### **TOWN OF GROTON PLANNING BOARD**

#### **Thursday, May 12, 2022 at 7:00 PM**

**Meeting Minutes**

A virtual meeting of the Planning Board was held on Thursday, May 12, 2022, at approximately 7:00 p.m. All votes were to be taken by roll call because the meeting was virtual.

**Members Present:**

Mr. Scott Wilson, Chair

Mr. Russell Burke, Board Member

Ms. Lorayne Black, Board Member

Mr. David Bonnett, Board Member

Mr. George Barringer, Board Member

**Members not Present:**

Ms. Annika Nilsson Ripps, Vice Chair

Ms. Alyson Bedard, Clerk

**Also Present:**

Mr. Takashi Tada, Land Use Director/ Town Planner. Mr. Mark Haddad/Town Manager

**Public Hearing- Major Site Plan Review for Florence Roche Elementary School, Phase 2**

**342 Main Street (Florence Roche Elementary School Building Committee)**

Mr. Wilson opened the public hearing and noted that the Public Hearing Notice was available in the Land Use Office at the Town Hall.

* Peer Review Letter

Mr. Jared Gentilucci, P.E, Nitsch Engineering was present for the public hearing and displayed the Peer Review Letter. He said that the applicant is requesting twelve waivers and there are no red flags or major objections. Mr. Gentilucci briefly discussed the following recommendations for the requested waivers of Site Plan Review Regulations.

3. Section 381-39 N: The scale of the plan drawings is appropriate; however, the building plans need to be stamped by a licensed architect.

6. Section 381-40. B (2): There are a number of proposed light poles that are 30 feet tall, which exceeds the 20-foot maximum; however, there is no light spillover into the neighboring properties.

7. Section 381-40. B (2) & (3): There are a few areas in the north and south parking lots as well as a walkway that do not meet the minimum footcandle requirements.

9. Section 381-40 D: The proposed Cape Cod Berm for the access road is acceptable; however, a granite curb would be more durable and require less maintenance and repairs.

12. Section 381-40.G: Retaining walls should not exceed 4 feet and there is one retaining wall listed above the maximum height. The applicant will provide a wall design prepared by a registered professional prior to the construction.

13. Section 381-40. I: It is recommended that the applicant submit any additional signage plans to the Planning Board.

Mr. Gentilucci then discussed the three general comments made in the Peer Review Report.

1. The north parking lot is an existing parking lot with accessible spaces. Four of the spaces require a pedestrian to be able to walk in the vehicular drive aisle. The applicant should consider connecting those spaces directly with a sidewalk.

2. The existing accessible parking signage does not align with the parking spaces and should be reinstalled.

3. The Do Not Enter sign existing north of the middle school should face west.

Mr. Burke asked about the potential impacts of waiver #8 related to curbing. Mr. Gentilucci said that waiver #8 relates specifically to the fire access road where a Cape Cod Berm is being requested. Mr. Burke commented that the request should be clearly stated in the special permit decision.

* Presentation

Ms. Meryl Nistler, Studio G Architects, provided a quick overview of Phase 2 which entails the construction of the new two story elementary school building in the vicinity of the existing track, the demolition of the old elementary school, and the construction of a common lawn space for the community.

Jeffrey Pilat, Civil Engineer with Samiotes Consultants, presented the Civil Site Phasing Plan. He said approval has been received from the Earth Removal Stormwater Advisory Committee, the Conservation Commission, and MEPA. The proposed project would be achieved in two phases. Phase 1 included installation of the erosion and sedimentation controls; construction of the new 400-m running track and the associated drainage system; site preparation for the new school, the construction of infiltration system #3, and all associated underground utilities for the new building. Mr. Pilat said Phase 2 would consist of the construction of the new elementary school building, demolition of the existing school, installation of infiltration systems #1 and #2, installation of a rain garden, all remaining utilities, a drainage connection, earthwork, signage, pavement, retaining walls, landscaping, pedestrian hardscape, and the GELD Battery Energy Storage System (BESS).

Mr. Pilat reviewed the Vehicular Site Layout for the western portion of the site. The new parking lot located to the southwest of the new school would contain 69 parking spaces. The access drive would serve as the primary option for parent pickup and drop-off. The parking lot and associated drives would contain vertical granite curbing. On the south side of the parking lot there would be retaining walls meeting the four-foot height restrictions and guard rails to ensure vehicular safety. There are 8 proposed ADA spaces providing accessibility to the school entrance in the parent pickup and drop-off area. The north existing parking lot would be updated by removing and replacing the parking spaces and the access drive that serves both schools. The northern access drive would serve as the primary option for bus pickup and drop-off. Mr. Pilat said there would be a concrete wall that exceeds four feet in height and a waiver is being requested. The wall would be designed by a registered professional prior to the commencement of construction. East of the drop off area there are three additional parking spots. There are a total of 108 parking spaces which is calculated below the required amount of 126. The project is requesting a waiver to exclude landscape islands and tree plantings in the proposed southern main lot and the northern lot to maximize the spaces and meet both the school and Town requirements. The 20 foot emergency access road would be paved and gated at both access points with the appropriate signage. Waivers have been requested to allow for a Cape Cod Berm around the emergency access road and to eliminate the requirement for wooden guard rails.

