



Stratham Planning Board Meeting Minutes

June 21, 2023

Stratham Municipal Center

Time: 7:00 pm

Members Present: Thomas House, Chair
David Canada, Vice Chair
Mike Houghton, Select Board's Representative
Chris Zaremba, Regular Member
John Kunowski, Regular Member

Members Absent: Nate Allison, Alternate Member

Staff Present: Mark Connors, Director of Planning and Community Development

1. Call to Order/Roll Call

Mr. House called the meeting to order at 7:00 pm and took roll call.

2. Approval of Minutes

a. June 7, 2023

Mr. Kunowski requested an edit on line 350 from "Saltonstall Plan" to "Saltonstall Farm".

Mr. Zaremba made a motion to approve the June 7, 2023 meeting minutes as amended. Mr. Kunowski seconded the motion. All voted in favor and the motion was approved.

3. Public Hearing (Old Business):

- a. JP Morgan Chase & Co. (Applicant) and NP Stratham LLC & Northstar Center LLC (Owners), Request for approval of a Site Plan and a Conditional Use Permit for a proposed 3,322 square foot Chase Bank with drive-thru service facilities and associated improvements at 20 Portsmouth Avenue (Tax Map 4, Lot 14). Application submitted by Bohler Engineering, 352 Turnpike Road, Southborough MA 01772.

Mr. Zaremba recused himself from the Public Hearing for this application.

Mr. House asked Mr. Connors if the public hearing is still open for this application. Mr. Connors replied yes.

Mr. House asked Mr. Connors to provide the Board with any updates to the application before the Applicant presents the project. Mr. Connors stated there is some additional parking on the Planet

45 Fitness side of the building. Eleven new spaces were added. There are currently 321 spaces on the
46 site. The original site plan showed a net loss of 36 spaces but with the changes made the net loss
47 is now 25 spaces. The driveway and building architecture have changed to address comments from
48 the last meeting. The signage plan has changed but a Conditional Use Permit is still required and
49 the application has not yet been submitted. The Applicant is seeking feedback from the Board on
50 the changes to date before submitting the CUP application.

51
52 Randy Miron from Bohler introduced the team for Chase Bank including Kenneth Knowles from
53 Eaglebrook Engineering & Survey, and Kevin Kelly with Core States Group. Mr. Miron presented
54 the parking changes. The property currently has more ADA parking spaces than is required. The
55 Applicant is proposing to convert some of those spaces to non-ADA spaces so there are 301
56 proposed parking spaces compared to 296 spaces on previous plan. Mr. Miron stated there are an
57 additional 16 spaces from the original plan. Mr. Connors asked Mr. Miron to present the existing
58 conditions plan vs. the proposed plan. Mr. Canada asked where the additional parking is proposed.
59 Mr. Miron pointed to an area of the parking lot that will be reconfigured to add spaces. Mr. Canada
60 asked if the electric charging spaces are included in the count. Mr. Miron replied yes. Mr. Canada
61 does not think the electric charging spaces should be included in the count. Mr. Miron stated that
62 non-electric vehicles can park in the charging spaces and even if those spaces are not included in
63 the count, the proposal is compliant with zoning.

64
65 Mr. Miron continued to describe other changes made to the project. Directional signage was added
66 around the bank as well as way finding signage when entering the plaza. Other additions include
67 a bike rack and crosswalk striping. The building setback was updated to address comments and a
68 waiver request will be submitted for the 40-foot front property setback. The sign on the back of
69 the building was removed leaving two wall signs on the building. The Applicant requests internal
70 illuminated signage and will submit a Conditional Use Permit application for approval of that. Mr.
71 Connors asked if the Applicant would consider back-lit halo type signage. Mr. Miron believes that
72 Chase would be okay with that. The landscaping plan was modified to add landscaping to the side
73 of the building facing Portsmouth Avenue and to provide more details on the overall plan. A sign
74 is proposed to address vehicle back-up from the Starbuck's drive through. The Applicant met with
75 the Stratham fire chief to discuss the width of the driveway in front of the plaza. The Chief has
76 concerns with parking in front of the plaza inhibiting emergency vehicle access. The Applicant
77 proposes no parking, fire lane signs. Additionally, the Applicant worked with the fire department
78 to practice maneuvering the trucks through the proposed design and it was determined the fire
79 trucks can safely maneuver the design and circulate around the plaza. Regarding a construction
80 management plan, Mr. Miron stated they can do that and requests the plan be a condition of
81 approval for when they have a contractor hired. NHDOT is in the process of drafting the driveway
82 permit. They are actively working with NHDES on the septic system approval. The existing leach
83 field for the project was oversized when constructed so there is a capacity available for the bank
84 to connect with a force main.

