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Groton Office:
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The Groton Planning Board
Town Hall
173 Main Street
Groton, MA 01450

RE: Lawrence Academy
Gray Building Renovation/ Site Plan Review

Dear Board Members:

I represent Lawrence Academy with regard to renovations which are to occur to the Gray Building.

HISTORY AND EXISTING CONDITIONS

The Gray Building was built in the late 1940's; it is named to honor the then Head of School, Fred C. Gray. The Gray Building, as originally constructed, contained the gymnasium, locker rooms, squash courts, dining hall, kitchen, a room for the Trustees to meet in, and the MacNeil Lounge, a lovely two story baronial space with a large stone fireplace and furnishings reminiscent of a private men's club of that era.

At the time, this building was a major improvement to the facilities Lawrence Academy had. Prior to that time, there was no real gymnasium, and the dining hall was a series of repurposed rooms on the first floor of Dana House. The campus was focused on Main Street (the old Schoolhouse was to the right of Dana House in front of Bigelow Hall). The playing fields were limited to those on the opposite side of Main Street.

The Gray Building was the first structure of an ambitious transformation of the Lawrence campus that was to occur in the 1950's and 1960's, changing the focus of the campus to the quadrangle which lies in the center of the principal campus buildings today.

The former gymnasium has been repurposed as the arts wing, but the rest of the building remains as it was seventy-five years ago.

The dining hall (the wing to the rear) has the look of an afterthought; its flat roof does not match anything else on the building and it leaks. The rear of the building does not share the quality and level of detail of the front, which was not an issue seventy years ago, since there was then nothing behind this building.

One of the unfortunate aspects of the existing building is that it creates a visual barrier between the quadrangle and the spectacular view of Gibbet Hill and the playing fields to the rear, which one can now enjoy only through a couple of modestly sized windows in the dining hall or by standing in a parking lot adjacent to a loading dock.

PROPOSED RENOVATION

Lawrence Academy has engaged Flansburgh Architects of Boston to design the proposed renovations, which will involve the demolition and replacement of the existing dining hall. Their inspired design for the building and surrounding site is transformative, resulting in a state of the art facility which both embraces and enhances its surroundings.

The proposed renovation will eliminate the deficiencies present in the dining hall wing and enhance the utility of the interior spaces by providing terraces to the front and rear which will create an unobstructed flow between the interior and exterior spaces.

A new terrace on the Southerly side of the front façade will create a pleasant exterior space linking the foyer and MacNeil Lounge with the quadrangle, eliminating the hard separation between interior and exterior which exists now. This terrace links the main and side entrances and includes a new access ramp which seamlessly blends into the design. The stairs which lead to the front entrance are extended along the full length of this terrace. The brick, trim, capping, and terrace materials will match existing components of the building.

The dining hall wing is replaced by an addition employing massing and rooflines consistent with the existing building. The foyer will now lead to a spectacular two story space which embraces the beautiful view to the rear with a wall of windows. This new space will be known as the Community Commons, providing dining spaces and areas for students and teachers to congregate. This interior space will extend outside to a rear terrace which again links the interior and exterior spaces.

SITE CHANGES

The front and side entrances will be improved by the incorporation of a terrace to the right side of the façade (as one faces it from the quadrangle); this space will provide a pleasant exterior gathering space which will serve as a transition between the exterior and interior spaces students congregate in. It also will incorporate an ADA compliant ramp allowing for easy access for those with mobility issues. Existing walkways leading to both the front and side entrances will be modified and reconfigured as needed.

The most significant site changes are to the rear of the building. A portion of the existing parking area will be removed and replaced with an access drive connecting the Stone Athletic Center to the existing driveway leading to Lowell Road. The remaining area will be landscaped, incorporating plantings shown on the planting plan, swaths of grass, and an exterior terrace along the window wall of the new rear façade.

The transformation of this space will be a major improvement; a now unsightly parking area and utility area will be transformed to a beautiful extension of the interior spaces of the new addition to the building.

The parking spaces removed (31 spaces plus 2 EV spaces) are incorporated into existing parking areas on campus. This portion of the campus accommodates 278 autos, 4 buses, 8 minibuses, and 2 EV spaces. The rehabilitation of the Gray Building envisioned by this project will not add any students, teachers, or staff.

Stormwater will be attended to by a subsurface system meeting current requirements which will collect and treat the runoff. These plans will be reviewed as part of a Stormwater permit application which has been submitted.

Existing gas, electric, water, and sewer utility lines which currently serve this building are sufficient to meet the needs of the renovated structure.

PROCEDURAL ISSUES

As the Board is aware, Lawrence Academy is an educational institution and is thus an exempt use under Chapter 40A Section 3. This exemption allows for most aspects of site plan review; the location and size of buildings, access, and parking.

Plans for this proposed renovation and addition have been reviewed and approved by the Historic Districts Commission.

As indicated above, I have submitted for review and approval as part of a Stormwater Permit; this review will likely be completed prior to the Board's hearing on this matter.

I look forward to discussing this project with the Board at the hearing. Thanking the Board for its time and consideration, I remain

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'R. Collins', written in a cursive style.

Robert L. Collins