

APPROVED
Meeting Minutes
Hartford Design Review Committee
September 23, 2021

Members Present Denise Welch-May, Jonathan Schechtman, Anita Hamalainen and Larson Burns

Staff Present: Lori Hirshfield, Planning Director, Chris Holzwarth, Project Manager and Jo-Ann Ells, Zoning Administrator

Others Present: Ken Parker, Eric Bunge, Stuart Johnson, Jim (?) and Kim Souza, Selectboard Liaison

Administrative Matters

1. Sketch plan review of conceptual plans for the reconstruction and expansion of the South Main Street parking lot in downtown White River Junction (formerly referred to as the Legion parking lot).

Chris described the improvements associated with a shared dumpster area as outlined on a plan distributed to the Committee.

Jo-Ann noted that Chris was before the Committee informally for feedback before a formal application is made.

Eric asked if the Town would be discussing the shared dumpster area with the abutters. Lori stated that she would bring the parties together.

Chris described the planned improvements to the parking lot including grading, drainage, ADA compliance, lighting, landscaping (TBD) and a retaining wall.

Larson asked why the empty “elbow” shaped area was not being utilized for parking or landscaping. Chris noted that both options were considered and determined not to be feasible.

Chris noted that there would be 37 additional parking spaces. Lori noted that there will appear to be more since the back parking spaces are not used today due to lack of lighting and drainage issues.

Jonathan asked if the design took into consideration the possibility of a parking garage in the future. Chris explained that if a garage was built, the ground level parking spaces would be replaced by the garage structure and footings.

Jonathan asked about the possibility of installing emergency call boxes like on college campuses. Chris stated that he would follow up with the Police Department.

Eric requested a meeting with staff regarding the shared dumpster area.

2. Minutes of January 16, 2020 (Tabled)

B. Applications

1. Application by Ken Parker for Design Review Approval for the demolition of two structures on lot 45-0151-000, 160 Gates Street, White River Junction in the CB, and Design Review zoning districts.

Ken stated that he appreciated the opportunity to review his application with the Committee.

Ken noted that he had submitted numerous materials to the Committee and requested that they start with a review of his letter of September 10, 2021, to Lori and Jo-Ann.

Ken reviewed the history of the property noting:

- It was built in 1880.
- He purchased the property in 1973 and used it as an office and apartments ultimately using the entire first floor for office space.
- The building is balloon construction with a stone foundation and dirt floor.
- The building is the same footprint as in 1880 with the exception of the addition of porches.
- It is in a state of disrepair due to lack of resources.
- Rehabilitation of the building would require a substantial investment which the revenue would not support.
- In March of 2021 a burst pipe caused considerable water damage.
- Information regarding income/expenses was included in the narrative.
- Knob and tube wiring was discovered after the water damage.
- Water damage caused \$190,000-\$200,000 worth of damage.
- Estimates from two contractors due to the water damage ranged between \$190,000 and \$199,000 for repairs.
- Hartford Insurance estimated the water damage at \$104,000.
- The estimates are for damage from water, and do not include other items that need repair (i.e., roofs).
- The Fire Marshal inspected the structure and listed violations that would need to be addressed.

It was noted that Ken was requesting that the Committee support his request to remove the structures on the property.

Jonathan asked about the costs associated with demolition. Ken noted that it was roughly \$41,000.

Jonathan asked what the property would sell for. Ken noted he did not have any properties to compare his to.

Jonathan asked what the Methodist Church had offered years ago. Ken stated they offered \$421,600.

Jonathan noted that the carriage house/barn is the last agricultural building in the downtown. He asked if Ken had considered selling the property as is noting someone might be interested in repairing it noting given COVID this is happening frequently.

Ken explained that he has not had a reason to market the property as he has a party interested in buying it as an empty lot.

Jonathan noted that the structures are amazing resources, their removal would leave a gap and therefore he'd like Ken to consider marketing the property for rehab. He added that the situation is to some extent "demo by neglect."

Ken stated he is not interested in marketing the property and noted that the people with an option on the property will make a big improvement to the neighborhood. He said that the water damage alone is a reason to justify the removal. He added that it costs him \$75 a day in taxes etc. just to have it sit there empty.

Ken reminded the Committee of the language in the Zoning Regulations that they need to base their recommendation on.

Larson noted he was concerned with losing an historic structure, but does not want to see it just sitting there.

Ken noted that WRJ has been rejuvenated recently by new construction.

Denise noted that she would like time to consider the application.

Anita asked if Ken could provide photographs of the basement.

The Committee agreed that they would like to conduct a site visit and continue the meeting.

Denise moved to hold a site visit at 9AM, Thursday, September 30, 2021, to be followed with a meeting at Town Hall. Jonathan seconded and the motion passed unanimously.