

**Meeting Agenda
State College Borough
Design Review Board
May 19, 2020
2:00 PM**

Members Present

Laird Jones, Chairman; Eric Boeldt; Richard Devon; and Veronica Iacobazzo

Members Absent

Michael Sanzotti, Vice-Chairman

Others Present

Wendy Wagner, Days Inn Penn State Assistant General Manager; Alex Hails, Real Estate Capital Management; Gary Brandeis, Scholar^x Hotel; Mark Goehausen, Core Spaces; John Sepp, PennTerra Engineering; Barry Gordon, OGP Architects; Jeff Zelisko, Antunovich Associates; Tibben Zerby, Nittany Engineering; Derek Kalp, Landscape Architect; Douglas Shontz, Assistant to the Manager; Isabel Storey, Planner; Alan Sam, Borough Arborist; Greg Garthe, Senior Planner; Esther Matthews, Administrative Assistant.

PA Act 15 of 2020

Greg Garthe gave an overview of the recent Pennsylvania legislation that allows municipalities to conduct virtual meetings and extends the deadline for municipal actions such as land development plan reviews during the COVID-19 emergency disaster declaration.

Virtual Meeting Procedures

Douglas Shontz reviewed the virtual meeting procedures with the group.

Approval of Minutes

A motion was made by Richard Devon and seconded by Eric Boeldt to approve the March 3, 2020 minutes. The vote was unanimously in favor.

Chair Report

No report was given.

Public Hour - Hearing of Citizens

No comments or concerns were offered during the public hour.

Signs

Request for Variance - Days Inn Penn State - 240 S Pugh St; Centre Hotel Associates, Owner; General Commercial Zoning District

Mr. Garthe briefly went over the variance request, stating that the Days Inn would like to move one of their wall signs due to the impact that the construction of Pugh Centre has had on its visibility. The hotel management would like to shift the sign horizontally to a nearby location on the building to re-establish the visibility of the sign, while retaining the nonconforming height of 45 feet from grade.

The hotel's Assistant General Manager, Wendy Wagner, presented the following additional information:

- Ms. Wagner reiterated what Mr. Garthe said, saying that in its current position, the sign is not visible to the public, and relocating it would help guests locate the hotel as well as get directional bearings.

Comments:

- Mr. Devon stated that if they were revisiting a variance already granted, he was in favor of the change in location of the sign. Mr. Garthe noted there wasn't a variance granted, and that this was considered a non-conforming sign because it was likely installed prior to the current sign ordinance.
- Mr. Boeldt said he had no comments about the sign, which looks fine for being a corporate sign. If left as is he said, it doesn't do anyone any good; moving it would make it more visible and maybe help their business.
- Chairman Jones said what they are asking for doesn't really change anything and moving it would be fine.

Mr. Boeldt motioned to recommend sign be approve and was seconded by Dr. Devon. All were unanimously in favor.

Request for Variance - Scholar^x Hotel - 205 E Beaver Ave; Scholar State College, Owner; General Commercial Zoning District

Mr. Garthe introduced the applicants, stating they were applying for two sign variances; one allowing a projecting or "blade" sign to be installed at a height of 29 feet above grade, which exceeds the 25 foot limit set forth by the ordinance, and one allowing a 9' 9" tall projecting sign which exceeds the ordinance limit of 6' tall.

Mr. Brandeis' presentation included:

- The proposed site for the signs would be a 72-room boutique hotel under the Scholar brand.
- They were requesting the two sign variances because of the change in use of the building from apartments and office spaces to a hotel.
- Being that this would be a hotel, the signs they proposed would increase their visibility to potential guests as well as better highlight the entrance to arriving guests.

Mr. Hails' presentation included:

- Both projecting signs they proposed would face Beaver Avenue, angled towards oncoming traffic in order to be visible to motorists.
- One projecting sign requires a height and size variance, while the other does not.
- The developer proposes to place both projecting signs along E Beaver Ave, however the sign ordinance only allows one projecting sign along each street frontage of a property, so an additional variance is needed.