Mr. Dan Mills, MDM Transportation Consultants, discussed the Auto Turn Analysis. He said by utilizing simulation of a variety of vehicles accessing the site they were able to determine an effective circulation flow with two separate drop-off and pickup areas, one designated for buses and the other for parents.

Mr. Mills said based on the Queue Analysis it was determined that 24 vehicles would be in queue during peak times for pickup and drop-off. The loop area has a queue capacity of approximately 32 vehicles. The bus drop-off and pickup area would serve 13 buses with no impact to the main drive.

Ms. Kellie Connelly, Terraink, presented the landscaping plans. She described in detail the front entry consisting of high-quality durable materials including cast-in-place concrete scored in patterns to create interesting finishes to match the exterior walls. Additional features utilizing the cast in place concrete include sloped walkways and ramps. The sport court would be constructed of asphalt and bounded by a concrete curb to provide a solid edge and limit ball rolling. The southern plant beds would provide a boundary to the poured-in play area, and granite slab benches would be installed for durability and to minimize vandalism.

Ms. Connelly said that the Outdoor Learning Lab would be constructed of the cast-in-place concrete and surrounded by vegetation and screening to lessen any noise. This area transitions to an active zone into the kindergarten play space also containing a poured-in play surface.

Ms. Connelly then discussed the proposed plantings. The naturalized setting identified to the east of the new building would consist of planted trees and turf to reestablish the vegetation. The proposed vegetation palette consists of 55 native trees, 764 shrubs, 1200 perennials, and a layer of buffer enhancement. There is a high level of interest in the front entrance, the learning lab, and the buffer enhancement area. A waiver is being requested for the landscaping strip along the foundation wall. There are activity and services areas proposed without the landscaping strip.

Ms. Connelly said that the planting plan in the front of the building utilizes a ⅔ spacing that layers the trees, shrubs, and perennials which creates a more natural buffer. The Outdoor Learning Lab will receive less sunlight, resulting in plant materials that require tolerance to meet the elements of temperature, moisture, and low lighting.

Daina Yurkus, Light This! Inc., was present to discuss the Lighting Plans. She said that the main factors taken into consideration when determining the appropriate exterior lighting plan were code issues and the surrounding areas. With the combination of mostly 20-foot poles and a few 30-foot poles the illumination goals were achieved while being cost conscious. The lighting is designed to be even and harmonious. Ms. Yurkus said that each light fixture would be downwards facing and contain a shield to prevent any glare. Mr. Steve Michener, Studio G, stated that the 30 foot poles were to provide adequate lighting to the extended southern parking lot and to prevent light from illuminating into the resource areas and the abutting properties. Mr. Michener said that there would be a miniscule amount of area where the minimum lighting levels were not met; however, the general illumination is within the measurements specified in the lighting regulations.

Mr. Michener presented the Existing Campus Views and stated that the proposed building fits within the footprint of the existing track and the wetlands would provide a protected nook for the newly constructed school. He said that the intention of the campus is to preserve the nature of the site and keep a harmonious design.

Mr. Michener said that the Bus Drop Area provides an accessible path up to the entry of the school where there is a large canopy and a smaller canopy to provide adequate shelter. The finishes and coating have all been considered to maintain the existing look. The retaining wall serves the raised area and allows for a welcoming entrance with appealing visuals. The design also accommodates an outdoor eating area.

Mr. Michener said The Parent Drop Off area was designed to ensure that the rooftop equipment was not observed. The design of the building utilizes metal panels and a storefront wall. There are two colors of brick masonry that would be utilized to provide a variation on the exterior of the building.

Mr. Michener briefly described the First Floor Plan. He said that the front of the building contains an organized public space where the classes then branch out.

The Roof Plan allows for the equipment to be obscured from the ground level as seen on the rendering and then continues around the entire building. Mr. Michener described the brick masonry to be durable and long lasting and said that the palette for the 50 plus year building has been approved by both the Town and the School Committee.

David Saindon, Leftfield (Owner’s Project Manager), discussed the Permitting/Construction Timeline and said there have been no revisions from the last meeting on April 7, 2022. The permits have been approved by the Stormwater Advisory Committee, Conservation Commission, Planning Board (Phase 1), and MEPA. He said that the track is projected to be complete in the fall and the earthwork to support the foundation is planned to commence shortly.

Tripp McElory, Gilbane Building Company, updated the Board that the project team received notice to proceed. During the week of April 11th they met with trailer vendors, GELD, and fencing contractors. The team was successful in securing work crews for the following week of April 18th and the temporary construction trailers were delivered, permits were filed for those trailers, temporary fencing was installed, and GELD installed temporary utility poles to allow for the trailers. The Conservation Commission authorized installation of erosion controls and conducted an inspection. Permission for the temporary construction entrance was granted and it will become active tomorrow. Mr. McElroy said an erosion control inspection is scheduled for May 17th to allow for earthwork to commence.

