

ZONING BOARD MEETING AUGUST 16TH, 2023

The meeting of the Zoning Board of the Borough of Somerville was called to order by Chair Arthur Adair at 7:00 p.m. and stated that adequate notice of this meeting had been provided in accordance with the “Open Public Meetings Act”.

Board Members Present: Arthur Adair, Roberta Karpinecz, Brian Vadimsky, Richard O’Neill
John Flores, Eric Alvarez, Stewart Daniels

Board Members Absent: Ed Allatt, Morgan McLachlan

Professionals Present: Clifford Gibbons, Esq., Board Attorney and Michael Cole, Board Planner and Engineer

See transcript.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Upon a motion by Roberta Karpinecz, seconded by Eric Alvarez, the regular and executive minutes of July 19th, were approved upon a roll call vote.

Roll Call Aye: Arthur Adair, Roberta Karpinecz, Brian Vadimsky, John Flores, Eric
 Alvarez, Stewart Daniels

 Nay: None

 Abstain: None

RESOLUTION

2022-022Z

1 L Somerville Land Holdings, LLC

1 US Route 206 & Bridge Street

B123 L11.01

Upon a motion by Richard O’Neill, seconded by Roberta Karpinecz, the resolution for application # 22-022Z, was approved upon a roll call vote.

Roll Call Aye: Arthur Adair, Roberta Karpinecz, Brian Vadimsky, John Flores, Eric
 Alvarez, Stewart Daniels

 Nay: None

 Abstain: None

LAND USE

23-006Z

RWJ Barnabas Health

453 Williams Street

B81 L1.011

John DeLuca Esq, attorney for the applicant RWJ Barnabas Health, addressed the board to provide an overview of the project explain that the applicant has filed before the planning board for a c (1) hardship variance for wall sign location, number of wall signs, wall sign size, height and width, and wall sign area. Mr. DeLuca went on to give geographic location of the parcel and provided information on the property stating that they were in both the B-4 Zone as well as the R-2 Zone and had previously appeared before the Zoning board on an amended sitrep lance application.

Mr. DeLuca informed the board that he would like two witnesses this evening. First Mr. Robert M. Scarola, as a fact witness and professional who designed the signs as well as the President of County Graphic Solutions. Mr. Scarola will be describing the dimensions and location of the sign and how they will be attached to the building. The second of the two witnesses will be Mr. Jay Beispiel, a fact witness and project manager for the applicant - will be explaining the purpose and the necessity of the signs.

John DeLuca Esq, attorney for the applicant, then called upon his first witness.

Mr. Scarola was then sworn in by Board Attorney Clifford Gibbons, Esq.

Under direct examination by John DeLuca Esq. Mr. Scarola was asked to explain the number of signs, dimensions of the signs, and what went into the design. Mr. Scarola provided commentary that there is an established RWJ Barnabas Health brand that they adhere to when working with their corporate marketing team, to make sure that they honor the marking guidelines. The RWJ Barnabas Health logo that they will be displaying is the brand logo that will be fabricated and installed on all buildings, hospitals, medical offices etc. consisting of standard internally illuminated channel letters. Mr. DeLuca then asked Mr. Scarola to review the dimensions of the signs. Mr. Scarola provided the dimensions of 2-foot high by 109 inches wide fitting within the gable of the building. Mr. Scarola additionally spoke about the signs specific to the front of the building as well as the rear sign. Mr. DeLuca then asked for an explanation on the operation of the signs. Mr. Scarola described the front facing illuminated LED lighting as low voltage soft lighting that requires 120 volts, he also confirmed that the rear facing sign will not be illuminated. There were no further questions at this time from Attorney for the Applicant John DeLuca Esq.

At this time Chairman Adair opened up for questions from the board.

Board Member Daniels asked Mr. Scarola if the light would be on 24/7. Mr. Scarola responded that it would not be, and it would be on a timer and set to hours in correspondence with the town's ordinance.

Michael Cole, Board Planner and Engineer then asked a clarifying question about which sign would and would not be illuminated and if the illuminated sign would be dimmable. Mr. Scarola confirmed that it is something they can investigate so that they can provide accurate foot candles in the field.

At this time Chairman Adair opened up for questions from the public.

At this time John DeLuca Esq, attorney for the applicant called upon his second witness Jay Beispiel.

Mr. Beispiel was then sworn in by Board Attorney Clifford Gibbons, Esq.

Under direct examination by John DeLuca Esq. Mr. Beispiel was asked his position was with RWJ as asked if he would provide an explanation about the need of the signs. Mr. Beispiel gave an overview of his role as well as the needs for signage on their medical buildings such as a wayfinding tool. He also confirmed that his employer, RWJ operates every aspect of the site. There were no further questions at this time from Attorney for the Applicant John DeLuca Esq.

At this time Chairman Adair opened up for questions from the board.

Michael Cole, Board Planner and Engineer asked if the applicant would be able to address the debris behind the dumpster on the site as well as the two dead trees. Mr. Beispiel confirmed that this was something that he could look into with the management group.