Comments:

- Dr. Devon commented that if the Board grants variances all the time, it renders the ordinance meaningless.
- Chairman Jones noted that last year they recommended against a similar sign variance for Harpers and doesn't see why it needs to be higher since nothing would block its view. Mr. Brandeis replied it was recommended by their local sign contractor to ensure an effective sign based on various factors they accounted for, including visibility, direction and how it would look to traffic passing by on Beaver Avenue.
- Mr. Boeldt referenced an article from the National Park Service he sent out to the DRB regarding how a sign should fit in with the building style, commenting their signs could use a more age appropriate font for signs.
- Mr. Brandeis rejoined that the font on the signs is their corporate "Scholar" font, which is on all their signage, that they use across all their buildings and brand. He added that the Federal and State tax credits they applied for were approved, which included the Commonwealth and the Federal government approving the signs for this project as it relates to the historic renovation of the site.

Mr. Boeldt made a motion to not allow the variance and recommended the owner use a more age appropriate font. The motion was seconded by Dr. Devon, and all were in favor.

Land Development Plans

Final Plan - Core Signature Development at State College; Core Spaces, Developer; CID Zoning District, Signature Development Area; PennTerra Engineering, Engineer; Antunovich Associates and OGP Architects, Architect

Mr. Gordon's presentation included:

- The Conditional Use Permit application was approved by Borough Council and the traffic impact study was approved by the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation.

Mr. Zelisko's presentation included:

- At the last DRB, they made note of 15 recommendations from the board that they have addressed, which included the following:
 1. Commercial parking was inadequate – their final plan exceeded this by five spaces, four more than originally included.
 2. There were no outdoor seating areas and the suggestion was made for wider sidewalks on that end of town – they added more flat areas along Hetzel to provide room for seating.
 3. No charging stations were present in the underground parking levels – these have been included in the final plan.
 4. There would be two temporary parking spaces off Calder Way, right around the corner from Hetzel Street, to address the DRB's suggestion for a pickup/drop off area for taxis, Uber, Lyft and other ride shares to utilize.
 5. These two additional temporary parking spaces would also speak to the DRB's suggestion to add some 15-minute parking spaces and an area for EMS services.
 6. The preliminary plan did not include a mailroom, which was included in the final plan.
 7. A dedicated telecommunications room was also lacking – this has been incorporated into the electrical rooms.
 8. Bicycle storage space has been added in the parking levels as suggested by the DRB.
 9. The final plan includes a dedicated refuse & recycling area, with separate trash & recycling shoots on the main level that go down to the lower parking level.
 10. The DRB had suggested adding sliding doors to provide connectivity between the retail spaces and the streetscape as well as provide better access for outdoor seating, which would depend on the tenant, but they designed it such that this would be an option.
 11. Being that a grocery store was lacking from downtown, the DRB suggested trying to secure a grocery chain as a tenant, which he said is a possibility they are aiming for as they begin seeking out potential retailers.

