meeting room due to cost and space issues. Also, could there be 3 instead of 4 bays?

Action Item: The group agreed that the DRB would like to see facades/elevations in more detail before going forward. Also, a larger segment of the area should be shown in the site drawing (for example, including the intersection at Rt. 2A and Main St.).

There was a discussion about the recreational use deed restriction, whether or not the town could encroach on the ball field land area, or in some way utilize some of the land. Town counsel would provide an opinion on this possibility if requested.

Dore expressed his opinion that it would be next to impossible to get town approval for variances on this site, given the past experience in the town. It would be almost impossible to get a variance based on 'hardship' if the objections were more design-related and not other issues. Dore mentioned that there are some towns where municipal buildings are not subject to commercial zoning bylaws. (Westborough an example). The board further discussed this option and whether or not that is something we could propose in Acton.

The Fire chief anticipates opposition to the site based on location and the fact that people now living closer to the current fire station object to losing their 'neighborhood' station and are concerned about response time.

Terra thought that it would be good to "explore" the possibility of a variance on zoning setback requirements.

Terra also does not like the large retaining wall, and prefers if the grade could be changed using a terraced approach, which might also be safer as well as provide audience seating/picnic areas for viewing sporting events.

Terra felt that it is of utmost importance that this building be a major landmark, and be visible from the intersection. Lynn also emphasized that the tower should be the center of the design. It should be a visible landmark, making the tower an important part of the design to emphasize. The group agreed that this was an important design/siting recommendation.

There was a discussion about the large bay doors and if they have southern exposure they could have glass fronts for solar effect. This led to a suggestion by Ann that the town should apply for a Renewable Energy Trust grant for a solar panel study. See MassTech.org. This would be \$40,000 for the study and \$250,000 towards the building design.

The Vaillancourt House:

Ann proposed that the DRB recommend that the house near the library parking lot be renovated. The town bought it 10 years ago and it has fallen into significant disrepair. Tom said that the HRC supports renovation and making use of this building as well. It was reported that staff had estimated that it would cost \$700,000 to renovate the building, but it was not clear how that estimate was devised. Tom said that he thought it would cost far less. Tom went on to state that the estimate should be examined to make sure that it was in line with only what was necessary."

A suggestion was made that CPA funds could be utilized.

Action Item: Suggest applying for CPA funds to renovate the Vaillancourt House.
The meeting was adjourned at 9:30

Respectfully submitted,

Ruth Martin