85
86 Mr. Kelly presented changes to the building architecture. The proposed building is a single-story
87 structure with grey clapboards and black asphalt shingles. On the western corner of the previous
88 design there was a projection of the conference room that the Board thought was too contemporary.
89 The projection has been removed with the result being more symmetrical and natural compared to
90 the surrounding architecture. White Hardie board trim is shown around the storefront opening. All
91 mechanical equipment will be on the low roof of the back elevation facing southeast and screened
92 from view. One wall sign will be on the main, front elevation and the second sign will face towards
93 Portsmouth Avenue.

94 Mr. Miron welcomed questions from the Board.

95
96 Mr. House asked if the dotted lines on the floor plans are canopies. Mr. Kelly replied there are two
97 canopies proposed; one over the main entry and one over the drive through. Additional canopies
98 shown on the plans will be removed.

99
100 Mr. House stated that the Gateway District is intended to be traditional New England style
101 architecture and he would like to see a change to the windows. Mr. Kelly replied that the windows
102 are black aluminum to match surrounding buildings like Chipotle. Mr. House clarified his concern
103 is with the amount of glass and lack of grills. Mr. Kelly replied that they can add sashes or muntins.
104 They will look again at Chipotle to try to match theirs. Mr. House asked what kind of screening
105 will be used for the mechanicals and how big are the units. Mr. Kelly replied they are about 4 feet
106 tall and there will be about a 5-foot tall roof parapet.

107
108 Mr. Houghton asked the type of mechanical equipment. Mr. Kelly replied Carrier roof-top units.

109
110 Mr. House asked if the wall sconces are pointing up or down. Mr. Kelly replied they are shining
111 down. Mr. House asked if the attic space is only false dormers and nothing else like storage. Mr.
112 Kelly replied yes.

113
114 Mr. House asked if the landscaping plan on sheet C-701 is within the NHDOT right of way. Mr.
115 Miron replied the landscaping is outside of the State right of way.

116
117 Mr. Connors summarized that the project needs a waiver for the total area of signage. He added
118 that the sign proposed on the southwest elevation seems large in proportion to that side of the
119 building and specifically asked if it can be made smaller to not extend beyond the windows. Mr.
120 Kelly replied that there are smaller letter sets and they will talk to the signage company on options.
121 Mr. Miron asked Mr. Connors if he is referring to the letters and the logo or just the logo. Mr.
122 Kelly responded that the letters and the logo are proportional to each other.

123
124 Mr. Houghton agrees with Mr. House's observations on the windows. He believes the change to
125 the corner of the building is a positive upgrade. Mr. Houghton has concerns with the intensive use
126 of the plaza particularly through construction. He added that access to the plaza is currently
127 inhibited by the traffic flow largely entering Starbucks. He appreciates the addition of the sign but
128 based on his experience, the sign will be meaningless. He thinks it would be of more significance
129 if the early entrance into Starbucks was removed thereby forcing vehicles to line up in the parking
130 lot and not out onto Portsmouth Avenue. Mr. Houghton believes the intensification of use will
131 make the traffic more difficult. Mr. House asked if the Applicant has permission from the property
132 owner for the additional directional signage proposed. Mr. Miron replied yes and that Mr. Knowles
133 represents the plaza owner and they have discussed the signage. Mr. Knowles stated that he
134 reviewed the Starbucks entrance with Northstar (the owner of the plaza) and Northstar is willing
135 to discuss closing the entrance with Starbucks but Starbucks has a right to use the entrance in their
136 lease. He added that the lane was important to Starbucks' decision to construct at the plaza and
137 their decision to build was followed by Chipotle and Chase which can be considered the start of
138 the Gateway development. Mr. Houghton applauds the property owner's innovative use of the
139 property, but the use needs to be balanced with public safety. Mr. Knowles stated that he passes
140 the plaza multiple time per day and will see the drive through backed up into the lane, but not more
141 than once has he seen traffic backed up into Route 108. He added that he would have expected
142 NHDOT to comment on that through the driveway permit process if it was common.

Mr. House summarized that the Applicant is not seeking a decision from the Board tonight and asked if the Applicant has any more questions for the Board. Mr. Miron stated they have no more questions and will submit the waiver and CUP applications along with some minor changes to the architectural plan. Mr. Connors asked if they would add impervious surface changes to the plan in order to determine if any additional stormwater work is required. Mr. Miron thanked the Board for their time.

Mr. Zaremba returned to the Board.

