

PLANNING BOARD

John R. Bethoney, Chair
Michael A. Podolski, Esq., Vice-Chair
James E. O’Brien IV, Clerk
Jessica L. Porter
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**TOWN OF DEDHAM
450 WASHINGTON STREET
DEDHAM, MA**

**MINUTES OF THE PLANNING BOARD MEETING
VIA ZOOM
OCTOBER 28, 2020, 7:00 P.M.**

BOARD MEMBERS:

John R. Bethoney	Chair
Michael A. Podolski, Esq.	Vice-Chair
James E. O’Brien IV	Member
Jessica L. Porter	Member
James McGrail	Member
Ralph Steeves	Associate Member

PLANNING DEPARTMENT STAFF:

Jeremy Rosenberger	Planning Director
Jennifer Doherty	Administrative Assistant

GUESTS:

Steven Findlen Senior Project Manager, McMahon and Associates

Minutes prepared by Angela Fracassi of Minutes Solutions Inc. from an audio recording.

1. CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Bethoney called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. and explained the meeting procedures to the public.

**2. PUBLIC HEARING
222 AMES STREET – NORFOLK & DEDHAM MUTIAL FIRE INSURANCE COMPANY,
MAJOR NONRESIDENTIAL PROJECT**

Guests:

John Connelly, Esq.	Attorney, Hinckley Allen
Justin Mosca	Project Manager and Civil Engineer, VHB Engineering

Jeff Tompkins
Joe Murray

Architect, SGA
President and CEO, NDMFIC

Norfolk Dedham Mutual Fire Insurance Company requests a special permit for a major nonresidential project, a special permit for a retaining wall in excess of four feet, and a major site plan review to demolish an existing office building and construct a three-story office building and 176 off-street parking spaces at 222 Ames Street in Dedham. The Applicant was represented by their solicitor, John Connelly.

On a motion by Ms. Porter, seconded by Mr. O'Brien, it was resolved to dispense with the reading of the public notice related to 222 Ames Street. A roll call vote was conducted. Motion carried unanimously.

Attorney Connelly stated that the building was constructed in the 1950s and met the accessibility and energy standards of the time, however, it is not economically feasible to retrofit the building in a way that meets current standards. The applicant did not seek any waivers and stated that the adjacent wetlands will not be disrupted.

Mr. Mosco presented the site plan. The proposed building was slightly larger and would shift approximately 25 feet east in order to widen the drop-off area in front of the building to accommodate fire access. Visitor and accessible parking would be added to the front of the building, with a walkway and landscaping island installed in the parking areas. Two patio areas on the north and south sides of the site would be installed, along with two retaining walls. There would be electric vehicle charging stations for both visitors and staff. Trash pickup would remain relatively unchanged. The Conservation Commission requested that the work not be done right on the edge of the wetlands. Because of this, Mr. Mosco anticipated that the final design may contain two or three fewer parking spots than originally anticipated. The plan included significant stormwater management measures, including three separate infiltration systems. These will be reviewed by the Conservation Commission. The photometrics plan stated that the lighting will be improved from a safety perspective, and no additional light would shine on the wetlands.

Mr. Tompkins presented the architectural plans. He outlined the plans for the electrical charging stations, bicycle parking, fitness center, showers, trash and recycling pickup areas, and entry and reception areas. There would be an elevator for accessibility purposes, conference rooms, and an open-office layout. The building was designed to be as energy efficient as possible. The roof will have an all-electric heating and cooling system, and energy recovery systems to bring in the fresh air. These were all among the most energy-efficient systems available. The building would be red brick with pre-cast sills to pay homage to the original building. The garage would have sufficient airflow to avoid any carbon monoxide issues but will be equipped with carbon monoxide sensors. All entrances will be accessible. The existing tree and flagpole would remain intact. The Board recommended that the Applicant preserve the wrought iron gate, as it is popular with residents.

Mr. Joe Murray thanked the Board and members of the public for their time. Deciding to tear down the existing building was not easy, however, it was the best option to be able to stay in the Town of Dedham.

The Board informed the Applicant that complete existing conditions photography must be submitted with the application. The Chair noted that McMahon and Associates performed a peer review on behalf of the Town of Dedham, which will be discussed at the next meeting.

The Chair opened the floor to questions from the public.

Lindsay Looney, 168 Ames, inquired when construction will begin and asked if there will be any nighttime work.

Mr. Connelly answered that demolition and construction will start in January 2021 and the construction process will be completed in early 2022.

The Chair added that the Board will determine the hours of construction throughout the review process prior to granting the permits.

The Chair asked if the roadway in front of the property on Ames Street will be newly paved given the other construction projects in the area.

The Applicant answered that the area will not be newly paved.

The Board inquired where the office will be temporarily relocated.

Mr. Murray stated that the office had been temporarily moved to a building in Needham, however, the majority of staff work remotely due to COVID-19.

The Board inquired whether the Applicant had selected a contractor.

Mr. Murray stated that the decision would be finalized shortly.

