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MORRISTOWN/MORRISVILLE
DEVELOPMENT REVIEW BOARD
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Minutes of October 26, 2006

Members Present: Gary Nolan, David Silverman, Jean Wickart, Paul Trudell, Karyn Allen, Carl Fortune

Members Absent: Theresa Breault

Recorder: Mark Leonard, Zoning Administrator (ZA)

Guests: see attached list

Chairman Gary Nolan called the meeting to order at 7:30PM. On a motion by David, seconded by Paul, minutes of the October 12, 2006 meeting were approved.

WARNED HEARING: PEEBLES DEPT STORES, CONDITIONAL USE, BUILDING FAÇADE ADDITION, MORRISVILLE PLAZA

Gary introduced the application, to be reviewed under sections 213 and 632-635 of the zoning and subdivision bylaws. Gary administered the sworn oath to William Gee, Michael Stablein, John Conner, Peter Murphy, Amy Walker, and Chris Ransom.

The applicant is seeking 'as-built' approval for exterior renovations and additions to the storefront it is leasing at the Morrisville Plaza. The additions, comprising an eight-foot high, 100-foot long band atop the existing façade and a second, four-foot high, 36-foot long band totaling 944 square feet of new façade area, were constructed without a zoning permit. The resulting frontage increases the overall height of the storefront from twenty feet to thirty-two feet.

William Gee of Peebles Department Stores explained the 'misunderstanding' over what work required a municipal zoning permit, emphasizing the company's intention to fully comply with all applicable requirements. He added that the renovations and addition would enhance the appearance of the storefront.

John Conner, contractor performing the work, said the enhanced appearance of the store would bring economic benefits to the community. People would have a much-needed local option for their shopping needs. He said re-using vacant commercial space is generally preferable to new commercial development in preserving open space.

Peter Murphy, representing the property owner Murphy Realty, said they were in the process of renovating the façade along the whole length of the existing shopping center. Other than the Peebles storefront, these renovations do not exceed the peak height of twenty feet and consequently do not constitute an enlargement of the structure requiring a zoning permit.

Chris Ransom, while noting the general commercial look to the area at and around the shopping center, expressed concern that the added height of the structure would obstruct some views to the south and east. He acknowledged that any such obstructions would be fairly minimal, but that projects such as this contributed to an incremental loss of views in the area.

Amy Walker expressed similar concerns about the additional height. She questioned whether this would be higher than other signs and storefront facades in the commercial district, possibly setting a precedent for other renovations and additions.

Gary Nolan recalled that during the review of the Price Chopper store application, the board required that the proposed storefront height be reduced when it was demonstrated that it would obstruct southerly and easterly views from Route 15. He noted that in this instance, the added height would not block views from Route 15 or the McDonald's on the north side of the plaza and would only marginally obstruct distant mountain views from the parking area in front of the shopping center.

Steve Bousquet, speaking as a business owner, taxpayer, and concerned citizen, stated his belief that this project, along with the renovation of other storefronts at the shopping center, was important for the economic development of the community. He said it would be a vast improvement over the previous look of the shopping center, drawing new tenants and customers to space that has sat vacant for too long. He added that the only thing being blocked from view was equipment on the roof of the building.

Paul moved to approve the application as presented. Karyn seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.

WARNED HEARING: CHITTENDEN BANK, CONDITIONAL USE & SITE PLAN REVIEW, LOCAL ACT 250 IMPACTS REVIEW, 2800SF BANK BRANCH, MORRISVILLE PLAZA

Gary introduced the application, to be reviewed under sections 213, 450, 470, 490, 500, 630, and 660 of the zoning and subdivision bylaws. David recused himself due to the fact that he is employed by a competitor of the applicant. Gary administered the sworn oath to Chris Bishop, representing the applicant, Peter Cross and Dereck Woolridge of Cross Consulting Engineers, property owner Peter Murphy of Murphy Realty, and interested parties Tom Crow (representing adjoining business McMahon's Chevrolet), Steve Bousquet, and Chris Ransom.

Dereck Woolridge explained the proposal. Chittenden Bank proposes to construct a stand-alone bank branch with drive-through service windows and associated parking on the northwest corner of the Morrisville Plaza, behind McMahon's Chevrolet. As part of the proposal, a previously approved 14,000-square foot addition onto the back of the existing shopping center, along with 62 parking spaces in the proposed bank location, would be deleted.

The 2800-square foot bank would be accessed internally along the rood through the plaza. There are three drive-through service windows and a fourth lane around the north side of the site to access the bank parking area, with 12 spaces, on the west side. Pedestrian access would be from the existing sidewalk along Brooklyn Street.

The bank would be served municipal water & sewer lines, with all utilities underground.

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There would be lighting in the parking lot and at the drive-through service windows. There is some landscaping planned in the front of the bank, along Brooklyn Street, and along the property line with McMahon's, where there would also be a 3-4' high retaining wall.

Jean asked about changes to the traffic flow through the plaza. There would be some narrowing of the through street, but it would be at least 24 feet (two car widths) at its narrowest point. Jean expressed concern about how this might affect large trucks transiting through the plaza. Peter Cross noted that the through lane had been narrowed during the previous site renovations; prior to that, the through lane was excessively wide with no real traffic flow pattern.

Paul asked why there were three drive-through lanes. Peter Cross replied that this would reduce idling while customers waited to get to the windows and was less likely to result in traffic backing up into the main traffic lane. Paul asked about the number of vehicles that could be lined up within the lanes; Peter said they could handle 4-5 cars in each lane.

Karyn asked whether any consideration had been given to making the internal traffic flow one way only, from the east side access by the service windows to the parking area and exit on the west side, adjacent to the shopping center entrance/exit on Brooklyn Street. She was concerned that cars waiting to turn left into the bank parking lot near the plaza entrance would get backed up and cause traffic problems. Peter said they had looked at it but, based on experiences at other bank locations, felt they needed two-way access on the west side. Otherwise, customers going into the bank would have to drive around the bank from the east side, past the service windows, en route to the parking area and bank entrance on the west side. Many customers, they felt, would just enter through the designated exit only on the west side, creating a worse traffic situation.

Paul asked about storm water drainage provisions. Dereck noted that under the previous plan for 60+ parking spaces in this location, the entire area would have been paved over. This plan includes some additional landscaping and actually reduces the amount of impervious surface from the earlier plan. He added that they would be checking with the Agency of Natural resources to determine if they needed to amend their storm water discharge permit. Peter Murphy added that they still plan to create a new storm water retention area behind the BankNorth branch on the southwest corner of the property once that bank hooks up to the municipal sewer system.

Carl asked for details about projected traffic increase. Peter Cross cited a 2004 study projecting an increase of 94 peak hour trips when both the shopping center addition and stand-alone Kinney store were constructed. With just the Kinney store, that dropped to 42 peak hour trips. He anticipated that the bank would add a maximum of 68 trips, with the actual numbers based on expected business at the bank to be closer to 57, almost the same number as if the shopping center addition had projected.

Jean moved to approve the application with standard conditions. Karyn seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.

On a motion by Paul, seconded by Carl, the meeting adjourned at 9:00 PM.

Respectfully submitted,
Mark Leonard, Recorder

Minutes approved on: 11/16/06