4. Public Hearing (New Business):

- a. Bradford Sawler (Applicant and Owner), Request for approval of a Site Plan Application to convert approximately 1,000 square-feet of an existing residential property into office space for a building company and to construct additional parking areas at 240 Portsmouth Avenue (Tax Map 22, Lot 89), Zoned Route 33 Heritage District. Survey prepared by Boudreau Land Surveying, 2 Beatrice Lane, Newmarket NH 03857

Mr. Connors presented an introduction to the project. The property was a former District 2 schoolhouse. The building was constructed in 1860 and has been modified and expanded over the years, but has kept its historic character. There is an addition on the north side of the building that was approved about 15 years ago for a Home Occupation. Subsequently the owner moved his residence from the property and requested a new Home Occupation approval from the Zoning Board of Adjustment which was denied. With the rezoning to the Route 33 Legacy Highway Heritage District, this type of office use is permitted. The Applicant went before the Route 33 Heritage District Advisory Committee in April 2023. The biggest concern of the Advisory Committee was to create a site plan with special attention to wetlands setbacks. There are a few waivers required, one to allow parking in the front setback and within 20 feet of the property line. The presence of wetlands in the back of the property impedes parking in the rear. A waiver from the stormwater regulations is also required and the project meets the requirements for that waiver. The Applicant has stated he is willing to work with planning staff on stormwater facilities. The final waiver is to allow seven parking spaces where the maximum allowed is six. There is no architectural plan because there are no proposed changes to the exterior. Mr. Sawler added that he is not expanding the footprint but he brought a rendering of some proposed minor exterior changes that he thinks is more traditional and will be an improvement. Mr. Sawler described there is an existing aluminum commercial double door that will be reduced to a single 3-foot door with a sidelight and there is a single, double-hung window on the front that he would like to expand to a double, double-hung window.

Mr. Canada stated that the fence for the dumpster is three sided without a gate and noted that he received many complaints regarding dumpsters when he was a member of the Select Board. Mr. Sawler replied that a gate can be added but that adds a level of complexity with trash removal. Mr. Canada and Mr. House stated that it is common to coordinate opening the fence for the trash hauler or that they will do it themselves. Mr. House asked how much space is between the dumpster and the fence. Mr. Sawler replied about a foot and a half. Mr. House suggested that Mr. Sawler ask his trash hauler how much space is needed, for example, ample room to walk around it might be needed and also to account for lifting and setting the dumpster.

Mr. House asked if there is a plan to add more landscaping. Mr. Sawler replied he is leaving the existing landscaping and is adding more to screen the parking.

192 Mr. House asked how many employees Mr. Sawler has. Mr. Sawler replied five.

193
194 Mr. Canada commented on an issue at other properties where the commercial vehicles are parked
195 to be visible from the street as advertisements. Mr. Sawler replied that he has a few trailers but it
196 is not his intention to look like that. He has other properties where some trailers will be stored. If
197 allowed in the wetlands setback he can install a fence to screen a trailer. Mr. Canada would like to
198 codify that on the plans and asked if any other members share the concern. Mr. House agrees and
199 Mr. Canada asked if it is prohibited in the regulations. Mr. Connors replied that it is prohibited.
200 Mr. Sawler added there is room in the back for a trailer. Mr. Canada asked if any commercial
201 trucks will be parked in the front parking spaces. Mr. Sawler replied that his truck will be parked
202 there. Mr. Canada requested more landscaping to screen the parking. Mr. Sawler noted that the
203 staff memo prepared by Mr. Connors doubles the number of trees. Mr. Canada noted that maple
204 trees won't have foliage 20 years from now, that bushes would be a better screen. Mr. Houghton
205 asked if there is any option to reconfigure parking to the sides of the building and off the street.
206 Mr. Sawler replied that they have some space but the wetlands buffers is the largest barrier. He
207 added that the house has two rental units that need parking and he is trying to separate the tenants
208 from the business owner. There is a tree that he could remove to add a space, but it is next to the
209 tenant spaces. Mr. Houghton asked if the employees are generally transient. Mr. Sawler responded
210 that the carpenters drive their work vans to and from work and park them at their homes and they
211 are rarely at the office. Mr. House asked for confirmation that there are only two parking spaces
212 for two residential units. Mr. Sawler replied yes and that they also park along the circle driveway.
213 Mr. Kunowski asked how the rear of the building would be accessed for parking. Mr. Sawler
214 replied it would be through the proposed parking spaces and that vehicles would need to be moved.
215 Mr. Kunowski commented that seems awkward. Mr. Connors asked what kind of construction
216 vehicles will be at the property. Mr. Sawler replied just one extra pickup truck and one trailer.

217
218 Mr. Zaremba asked if there is any carpentry work proposed to take place at the site or just office
219 work. Mr. Sawler replied just office work.

220
221 Mr. Canada asked if the site plan will be recorded as he wished to codify some of the Board's
222 requirements. Mr. Connors replied that it is optional.

223
224 Mr. Zaremba asked for clarification that more parking cannot be added next to the office because
225 of the wetlands setback. Mr. Sawler replied correct. Mr. House commented that he doesn't think
226 there is enough parking at the site especially with respect to the residential use. He asked how
227 many bedrooms are in each unit. Mr. Sawler replied they are a two-bedroom and a one-bedroom.
228 Mr. House stated that there could be a need for three parking spaces. Mr. Sawler replied that the
229 tenants will use the side of the driveway for parking as well.