12. The addition of ivy or similar plantings along Hetzel street to enhance the masonry wall, placing planters above the wall to reduce potential damage to the plants from rock salt during the winter months, was another suggestion the DRB had made. They added some plantings and vines to the streetscape to incorporate this suggestion.
13. Honey Locust and Maple trees do not do well in the downtown area and the DRB recommended they seek the guidance of the Borough Arborist, Mr. Sam. Per Mr. Sam's direction, Ginkgo trees were added along Hetzel Street and Autumn Glazed Maple trees were added along College Avenue.
14. The DRB requested more variety in color palette, which has been reflected in the materials chosen in the final plan.
15. There would also be larger kitchens to provide ample space and increased functionality for multiple roommates sharing multi-bedroom apartments.
 - There would be 8,850 square feet of retail space; 1,281 square feet of leasing space; and 7,492 square feet for amenities.
 - There would be a 1/12 ramp to the loading dock in place of a service elevator for getting trash out to the dumpsters.
 - The lowest level would be parking with 65 spaces and some storage; there would be 63 spaces on the second parking level along with some more storage; and the third parking level would have a lot of their MEP, fire, water and trash services along with 47 more parking spaces, for 175 parking spaces total.
 - The second floor had to have mostly commercial space in order to meet the minimum FAR requirement, which they exceeded, and includes some isolated apartments in one corner.
 - Levels 3 – 12 would be residential: there would be apartments ranging from studio to 5-bedrooms available, for a total of 453 bedrooms and 135 total units.
 - There would be a rooftop terrace, which includes a pool and hot tub, set back far enough so it is not visible from the street below, as well as some mechanical spaces.
 - The total building height would be 140 feet to the top, 157 feet to the top of the elevators.
 - Exterior finishes would include a factory finished continuous insulated wall cladding system with a terracotta batten effect with dark grey mortar, black brick with black mortar along the base of the building, metal canopies over the entrances, and various other metallic elements throughout.
 - The building would be mostly uniform in appearance and appear the same from all sides, with a strong base and strong shoulder-like elements.
 - Retaining walls were added to provide for flat seating areas along the sidewalk, which slopes significantly as you walk along College Avenue then around the corner down Hetzel Street.
 - There would be a level walkway area with stairs leading down slope on the Hetzel Avenue side.

- Additional landscaping was added along both Hetzel Street and College Avenue, providing some separation between the sidewalk and flat walkway/seating area as well as making use of the retaining walls and railings.
- The shadow study showed its shadow reaching across College Avenue in the late afternoon during the summer solstice, but otherwise the building would have a minimal impact or addition to other shadows cast already by the existing surrounding buildings.
- They exceeded the minimum requirement of at least 50% glazing for commercial areas with 55.1% glazing on the College Avenue side and 63.7% glazing on the Hetzel Street side.
- All units would have large kitchens, common areas, storages spaces and are overall very generous, luxury apartments.

Comments:

- Dr. Devon:
 - He was not enthusiastic about all the red brick in this town, asking why they decided to go with terracotta instead and asked how the color would look at night. Mr. Zelisko responded they wanted it to be edgier and have the dark elements; the terracotta still ties in nicely with all the brick downtown.
 - He inquired if there would be charging stations and Mr. Zelisko said yes, right as you pull into the garage.
 - The drop off location isn't adequate in his opinion.
 - He asked if the building would be LEED certified and Mr. Gordon responded yes.
 - He concluded by inquiring what the sidewalk color and type would be, and Mr. Zelisko responded it would likely be a standard concrete grey sidewalk based on Borough code.
- Ms. Iacobazzo:
 - She asked if there would be any safety and security measures in place for the underground parking facilities, expressing her concern that some underground parking garages can be very dark and cavernous.
 - Mr. Gordon replied that there would be a gated entrance to the garage only accessible by residents, along with motion sensor lights for energy efficiency, with at least 50% of lights always kept on, and security cameras covering all areas. Additionally, he said each level is flat with only a sloped ramp, which makes for a much less cavernous parking garage.
- Mr. Sam:
 - He asked if they moved the street trees so that they would be staggered between the lights and Mr. Sepp replied the lights would stay the same as the rest of the streetscape, with four lights on College Avenue.

- He inquired if they would use structural soil around trees and Mr. Sepp said yes, the same as other downtown projects.
- For the green roof, he asked if they knew what kinds of plants they would be putting there, and Mr. Zelisko said they would choose indigenous plants meant to soften up the edges and wrap around the deck area.

Dr. Devon moved to approve the building as presented and was seconded by Mr. Boeldt. All were unanimously in favor.

