

Approved 4/4/2023

Zoning Board of Appeals Meeting Minutes

March 28, 2023 7:00 p.m.

Public Hearing

Northfield Town Hall

Members Present: Jennifer Cox, Chair, Erin Jaworski, Clerk, Al Dietrich, Michael Bird, Larry Hansen and Vivien Venskowski, administrative assistant.

Absent: Shawn Foster

Audience: See attached sign-in sheet.

Jennifer Cox, Chair opened the meeting at 7:05 p.m. She read the following public hearing legal notice "The Zoning Board of Appeals of the Town of Northfield will hold a public hearing at 7:00 p.m. on Tuesday March 28, 2023 at the Town Hall, 69 Main Street, Northfield, MA on the application by The Town of Northfield, 69 Main Street, Northfield, MA 01360 for a Variance or whatever relief is needed for the construction of a new public safety facility (Police, Fire & EMS Headquarters) with a reduced front offset to accommodate the building (191' Length x 64' Width, 1.5 stories, apparatus bays 84' x 97.5'), site and environmental conditions at 121 Main Street, Northfield MA 01360 (Assessor map 17-D2.2) as required by the Northfield Zoning Bylaws per Section 7.2, Table 2." She noted that she had copies of the legal postings and certified mail receipts.

She requested that the representative for this proposal do a presentation. William Murray, sub consultant, and John MacMillan, architect did a presentation and responded to questions. They also introduced Matt Sturz, Colliers project leader.

Mr. Murray noted this would be new construction on property the town owns. The parcel is 26.96 acres, near Mill Brook, includes a flood plain, a perennial stream/River Protection Act. The Conservation Commission and DEP have been contacted. The restraints on the property are due to the Mill River, flood plain and wetlands and the topography, soil conditions, slope, and lot shape. He feels all of the issues have been addressed with the current plan. There are specific considerations related to building a public safety complex, including siting. The Town of Northfield has looked at multiple properties along Main Street and sent out RFPs. This property was chosen due to its unique properties. It is ideally located on Main Street, centrally located for ER services, and has town sewer/water. Studies and the Master Plan have noted the need for a public safety complex. It was noted that the Police, Fire and EMS chiefs produced a PowerPoint presentation outlining the issues with the current facilities and the urgent need for this facility. This project benefits the public good and is sponsored by the Town. The Bylaws were discussed as it relates to this project. Due to the issues with this property, slopes, topography, and Mill Brook the building has been reduced in size. The design includes shared use, common spaces, training/conference room, bays, private areas for police interviews, parking areas for public and employees. The building is traditional in appearance to blend with Main Street, it's a 1 story structure, with stone veneer to mimic the Library and wood trim. The apparatus portion of the building drops down 4 feet to hide it from view. The fire apparatus can leave from both sides of the building so that vehicles can be backed in. The site is designed so that the employee parking

is close in proximity to the apparatus. The site is designed to keep employee areas private. The public access is separated from the rest of the building areas. There are plans for future improvements such as a charging station and covered area in parking lot for the police cruisers as funds allow. There has been considerable planning regarding the storm water drainage, it is a low tech easy to maintain system. And a landscape plan with plantings including shrubs and trees for shade. The plan does not infringe on the Mill Brook Trail for recreation. Junipers will be planted to screen the parking lot area from those using the trail. The Planning Board has approved the Site Plan Review. The wetland areas have been flagged and the applicant will file a notice of intent with the Conservation Commission next week.

The shape of the lot and extenuating circumstances with the wetlands does not allow any other options for the building location. The only part of the structure that the variance applies to is the 12 foot front section, which includes the public area. Due to the needs of this facility, security and functionality the public section is in the front of the building. There are permits that will be required from Mass DOT, Conservation Commission, ZBA and approval at Town Meeting.

The Board members asked questions and answers are noted below.