230
231 Mr. Kunowski commented that the handicapped parking is in front of the residential portion of the
232 building and not the office. Mr. House added that the driveway looks like one-way travel. Mr.
233 Sawler replied that he plans to set up one way travel. Mr. House asked him to add arrows to the
234 site plan. Mr. Sawler agreed. Mr. Kunowski asked if the tenants would have access to the
235 commercial parking on the weekends and during off hours. Mr. Sawler replied in theory they would
236 but they don't park down there now. Mr. House asked Mr. Connors what is the parking requirement
237 for the residences. Mr. Connors replied two spaces per unit. Mr. House asked if two parking spaces
238 would fit between the well and the trash. Mr. Sawler replied yes. Mr. House asked that Mr. Sawler
239 add two parking spaces to the plan in that area. Mr. Kunowski asked if the spaces are required to
240 be lined and designated. Mr. Connors replied that the fire department would want to see a 12-foot

clearance. Mr. Sawler replied that he can dimension that on the plan. Mr. Connors added that the fire department would not want to see a parking space designated along the driveway but there does appear to be room between the well and the dumpster. Mr. Sawler discussed with the Board moving the handicapped space to one of the spaces closer to the office. It was decided if there is clear access to the door from the space that should be fine.

Mr. Canada asked if Mr. Sawler would be willing to install a sign regarding the historical nature of the building. Mr. Sawler replied that a sign currently exists but is wrong. Mr. Canada asked if Mr. Sawler would like to work with Nate Merrill, the Chair of the Heritage Commission on a sign. Mr. Sawler replied yes. Mr. Canada will provide Mr. Merrill with Mr. Sawler phone number.

Mr. House asked if the soil is stable between the well and the dumpster where they discussed adding parking spaces. Mr. Sawler replied yes. There was agreement between the Board and Mr. Sawler as to the direction of the new parking spaces.

Mr. House asked if the Board should review the waiver requests tonight. Mr. Connors replied that since there are some changes required to the plan, the waivers could be held until Mr. Sawler returns.

Mr. Zaremba asked if more than six parking spaces are allowed because of the residential units. Mr. Connors replied yes. There was more discussion on how much parking is needed vs. required. Mr. Houghton summarized that if there is a way to innovate further on parking, then Mr. Sawler should pursue that. Mr. Houghton added that he agrees with Mr. Canada that the plan should commit to what was agreed to. Mr. Sawler asked how the plan details get formalized. Mr. Connors replied that the plan will be recorded at the Registry of Deeds and visible to future owners. Mr. Sawler asked if a future owner can pull out the parking and convert the property back to a residence. The Board confirmed future owners can do that. Mr. Sawler suggested that he could rotate the three commercial parking spots so they are perpendicular to the wetlands buffer.

Mr. Kunowski asked where the sign will be located. Mr. Sawler described the location as near the old well depicted on the site plan. Mr. Kunowski asked if there would be any signs on the building. Mr. Sawler replied he wasn't planning on it but asked if he could do a smaller version of the sign that would hang on a bracket on the building. Mr. Connors replied that he should add it to his application for the next meeting. Mr. Zaremba asked Mr. Connors if the proposed free standing sign meets the current requirements. Mr. Connors asked how tall the sign is. Mr. Sawler replied about 4 to 5 feet to the top of the post and the sign will hang lower than that. Mr. Connors asked if it will be lit. Mr. Sawler replied there will be down lights on it.

Mr. House stated that the Board will address the waiver requests and the application changes at the next meeting.

Mr. Zaremba asked if the Board needs to address any stormwater requirements. Mr. Connors replied that a waiver is needed from the stormwater report requirement and instead require some minimal infrastructure like a rain garden.

5. Other Business:

a. Discussion of proposed revisions to the Site Plan and Subdivision Regulations (continued)

Mr. Connors asked to continue this discussion to the next meeting.

b. Miscellaneous Community Planning Issues

Mr. Connors reported that the dermatology clinic at 23 Portsmouth Avenue opened on Monday, June 25th with a temporary 90-day Certificate of Occupancy.

Mr. Connors and Mr. House attended the “Navigating the Infrastructure Challenge” program presented by the Workforce Housing Coalition of the Greater Seacoast. The program discussed challenges with housing, particularly workforce housing, in towns without water or sewer infrastructure. There were a few projects in Rye that were interesting. One project was a non-profit that was able to meet the workforce housing definition for 20% of the project because the property values in Rye are high. The density was higher than expected for some projects due to advanced septic system design and sharing of septic systems between homes.

6. Adjournment

Mr. Canada made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 8:28 pm. Mr. Kunowski seconded the motion. All voted in favor and the motion was approved.