Preliminary/Final Plan - Foxdale Village Groundskeeping Building and Bird Garden; Foxdale Village Corporation, Developer; R2 and R3B Zoning Districts; Nittany Engineering, Engineer; rlps architects, Architect

Mr. Zerby 's presentation included:

- There would be a four-lot consolidation plan, taking a single-family home, and two sections of Norma Street to combine it with rest of Foxdale Village.
- The home was demolished in 2018 after Foxdale purchased it.
- The proposed use would be accessory to Foxdale, split between R3-B zone and R-2 zone, and would still meet both zoning requirements.
- There would be a sidewalk leading from the main campus around the groundskeeping building to a bird sanctuary and continues to connect to the proposed sidewalk leading to Tussey View Park.
- The maintenance/ groundskeeping building along with material storage areas and an outdoor storage area would be the second part of the plan.
- The main part of the maintenance/groundskeeping building would have four bays for the storage of their vehicles and there would be an adjacent area behind it where up to two vehicles could be worked on at a time.
- They would relocate a portion of Norma Street to eliminate the presence of a sharp turn at that intersection.
- Some healthy trees on the site have been identified including a Red Oak, which they wish to keep, and they would be sticking tightly to the original house footprint when it comes to the new building.
- All storm water would be handled by a bioretention rain garden as well as sump drains from existing roofs.
- The goal was to design a building that did not look like a groundskeeping building, but rather one with more of a residential feel so it fits in with the Foxdale Village facilities as well as the existing surrounding residential homes.
- Screened fence would go around the work area to keep it separate from sanctuary and residential areas.

Mr. Kalp's presentation:

- In designing the bird sanctuary, they tried to free up as much space for the plantings as possible in order to create not only a habitat, but also a demonstration area.
- There would be plenty of biodiversity to provide a habitat for as many local, native species as possible, including the use of native plants to attract native pollinators.
- One of the main goals was to create an accessible path from the village to the park, with no more than a 5% slope so residents utilizing a wheelchair or walker can still navigate the path and property.
- As you approach the sanctuary on the walkway from Foxdale, there would be a wooden gateway trellis placed near an existing White Pine tree with some vines to grow on it and some stones to form a casual seating area.
- The trees would include Norway Maples, Norway Spruce, a Copper Beech Tree and Red Oak.
- The bird house shelter would be a pavilion with a winged roof, which would allow rainwater to collect and pour into a shallow water collection pond and includes a seating area so visitors can get out of the rain and relax.
- They created a level, circular pollinator area by using a stone retaining wall to enclose the area.
- Evergreens and denser shrubs would be used to screen the landscape yard and groundskeeping building as well as create a variety of sun-to-shade environments.

Comments:

Dr. Devon:

- He asked if Norma Street was going to be blocked off and Mr. Day said no, you would still be able to walk through there without any obstructions.
- Noting the two nearby schools, he asked if they would be collaborating with either of them. Mr. Day said they worked with the Friend's School already, and their CEO has worked with the Tusseyview neighborhood to give them updates.
- He asked if there would be any caged birds, or if they were hoping to appeal to local species with what they provide in the sanctuary. Mr. Kalp said it would be more of a habitat not so much an aviary, with lots of plantings and minimal lawn space.
- He inquired if they would be designing their bird life by designing their plant life and Mr. Kalp responded yes, they would provide more plant variety to provide for a rich environment to attract a variety of wildlife.
- He queried whether there were any Dawn Redwood trees and Mr. Kalp answered there aren't any on the property.

Mr. Boeldt:

- He remarked he was surprised there were no garage doors on the outdoor storage space to hide the contents, and suggested adding doors, also

pointing out the material storage space will likely be a spot birds will make some nests.

- Another comment he had was regarding the plain fence, which he suggested they spruce up by planting Oak Leaf Hydrangeas or other plants to make it more interesting as well as attract more wildlife.
- He suggested fruit trees could be beneficial for the habitat as well.
- Mr. Sam noted they have been working together and he's made some suggestions; he liked how they opened the area up and the addition of the bird sanctuary.

Mr. Boeldt moved to recommend the plan as is and take the suggestions for what they're worth and was seconded by Ms. Iacobazzo. All were unanimously in favor.

Official Reports and Correspondence

Borough Council

No report given.

Planning Commission

The next meeting would be Thursday, May 21st at 7pm.

Adjournment

There being no further business, Dr. Devon motioned to adjourn and was seconded by Chairman Jones. All were in favor, with the meeting concluding at 3:50 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Esther Matthews, Administrative Assistant