Clifford Gibbons, Esq., Board Attorney then asked if the terms, conditions, and recommendations in Michael Coles report be a condition of approval. John DeLuca Esq. confirmed that it was agreeable to the applicant.

At this time Chairman Adair opened up for questions from the public. Hearing no public comment, the public portion was closed.

John DeLuca Esq, attorney for the applicant, gave a summation of the application and testimony heard before the board.

Board member O'Neill commented that the thought the addition of the signs was a good idea as people need to find the building and that he was pleased the rear sign was not lighted was fine for the neighborhood.

Chairman Adair then looked to each board member for comment.

Upon a motion by Richard O’Neill, seconded by John Flores, Zoning Board application 23-006Z RWJ Barnabas Health, was approved upon a roll call vote.

Roll Call Aye: Arthur Adair, Roberta Karpinecz, Brian Vadimsky, Richard O’Neill, John Flores, Stewart Daniels

Nay: None

Abstain: None

23-008Z

40 West Main Street, LLC

40-44 West Main Street

B113 L25

Michael O’Grodnick Esq. attorney for the applicant 40 West Main Street, LLC addressed the board and presented an overview of the location of the property as well as a description of the history of past application along with the application that was in front of them for this evening. Mr. O’Grodnick explained that the current application seeks to advance with residential development on the upper floors of the building while continuing to provide the retail and restaurant space on the ground level. The application proposes the conversion of eight one-bedroom apartments on the second and third floors. He went on to explain that the residential tenants will have the benefit of the owners also own the parking lot and that they have agreed to deed restrict and designate those parking spaces to the tenants at not additional monthly cost. Additionally, he stated that for purposes of improvement there are no substantial site improvements, the facade of the building is intended to be renovated, replacement of the windows on the second and third floors, applying a new stucco finish, installing uniform canopies. The applicant is also looking to run new electrical and is looking to and will agree to sprinkler the whole building including the basement.

Mr. O’Grodnick then went on to address the three potential variances identified in the application including parking, sign height, and the labeling on a separate bedroom on the plans. He stated that the application will comply with all items and revise the application to meet the bulk standards in the zone – resulting in zero variances for the application.

At this time Susan DeHart and Dylan Catino from USA Architects were sworn in by Clifford Gibbons, Esq., Board Attorney.

Under direct examination by Mr. O’Grodnick, Ms. DeHart provided the board with a brief synopsis of her professional history and licenses. Mr. O’Grodnick then asked that they walk the board through what is currently existing on the site and what is proposed for the second and third floors.

Mr. Catino reviewed previously stated items such as converting the offices to one-bedroom apartments, design of the building including the exterior facade, replacing all windows, etc.

Chairman Adair then opened up to questions from the board.

Michael Cole, Board Planner and Engineer asked if there was something that can be done about the metal door on the first floor. Ms. DeHart responded that the plan was to replace the door.

Board member Flores questioned if there was rear access to the apartments. Ms. Dehart confirmed that there was not.

Michael Cole commented that the Fire Marshall was very pleased with the applicant as they agreed to do a 13 system throughout the building including the basement and attic.

A COA obligation and school-aged children impact were also discussed briefly.

Chairman Adair then opened up to the members of the public for any questions on the testimony.

Hearing no public comment the board then discussed the report that was prepared by Michael Cole as well as the parking component and license agreement for the dumpster.

At this time Paul Ricci, professional planner was then sworn in by Attorney for the Board Clifford Gibbons, Esq.

Under direct examination by Michael O'Grodnick Esq. Mr. Ricci explained that from a planning standpoint the application was clearly a positive one, stating that it's repurposing a building for a needed use today as well as adding some much-needed improvements to the building. He also addressed a few items from the master plan such as housing goals and policies, preserving and establishing residential areas, promoting redevelopment, stimulating business and retail activity within the Central Business District, as well as decreasing the demand for parking with the deed restricted spaces that would be provided to tenants. Concluding that for these reason the application serves the public need.

Chairman Adair then opened up to the board for questions of Mr. Ricci. Hearing no questions from the board he then opened up to questions from the public.

Member of the public Greg Storms commented that he was in support of the project and agreed that he likes to see people come to town and invest money in Somerville, and building apartments where there are vacant building.

Hearing no further comment, the public portion was closed.

Further discussion was had amongst the board members including parking, updating the façade, aligning with the current climate and workforce housing etc.

Upon a motion by Richard O'Neill, seconded by Roberta Karpinecz, Zoning Board application 23-008Z 40 West Main Street, LLC, was approved upon a roll call vote.

Roll Call Aye: Arthur Adair, Roberta Karpinecz, Brian Vadimsky, Richard O'Neill, John Flores, Eric Alvarez, Stewart Daniels

Nay: None

Abstain: None

ITEMS NOT ON THE AGENDA

The board members and professionals had a discussion on ad-hoc committees including how they are formed and how they should be formed in the future.

AJOURN

The meeting was adjourned at 8:24 p.m.