

OFFICE OF THE
PLANNING BOARD

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Memo

Date: 17 JAN. 2023

To: Richard Cabelus, Chair & Members of the Planning Board

From: Frank O'Connor, Jr., Director of Planning *FOC*

RE: Design Review Board comments on 203 Ayer Road

The Design Review Board members completed the categories on the matrix (attached) regarding the proposal to build three mixed-use commercial / residential buildings at 203 Ayer Road. They were instructed to utilize the design guideline through the lens of Bylaw §125-38(F) as the DRB's controlling document. Primary areas of concern were parking, the roof, "massing" and energy use. More than one DRB member explained that they separated Building A from the other two buildings when preparing their comments.

There were questions about size, materials and the façade, specifically to Building A, a proposed sixteen court badminton facility. They expressed these concerns due to perceived limited information provided by applicant. However, many of those items will be addressed by the Building Inspector. There was a question about how the Building Inspector would make certain the energy efficiency standards were being met or exceeded. Design Review Members requested more information about exterior lighting from applicant. One DRB member did inquire as to what lighting requirements the applicant must meet.

The parking situation drew sharp contrasts among DRB members. Some felt it was acceptable because the parking was more than seventy-five percent behind the building. Other DRB members felt there were too many parking spots in total, considering the use of the building. Some DRB members agreed there was a lot of parking but wondered if it could be broken up. However, the applicant made many efforts to explain the need for parking during tournaments on weekends and that some of the parking spaces could be used by residents and clients of the two other buildings on the site.

DRB members focused on the badminton facility roof being too flat, that the roof lacked variations and that it was not in spirit with the Design Review guidelines. While the applicant explained that the shape of the roof and building were dictated by the use of the facility, one member suggested a spire be added to the roof. More than one DRB member suggested faux doors on the building might create the appearance of a barn, and help with sight lines. Applicant explained that windows would allow natural light, which would adversely affect the badminton games.

Concerns were expressed by DRB members that the building would outlive the proposed business, and that the main building lacked longevity of design to avoid it becoming a de facto warehouse. Some DRB members wanted more trees in the parking areas and restructured parking areas. The other smaller buildings were acceptable to DRB but it was suggested a focal point was needed among all the buildings other than the parking lot. Further discussion may be needed about screening along the road.

The applicant stated previous drafts of the proposal did try situating the large building differently and that the proposal was to permit all three buildings. Applicant reminded the DRB that Harvard does not have the infrastructure to line up large anchor tenants. The proposal is based on a vehicle approach and the facility will draw people to Harvard from other towns. Applicant said the only entrance to the facility is in front of the building.

Applicant referenced the that limited parking in front of the building and that the proposal meets the parking requirements of the bylaw. Applicant mentioned the town administration requested the building be closer to the street, and added there needed to be more flexibility applying the guidelines because the commercial uses are not all the same. Applicant said the grades of the road and the site will diminish the size of the building.

DRB members added that material guidelines and energy guidelines needed to be addressed. Some DRB members liked the proposed connectivity for pedestrians and how to maximize it. DRB members discussed if and how conditions were to be put on any Special Permit to ensure use and adherence to bylaws.