The Chair asked how many employees worked at the site prior to COVID-19.

Mr. Murray stated that there were one hundred employees coming to the office, and he foresaw the size of the company remaining relatively unchanged, however, the company intends to offer remote work options moving forward.

Ms. Porter inquired if there would be walkways in the parking areas to access the building and thanked the Applicant for including electric vehicle charging stations.

Mr. Mosco answered that the west visitor parking will have a sidewalk, however other areas will not have a sidewalk due to lack of space.

There were no further questions from the Board or the public.

The Chair introduced Steven Findlen, Senior Project Manager, McMahon and Associates. Mr. Findlen led a peer review of the Applicant's proposal and identified six issues with the site plans. He reported that he had received a response from the Applicant on October 28, 2020, which was under review. A full report will be presented at the next meeting.

The Applicant confirmed that the site presentation was complete, notwithstanding the response from McMahon and Associates.

On a motion by Ms. Porter, seconded by Mr. McGrail, it was resolved that the next public meeting between the Town of Dedham and Norfolk and Dedham Mutual Fire Insurance Company was scheduled for November 12, 2020, at 8:00 p.m. A roll call vote was conducted. Motion carried unanimously.

ACTION – Planning Department Staff will ensure that the Planning Board has the authority to approve the application for retaining walls in excess of four feet.

3. **PUBLIC MEETING**
480 SPRAGUE STREET – AMAZON, INC., MINOR SITE PLAN REVIEW

Guests:

Peter A. Zhaka, Esq.	Attorney
Brad Griggs	Senior Manager, Economic Development, Amazon
Jeff Schumer	Manager, Economic Development, Amazon
Michael Kelleher	Senior Program Manager, Amazon
Katie Coakes	Station Operations Manager, Amazon
Suzanne King	Civil Engineer, BL Companies
Michael Deon	Traffic Engineer, CL
Marci Loeber	Property Owner's Representative, Griffiths Properties
Donna Panino	Property Owner's Representative, Griffiths Properties

The Applicant Amazon had requested a minor site plan review in order to utilize the entire property at 480 Sprague Street in Dedham. McMahon and Associates performed a peer review of the Applicant's traffic study. Mr. Findlen was present to discuss the findings of the peer review.

Mr. Findlen explained that McMahon and Associates was retained by the Town of Dedham and paid by the Applicant to review the Applicant's proposal and related documentation. His report initially identified 25 issues, including:

- inconsistency in the building size and site plans,
- issues with existing conditions,
- confirmation and clarification needed of peak hour traffic volumes,
- a recommendation that East Street Rotary be included in the traffic study area,
- a recommendation to include exact traffic counts in the appendices,
- a recommendation to include two additional years of crash data,
- a request for confirmation that the background growth rate included in the study is adequate
- clarifications on trip generation and distribution numbers,
- clarification of the software settings used,
- clarification regarding the parking and vehicular circulation,
- a recommendation that additional signage be installed, and site lines are improved coming in and out of driveways,
- assurance that trucks and emergency vehicles can enter the site safely,
- confirmation that dumpsters were shown correctly on the site plan,
- the inclusion of snow storage on the site plan,
- a request for a lighting plan,
- a request to review the operational management plan in terms of the frequency of trucks accessing the facility,
- mitigation options to address noise, dust, speed, and maneuverability.

The Chair opened the floor to questions from the Board.

The Board inquired whether the Applicant has reviewed other potential routes to lessen the impact of heavy overnight traffic on the community.

The Applicant responded that it had not.

Mr. O'Brien stated that he will not approve any mitigation efforts that include widening Dedham streets.

The Board inquired if using freight rail has been considered.

Mr. Griggs stated that he was not aware that Amazon had considered freight for this location.

The Chair requested clarification on this item at the next meeting.

The Board inquired about measures to reduce idling time.

Mr. Griggs explained that tractor-trailers are instructed to disconnect, pull over, and park while being loaded. Van drivers are instructed to drive up to the loading zone or staging area and turn the engine off.

The Chair inquired if tractor-trailers are using Sprague Street to get to the Hyde Park lot.

Mr. Briggs stated that tractor-trailers no longer need to access the Hyde Park lot since the other tenants have vacated 480 Sprague Street.

Mr. Zhaka explained the scope of the proposal and the process around responding to the peer review. The Applicant responded to the peer review's 25 recommendations and was awaiting McMahon and Associates' response. The project will not increase traffic to and from the site and is designed to increase efficiency by eliminating the need for off-site van parking. The peak associated on-site at any given time is 105 and there is adequate parking for employees' vehicles and delivery vans. The state recently redesigned the rotaries, including the rotary on East Street. He stated that it is possible to turn on the rotary without driving over it, however, he acknowledged that the new design is tight. When Amazon first came to town the Town of Dedham requested that they use this route.