- Run off concerns have been addressed with a berm of glacial till
- The sidewalk extended to front entry but not beyond, cross walk – none
- Sight lines are good and no signal/traffic lights needed
- Fire Station is deteriorating, concrete is dropping on apparatus, the upstairs can no longer be used for larger vehicles, not enough space to replace hoses inside of building and staff training area needs as there are 29 members.
- Police Department is in basement of the Town Hall where flooding has been an issue, those under arrest have to walk past members of the public and senior center and witnesses have no privacy.
- EMS is currently renting a property, space not adequate as department is growing, 25 staff members, no storage for supplies, no room for training or vehicles.
- The main wall of the building is behind the setback, adding an additional floor would require stairs/elevator for ADA compliance and would add considerable expense. The community/training/ meeting area the public would have access is too close to the lot line. Needs of the Fire, Police and EMS were all taken into consideration in the building design.
- Building is a safe secure facility, no local dispatch, building would be mostly dark and empty at night. There would be a blue light phone available for emergencies.
- Structure is designed to withstand severe weather and would be an emergency command center.
- Meeting space – would be used for training, routine meetings, public can utilize for club or Boy Scout meetings. The meeting room and public parking has been kept small to reduce building size, costs and land use.

This ended the presentation portion of the meeting.

Jennifer Cox disclosed that she has property/rental on Mill Street. She noted if there were any objections to her voting she would abstain. She could continue to run the meeting. There were no objections.

The public comment portion of the meeting was opened at 8:03pm. Questions and responses as follows:

- There are no solar panels and only 1 charging station – the roof is large enough for panels possibly in the future. Charging stations are expensive and are not self-sustaining.
- There was a concern about sound bouncing off the front of the building towards neighbors across street. It was noted the building is lower than street level and street landscaping will prevent this issue.
- There was one letter in opposition of this project. However, it did not refer to anything specific to the requested variance.

There were no further comments or questions from the public and this portion of the meeting was closed at 8:09pm.

The Board discussed the role of the ZBA tonight and the two requests in the application.

- Variance request
- Relief from the fee of \$150

The Town Administrator noted this fee would just mean the town paying the town. And expenses related to this project would be paid for from the project budget.

On a motion by Jaworski, seconded by Dietrich it was unanimously voted to waive the fee for this variance application.

The Board began deliberations

- Financial hardship – “community section”. It would be a substantial hardship to move any portion of the proposed building, due to land constraints
- Detriment to Public Good - there is no detriment to the public good. The building fits in with the look of Main Street, sits down lower but it needs to be visible, and it is centrally located
- Concerns were addressed and the building foot print was reduced to match property. There were limitations due to environmental issues. The Town conducted a search and evaluations for appropriate parcels
- It would be a hardship to the Town to not grant a variance
- The public will have an opportunity to vote on the project
- There have been multiple meetings and an open process
- Criteria – 12 foot, community/training center
- Master Plan notes a new complex is a goal
- The building can’t be located elsewhere on the property
- The public had no objections or negative comments except the sound issue
- With the variance the front section of the building is 12 feet off of the property line. Many houses on Main Street are closer to the property line, this will not be any different.
- Side walk only to the community area
- Fits in well with the feel/atmosphere of community

Findings – Variance Application – Northfield Public Safety Facility

ZBA determined that the applicant established justification for granting a variance. The applicant established there was hardship because of the relating soil conditions, shape or topography of the land or structures, and especially affecting the land or structures, but not affecting generally the zoning district in which it is located, a literal enforcement of the provisions of the bylaw would involve substantial hardship, financial or otherwise, to the petitioner and that desirable relief may be granted without substantial detriment to the public good and without nullifying or substantially derogating the intent or purpose of such bylaw.

FINDINGS:

1. The soil conditions and rear sloping topography

Subject site is primarily sand-based soil. And the existing soil near the wetlands have relatively shallow depths to groundwater. The soil, rear sloping topography and ground water depths impacts the location of building on the site. The combination of sandy soils on slopes and shallow groundwater elevations on the easterly portions of the developable areas requires development of the building to be pushed toward the westerly portion, Main Street, of the developable areas. Because of these constraints, construction of a portion of the building is pushed within the front setback area. Both the site and building design are located to minimize the impact on the slopes and constructing on the slopes.

