

Design Review Meeting
January 24, 2022
Virtual Meeting via ZOOM

This is a special meeting to discuss the DRB guidelines

Members In attendance: Ken Savoie, Rue Sherwood, John Sarni, Linda Riley, Bob Weatherall, Laura Gresh
Also Present: Kristen Grubbs, Town Planner

Citizens Query: None

A DRB review is for a development before the Planning Board requiring a special permit. This includes developments and site plans for commercial, industrial, and multi-family residences. Many of the characteristics we review are subjective.

The role of the DRB, to provide design guidance to the Planning Board. Any recommendations are advisory.

Rue said the board is composed of members / professionals from varied disciplines.

Those are:

- 2 Architects
- 1 Landscape designer or landscape architect
- 1 Historic Commission member
- 1 Individual with knowledge of ADA / handicap code requirements
- 1 Individual with a business background

Most of projects we are asked to review have design related issues.

Bob said each member's opinion and all recommendations should be presented to the Planning Board including dissenting opinions. There are often times when members express different recommendations.

Ken said the developer of the 15 Washington St. condo project has been before the DRB several times. Each time the developer comes back with improved design. He said the developer has been willing to incorporate many of the DRB's recommendations. It is important to let the Planning Board know that the developer has complied with these recommendations.

Ken also said the DRB wants everyone member's opinion to be presented to the Planning Board.

John said he thought there is too much back and forth with the Planning Board. Perhaps the project should not go to the Planning Board until the DRB given final approval or is in the latter stages of review.

Rue said the Planning Board has different criteria than the DBB when looking at a project.

Bob said we never know if the DRB recommendations are presented to the Planning Board. He thought a separate report – other than the minutes – with DRB recommendations should be presented at next Planning Board meeting. He suggested tightening up the DRB recommendations with a checklist to present to the Planning Board. He questioned if Ethan gives a summary of our recommendations to the Planning Board and is that presented as document or verbally.

Kristen suggested the DRB provide a document with our recommendations to the Planning Board.

Linda suggested comments be presented not until our final recommendations are met – only then the project moves on to the Planning Board.

Laura said she has made comments regarding the historical appropriateness of a project and they were ignored. She gave examples of recommending wood windows at 15 Market Street addition and questioned the compatibility of the three condo units at the corner of Mineral and Washington Streets She thought three units did not fit the streetscape and that two would be more appropriate for the neighborhood -- she said the project should be reduced to 12 units instead of 13.

Kristen said no project is straight forward especially with multi-family developments many iterations are necessary.

Ken commented -- this document with recommendations should be separate from the minutes. He suggested our recommendations be based on our guidelines and should be presented as a checklist/document. He said everyone's opinion on the DRB should be presented. With our meetings so close to the Planning Board there often is not enough time to get our comments put together to present in time. He said we need to be cognoscente how costly delays and changes are to the developer. There are times when the complete application is not presented and we need more information. In order to evaluate a project, we need enough of the application complete to discuss.

John said there is difference between a preliminary consult and at formal design review. The option for the applicant to have a preliminary review can save time and money.

Ken thought encouraging the applicant to take advantage of a preliminary review is helpful for applicant and for the DRB. He said once the applicant formally applies the application should be complete.

Bob agreed and said the applicant needs to present a complete application including site plans, floor plans, elevations, landscape plans when submitting an application.

Ken said interior floor plans are not under the DRB purview.

Linda said interior plans help to see accessibility for handicapped and shows how the building functions. She said wheelchair accessible requires more modification than just meeting ADA requirements and since the Planning Board requires floor plans and they are available it is beneficial for us to review. She said there have been occasions when seeing plans that show access to building and other measurements has allowed us to determine if the building is wheelchair accessible.

John said during a preliminary discussion Step 3 of the DRB guidelines should be skipped and that the DRB make only verbal recommendations. He said when plans are submitted, we rarely see how the development will relate to the surrounding streetscape or a density plan.

Ken said we should also see if zoning analysis parameters are being met. This should be presented at the onset of application. This includes setbacks, existing units, allowed units, and proposed units.

Kristen said we need to make sure the DRB guidelines reflect the zoning requirements.

Rue said creating a check list would keep us focused.

It seems unanimous that a checklist would solve many communication issues.

The choice of color was mentioned and although the DRB does not comment on color, Bob said color is a design element that has value for certain projects such as Washington St.

Bob thought one person on the DRB should be responsible of documenting recommendations/checklist. Perhaps the chair from the DRB and the chair from the Planning Board should then discuss recommendations before the Planning Board meeting.

Ken said the Planning Department should convey that a preliminary consult with the DRB is available at the beginning of the project. When the paper submittal is submitted to the Town Clerk perhaps a preliminary consult application should be available.

Kristen said to make any changes in the by-law, these changes must be approved at Town Meeting and that our rules and regulations have to reflect Zoning by-law. If we change our rules and regulations the Zoning by-law will need to change.

It was agreed, we continue this discussion and that members review and determine if we want to change the rules and regulations and make any changes to the by-law. It was noted that changes to DRB rules and regulations do not require a public hearing since we are advisory.

Next DRB scheduled meeting is on February 7th at 7 p.m. and a special meeting to continue to discuss the DRB guidelines is set for Tuesday, February 22 at 7 p.m.

Bob motioned for the meeting to adjourn. Ken seconded the motion. All members voted in favor.
Meeting adjourned at 9:03 p.m.

Minutes by
Laura Gresh

Minutes adopted 2/7/22