Amazon vehicles are not being directed to go anywhere except to 480 Sprague Street and their delivery destination. Mr. Deon noted that many heavy vehicles pass 480 Sprague Street without stopping and are not related to Amazon. This included 77 heavy vehicles in the early peak hours, 105 in the afternoon peak hours, and 51 in the evening peak, and that 95% of the trucks entering 480 Sprague Street are branded. Trucks not affiliated with the Sprague Street facility could be using Whiting Avenue.

The Board noted that trucks entering the Amazon site in the overnight hours are disruptive to residents, and Amazon must be more sensitive to this dynamic. The Board noted that the traffic study does not take into account the overnight hours when an average of 36 tractor-trailers enters and exit the facility. The Board noted that many residents' complaints state that overnight noise disturbances did not exist prior to Amazon's arrival.

The Board recommended that Amazon use a different route that avoids East Street and suggested potential routes that use Route 138.

The Board noted that Amazon was planning to open another facility near the Norwood-Westwood town line and inquired how that would affect the operations at Dedham. Mr. Briggs answered that the newly proposed Amazon facility would reduce the number of zip codes that Dedham covers once it comes online and would not increase traffic or site operations in Dedham.

The Chair requested a comparison of the current site traffic and the revised agreement from 2017, to be presented by Mr. Zhaka at the next meeting.

The Chair opened the floor to questions from the public.

Kerry Ann Hawkins, 347 Sprague Street, inquired why the traffic study did not include seven days per week, 24-hours per day, as traffic coming in and out of Amazon is not limited to typical peak times.

Mr. Deon explained that traffic studies typically only include the morning and afternoon commuting peak times.

The Board inquired if Mr. Findlen was familiar with any traffic studies that included overnight or other non-peak hours.

Mr. Findlen and Mr. Dion answered that although it is not common practice, it can be done.

Joanne Keevaney inquired if the van traffic has increased from 2019 levels.

Mr. Griggs stated that operations have increased due to COVID-19.

Ms. Hawkins, commented that video surveillance of vehicles exiting and entering the site would be helpful.

Sarah Basu stated that she agreed with the Board's request that Amazon examines its routes and determine which route would mitigate the effects on the community.

The Board inquired about safety measures beyond training.

Mr. Griggs answered that drivers are given a reasonable amount to deliver, and vehicles go through safety checks before leaving and upon returning. If drivers are delayed, Amazon sends out additional drivers to discourage drivers from attempting to complete their deliveries in an unsafe manner.

The Chair stressed that he has repeatedly requested that Amazon vehicles post an identification number. He also asked if drivers are incentivized to complete their routes quickly.

Mr. Griggs responded that there are no incentives to complete a route faster than expected.

The Chair reported the task force will move forward with some changes. The Applicant has agreed and will meet with the task force for discussions. Mr. McGrail had previously agreed to lead this project. The Chair stated that the next meeting would be scheduled after the first meeting between the Applicant and the task force.

4. **PUBLIC MEETING**
910-928 PROVIDENCE HIGHWAY, ACP PROPERTIES, MODIFICATION SITE PLAN REVIEW

Scott Henderson of Henderson Consulting presented a request for determination of insignificant modification at 910 to 928 Providence Highway in Dedham. The proposed modifications are to switch the entrance and exit driveways and install ADA-compliant accessible walkways that lead to the entrance of the building.

On a motion made by Mr. McGrail, seconded by Mr. O'Brien, it was resolved that the plan presented by Mr. Henderson on behalf of ACP Properties be deemed insubstantial. A roll call vote was conducted. Motion carried unanimously.

On a motion made by Mr. McGrail, seconded by Ms. Porter, it was resolved to approve the plan presented by Mr. Henderson on behalf of ACP Properties as presented. A roll call vote was conducted. Motion carried unanimously.

5. **FALL 2020 TOWN MEETING – ARTICLE 23**

The Board reviewed and discussed a draft of Article 23 of the Town Meeting Zoning By-Laws. The Board previously requested changes to section 4.2.2. The Board reviewed and amended the draft by-law and noted it does not hamper the Board's ability to grant waivers.

On a motion made by Ms. Porter, seconded by Mr. McGrail, it was resolved to approve Article 23 as amended. A roll call vote was conducted. Motion carried unanimously.

6. **PLANNING BOARD ASSOCIATE MEMBER**

On a motion made by Mr. McGrail, seconded by Mr. O'Brien, it was resolved to re-appoint Mr. Steeves as an Associate Member of the Planning Board. A roll call vote was conducted. Motion carried unanimously.

7. **PLANNING BOARD ANNUAL REPORTS**

The Board received the annual reports for the fiscal years 2018 and 2019.

ACTION – The Board will review the reports and forward any comments to Mr. Rosenberger by e-mail.

ACTION – Mr. Rosenberger will ensure that Mr. Steeves is informed of any upcoming special permit meetings.

8. **ADJOURNMENT**

A motion made by Mr. Podolski, seconded by Mr. McGrail, it was resolved to adjourn the meeting at 10:53 p.m. A roll call vote was taken. Motion carried unanimously.