2. Lot Shape/Riverfront.

The Site is located adjacent to wetlands. Development within the riverfront area, known as Mill Brook, is heavily restricted within 100' of the edge of the river and is restricted in the 100' to 200' outer riverfront. Because of the regulatory area, applicant focused much of the development towards Main St to keep development away from the regulated area. Applicant's site and building design is intended to stay away from the wetland regulations. Applicant had studied and reviewed a number of layouts for the development. Other layout proposals determined not feasible. The proposed layout requires fire apparatus to be located in the back of building, takes into account the wetland, buffer area and rear sloping. Applicant reduced the size of the overall development to reduce its potential infringement in the rear wetland and buffer area. The triangle shape of the lot forces the construction closer Main Street and into the front setback area. The intended portion to be within the front setback area cannot be located in any other portion of the proposed building design.

3. Financial hardship

There would be substantial financial hardship if variance was not granted. The portion of the building within the front setback area would be the meeting/training room and porch area (covered front entrance). The meeting/training area cannot be located in any other area of the building without substantial increase in cost. Moreover, it is in the interest of public safety to locate the meeting/training room in the front public area of the building.

4. Public Good

The Public Safety Complex was declared a necessity in the current Town's Master Plan. The proposed plan complies with the master plan resolution that the Town is in need of a new safety complex. The location of the facility must be in the center of the community to allow for the response of call fire and EMS personnel to the station to respond to an emergency. Complex must also be visible for the general public access and use.

5. Not a substantial derogation from the intent and purpose of the bylaws.

The adjacent property is subject to a reduced setback as are many other properties on Main St. In additional, even with the variance, there is a sufficient distance between the state owned road and the front of the building.

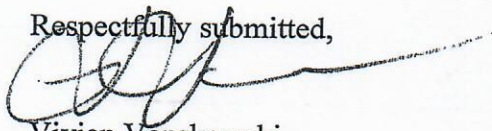
The site plan is in compliance with the general characteristic of the neighborhood. Municipality is allowed by right in the zone – Recreation/Tourism District.

On a motion by Jaworski, seconded by Dietrich it was unanimously voted (Cox/yes, Jaworski/yes, Dietrich/yes, Bird/yes, Hansen/yes) in light of the findings of the Board it was voted to grant a variance for the construction of a new public safety facility located at 121 Main Street (Assessor map 17-D2.2), a portion of this facility may be constructed within 12 feet of the front property line. With the following condition: Construction must adhere to the plans set forth in Reference Dimension Plan A1.1 issued 3/8/2023. Northfield Emergency Services Facility by Caolo & Bieniek Associates, Inc., Layout and Materials Plan C-5, February 28, 2023.

The next business meeting will be Tuesday April 4th, 2023.

On a motion by Dietrich, seconded by Bird it was unanimously voted to adjourn the meeting at 9:20 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,



Vivien Venskowski
Administrative Assistant to
The Zoning Board of Appeals

Northfield Zoning Board of Appeals
Audience Attendance Record

4/28/2023
Date of Meeting

Public Hearing - Northfield ER Facility
Meeting Topic

PRINTED NAME

ADDRESS

John MacMillan

129 Silver Creek Dr, Suffield CT

Dorothy Koda

109 Main St.

Jim Prescott

116 MAIN ST.

Lawrence Russell + Joseph Ingram 126 Main St

Gail + Mat Doolittle-Card

130 Main Street

Mark Fortier

579 Mt. Vernon Stn Rd

Beverly Porana

67 SOUTH MOUNTAIN RD.

Shys Sunnell

20 Hamilton Drive

Wm Murray

Placer Assoc Fax Applicant.

MATTHEW STURZ

COLLIERS PROJECT LEADERS 106 MOUNT VERNON ST, FITCHBURG MA,

Andrea Llamas

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