

Planning Board Special Meeting – Waterfront West – 4.19.22
Meeting notes taken by Bonnie Sontag

Attendees: Alden Clark, Richard Yeager, Bob Koup, Heather Rogers, Jamie Pennington, Rick Taintor, Bonnie Sontag

Absent: Beth DeLisle, Don Walters (submitted comments prior to the meeting)

Staff: Andy Port, Jennifer Blanchet

The categories below reflect a draft list of priorities produced by Mayor's Advisory Committee. The inputs are specific to zoning revisions.

Layout & climate resiliency

- Preserve view corridors
- Consider flood level: fill &/or sacrificial zone(s)
- Address potential problems with use of fill: grading to avoid tunnel-effects, on-site stormwater management &/or drainage into the river
- Consider reasonable setbacks from Horton's Yard
- Incorporate an enhanced berm into resiliency planning

Height, scale, massing of structures

- Establish maximum building heights in relation to a fixed datum (NAVD or mean sea level) rather than height above grade, for predictability in terms of view planes and relationships to abutting structures.
- Consider existing, projected, & proposed elevations to determine maximum building heights
- The required elevation of the lowest floor should be specified in accordance with projected sea level rise
- Consider views from rail trail, Rt. 1 & the water to help determine heights of buildings on different parts of the site
- Once height, footprints & open space are determined, massing can be determined. Massing is more important than arbitrary caps on numbers of dwelling units.
- Recommend 3D modelling allowing views from any location plus an on-site balloon test

Density & parking/loading

- What should be the relationship with the city garage?
- Require all residential parking on site but not for the hotel or retail/commercial uses
- Parking could be in a separate structure on site, e.g., along Rt. 1 edge
- Allow temporary surface parking for loading/unloading at the marina; no other surface parking
- Currently our zoning requires 1 parking space/boat slip; we could change that zoning requirement or allow off-site parking for marina use on this site
- Help developer solve parking problem so that phased development can provide parking, e.g., public/private partnership for an on-site garage (perhaps next to Route 1 as in the Waterfront Strategic Plan)

Access & circulation: vehicles, bikes, pedestrians (connect to abutting parcels & rail trail)

- Where are the important pedestrian connections?
- Connections to abutting properties, e.g., waterfront park & Merrimac St.
- Keep the idea of a “Wharf Street” along the river
- Integrate access to the water/view corridors with configuration & location of retail/commercial uses

Building design: standards & guidelines

- Activity at ground level
- Parking under residential units ok as sacrificial space
- Define limits on the vertical and horizontal extent of rooftop elements that exceed maximum building height
- Establish architectural standards to promote variety in building styles
- Require tallest buildings to provide a stepped-back top story to reduce visual impact of height

Uses (hotel, retail, marina) & affordable housing

- Mixed use to maintain street front activity with destinations plus basic services for residents
- Locate retail/commercial on Merrimac St. & across water-facing facades
- Amount of retail space must be enough to create vitality along both Merrimac St and Wharf St – don’t set an arbitrarily low ceiling.
- Why not a hotel? Build it and visitors will come! Make it an allowable use in the zoning
- Allow smaller marina lift to stay-it reflects our uniqueness as a waterfront community
- Recommend/negotiate (Development Agreement?) 25% affordable housing at 80% AMI (if we don’t ask for it, we won’t get any more than the minimum 12%); consider lower % units at different levels of % AMI – both higher and lower than 80%

Public (open) space

- What is the appropriate percentage and type of public/open space, given the location of the site?
- Publicly accessible roof gardens – would they count as open space?
- More important to consider quality & usability than amount of public/open space
- Open space more important by the river rather than along Merrimac St.
- Define public open space to exclude pedestrian alleys, walkways (other than boardwalk/Wharf St.) and sidewalks; public restrooms; parking spaces & other areas designed to accommodate private automobiles

Energy Efficiency (recommendations from Energy Advisory Committee)

- All electric/no gas hook-ups is not yet supported by state statute; we should offer to become one of the first 10 communities to utilize this option if adopted by the legislature [include in Development Agreement?]
- Electric vehicle charging stations: minimum 10% & wire more (all?) parking spaces
- Other energy conservation standards to be recommended by committee and incorporated into the ordinance

Permitting process: SPR; overlay amendment; master development plan w. phases

[Use 40R amendment as a planning template, adapted to WW site]

- 'as of right' works only if the zoning is very specific; it requires a master development plan laying out the components of the development that conforms to those zoning regulations
- Review 2003 Strategic Waterfront Plan for relevant considerations to request/require from the developer in a master development plan

Other considerations

- Research: projects of similar scale that we like; Rick: Portland (OR) South Waterfront Park - lower buildings along the water, taller buildings allowed for more density, much larger development than our 8 acres; Bristol Harbor Inn (RI) – 52-room boutique hotel on a brownfield site on the waterfront
- Incorporate relevant zoning recommendations from the Planning Board and City Council deliberations in 2019
 - CC Ad Hoc Committee Report, 01/28/19
 - Draft WWOD revision, 07,15,19
 - Planning Director-WWOD Zoning, 9/26/19
 - Planning Board Report to the City Council, 10/16/19
 - Draft revision suggestions to zoning by Rick Taintor: Height/Elevation/Resiliency and WWOD-Special Permit-Density, Height, & Open Space
- Development Agreement: homeowners association joins a community solar project