

**TOWN OF ACTON
DESIGN REVIEW BOARD
MINUTES OF MARCH 19, 2008 MEETING**

7:30 p.m.
Room 126, Town Hall

NEXT COMMITTEE MEETING: Wednesday, April 2, 2008
Acton Town Hall, Rm 126, 7:30 p.m.

Present: Ann Sussman (Chair), Tom Peterman (Vice-Chair), Terra Friedrichs, and Holly Ben-Joseph.

Meeting was called to order at 7:40 p.m.

We reviewed the March 5th meeting notes and approved them with minor changes (at the end of the meeting).

We reviewed the proposal for the new commercial development for Kelly's Corner. The developers – Chris Starr, and Chris Bailey, with Peter Quinn of Peter Quinn Architects described the project to us. The following are the major points of the presentation:

- The new project site includes three parcels – Meineke Motors, Bank of America drive through teller, and the Bowladrome site so that the total land area is about 1-3/4 acres.
- The 30' setback constrained how the buildings on the site could be manipulated.
- The site also has grade issues
- The proposal shows one building at the street corner (one tenant, probably will be a drug store), and one other building with multiple tenants.
- A large space between the two buildings exists for parking, which also is located behind the smaller building.
- Large trucks will service the drug store at the Mass Ave side of the building
- Both buildings will have awnings along the frontage
- There are minimal windows proposed (on any side) of the drug store building
- The other building will have windows and doors facing Rt 27 and the parking lot. The side facing the pizza store will not have windows.
- The design is currently below the FAR, but it has more parking spaces that required by code (?)

The committee members asked the developers why they didn't maximize the FAR and building a second story. The developers said it is not economically feasible at this time.

Lack of parking is the biggest issue which is required by the clients (and future tenants)

The board members were concerned with the proposed development and our comments are summed up in a memo, which was sent to the developers (and the board of selectmen?) See the comments at the end of these notes. One major concern was that the architecture wasn't appropriate for the gateway into Acton, and that it didn't have the desired 'look' as described in the design guidelines.

April 17 is the next Fire House meeting. DRB members are encouraged to attend.
The meeting was adjourned at 9:15.

Copy of the Board's Comments on the Kelly's Corner Project



Design Review Board

472 Main Street
Acton, MA. 01720
Re: Schematic Design for Kelly's Corner March 19, 2008

Preliminary Review

The Design Review Board met with Chris Starr and Chris Baily, the developers of the parcel at the intersection of Main Street and Massachusetts Avenue, at our meeting on March 19, 2008. Also in attendance was their architect for the project Peter Quinn of Peter Quinn Architects, LLC. The proponents of the project informed the Board that they had purchased or were in the process of purchasing three contiguous parcels currently occupied by Meineke Mufflers, The Acton Bowl-a-Drome, and a Bank of America ATM. The proposal is to demolish the structures on the three parcels and erect in its place two new one story retail buildings with parking and a drive through ATM at the rear of the site. The architect made a brief presentation describing the design criteria and proposed design for the two buildings. Everyone expressed lament that current zoning for the Kelly Corner district imposed front yard setbacks and parking requirements that make it difficult to create a vibrant and engaging pedestrian streetscape. The current site plan indicates a 30' deep landscaped buffer between the building and the sidewalk at the street.

Following the presentation there were further questions and comments by the Board about the proposal with the expectation that the design may be refined and improved before it is finalized. These comments and recommendations are summarized below:

- 1) The corner site is among the most important sites in Acton and a corner stone to the Kelly Corner district with the potential to shape future development in the immediate vicinity. The Board's expectation therefore is for a project that will have a lasting beneficial impact on the site, that is appropriate for the context and that will serve as a landmark at this important crossroads.
- 2) The proposed design does not live up to the expectations created with developers several months ago when this project was initially discussed. The project seems to be shaped largely by the design criteria of the drug store retailer rather than our published guidelines. We strongly encourage the proponents to modify the design meet the intent of our guidelines and the Kelly Corner Special Provisions in Section 5.6 of the Zoning Bylaws.
- 3) The Board would like to encourage the applicant to increase the density of development on the site and take full advantage of the 36' height limit by adding another floor to both buildings if possible for business or residential use. The one story buildings otherwise appear to be a generic retail formula that is unfortunately associated with typical suburban sprawl development that we wish to discourage.
- 4) If it is not possible to add additional floors the Board recommends substituting sloped roofs for the flat roofs proposed along with other architectural features that would animate the roofscape.
- 5) The corner building should have a continuous storefront along the street – even if it is only a shadow box for display. Long blank walls or walls with only high transom windows should be avoided.

- 6) The corner building should address the intersection with a significant architectural element. If possible an entrance to the building should be at this location. In the current design it appears the building is turning its back to the intersection and does not recognize the importance of this public space.
- 7) The smaller of the two buildings should present its longest dimension to the street with each retail tenant having a storefront and an entrance facing the street. A rear entrance accessible from the parking lot would allow easy access by drivers.
- 8) The gap between the two buildings should be as small as possible to both screen the large parking lot and to create as continuous of a street wall as possible.
- 9) Since the smaller of the two buildings is significantly closer to the street than the building on the neighboring site special attention should be placed on the wall perpendicular to the street as it will be very prominent when approaching the intersection from South Acton.
- 10) The site plan should be enlarged to show more of the immediate context including building footprints on all of the abutting parcels and across the street.
- 11) The landscaped buffer should not be only lawn with trees but should also have well designed hardscape areas for outdoor dining, vendors or gatherings
- 12) The proposed materials and vernacular of the buildings do not fit comfortably into the small town New England vernacular of the town. Acton's historic architect is varied and so rather than send you images of our favorite building refer to www.cornishlp.com for some good images of successful small scale streetscapes. Also reference the sketch below, not for specific design elements, but for the "look and feel" we would like this project in general to aspire to.
- 13) The Board encourages the architect to break up the massing and scale of the structure by modulating the footprint and elevations to create a more pedestrian-friendly residential scale.
- 14) The Board has expressed support for zoning variances or bylaw changes that would result in a better project that more closely aligns with our guidelines. The developer agreed to prepare a study of what could be done with a change in required setbacks for instance. This would also serve to illustrate in a tangible way the unfortunate consequences of present dimensional restrictions for this zoning district and may mobilize support for needed changes.
- 15) The Board praises the effort to set parking back from the street rather than placing it in front of the buildings. Further screening and reduction to only the minimum number of spaces required by bylaw is recommended.

The developer agreed to study the proposal further in light of these comments and recommendations and to bring a revised design to our next meeting on April 2nd. We look forward to these design improvements and continued collaboration on the development of this important site. We thank the developer's team for taking the time to meet with us and their commitment to creating a high quality project that will benefit the town. We invite you to contact us if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Thomas Peterman

Design Review Board