Studio G Architects presented an animated video showing the construction of the site from start to finish. The work for the track, utilities, and site prep had already commenced. In the Fall/Winter of 2022 the athletic track and field would be turned over and the construction of the new foundation would commence. In the Spring/Summer of 2023 the roof exterior and wall assembly would be constructed. In 2024 the new elementary school would be completed and the demolition of the existing school would commence. In the Fall/ Winter 2024 the site prep and hardscape of the new common area in front of the building would be completed and in the spring of 2025 the landscaping would be finalized.

Mr. McElroy discussed the Site Utilization Plan identifying the locations of the office trailers. He reiterated that the track would be turned over this fall and the new elementary school would be turned over in the summer of 2024. As seen on the plan identified in orange the perimeter of the old building would be enclosed with fencing along with the trailers and materials. The proposed demolition work would commence in the summer 2024 starting in the southeast corner and working counterclockwise to support the idea of working their way off the site.

Mr. McElroy said the Site Logistics Plan includes the details of the main entrance and removing the temporary construction access. The main entrance would revert back to a single entry and exit way. He said that they are requesting permission to remove two additional trees near the front entrance due to the poor condition of the trees and their proximity to the construction access.

Mr. Pilat displayed the summary of the main waivers omitting any of the administrative requirements and said he would respond to any questions.

* Board Members Comments/Questions

Mr. Barringer asked if the southern parking lot could accommodate any additional trees. Mr. Michener replied there are no intentions to plant any additional trees in that area. Mr. Pilat explained that the southern parking lot borders the edge of the tree line which also contains guard rails and retaining walls which would not allow for any additional vegetation.

Mr. Barringer asked if the parking spaces in the vicinity of the parent queue line were placed efficiently. Mr. Millis said that the parking spaces would be designated for staff parking only and would not be affected by the queue lines due to arriving prior to any students and then departing after school hours. Mr. Barringer also questioned if the turning radius for emergency vehicles around the access road and how the road was intended to be utilized during peak queuing periods. Mr. Pilat said the radius was verified based on fire apparatuses and there would be no parking permitted in front of the access gates. Ms. Nistler assured that the Fire Department had been consulted with. Mr. Powers said that the emergency vehicles can access the campus through Champney Street or they can loop around the middle school. Fay Raynor, School Committee Member, commented that the emergency services can be notified to utilize the Champney Street access during specified times.

With regard to the lighting plan, Mr. Barringer asked if there is a reason for utilizing lighting that is 4000K and if an alternatives analysis was performed. Ms. Yurkus said the lighting is very efficient and with taking into consideration the budget and surrounding areas a 4000K light was the most appropriate color choice. An alternatives analysis was performed in regards to lighting levels and to minimize impact to the site. The 30-foot poles are proposed to reduce the overall number of poles. Mr. Barringer questioned the location of the 30-foot poles. Mr. Michener identified the five poles on the plan located both in the northern and southern parking lots. He explained that the 20-foot poles would not adequately illuminate the entire parking lot and it would be very challenging installing them along the property line and retaining walls, especially in the southern parking lot. Mr. Barringer wanted to ensure that public safety is being considered. Mr. Michener said he would provide an alternate design including only 20 foot poles at the next meeting.

Mr. Burke commented that the poles would be located on the north side of the parking lot and the light would diminish on the opposite side of the parking lot. He said that the lights are programmed to an astronomical clock timer and would be terminated at 8:00 AM and 9:00PM. Mr. Michener confirmed that information is accurate and the device is connected to the overall building management system.

Mr. Burke asked about the delta between the existing parking spaces and the proposed parking spaces. Mr. Pilat said that an increase in student population has been factored in. Mr. Powers assured that information would be provided before the next hearing. Mr. Burke asked if there were any preventive measures to keep skateboarders off the proposed granite seating. Ms. Connelly said that the granite seating design utilizes short benches, and where there are more grouped benches in close proximity it would discourage skateboarding.

Mr. Bonnett asked if there was access for pedestrians and bikes entering from Champney Street to navigate their way around the school to utilize the track. Mr. Powers said that there is a safe passage to access the track from Main Street and sidewalks accessible for pedestrians around the campus. The Champney Street entrance is intended for emergency access only, as it is now.

Mr. Barringer asked if there is any lighting planned on the access road or near the BESS structure to provide a safe passage for the public. Mr. Michener replied there would be very minimal lighting on the BESS which hasn’t been fully designed yet, and there would be no lighting on the new track. The existing track does not provide any lighting. He said the maintenance shed adjacent to the track would be illuminated. Ms. Chesson said that the existing track is used seldomly after dusk. Mr. Saindon suggested posting signage of the hours of operation to prevent track usage after dark.

Ms. Black commended Terraink for the planting design and selection, including the rain garden. She said there are trees displayed on the rendering however, that are not shown on the tree planting plans. Ms. Connelly explained that the rendering shows their end goals and they intend to achieve full planting. Ms. Black recommended providing a plan of the final lawn area if there is a waiver being requested in the southern parking lot for no additional trees. Ms. Black then asked for clarification of a contoured area shown on the front lawn and how it would be maintained. Ms. Connelly identified it as a raised area or berm. Mr. Michener said that the area was designed to act as a barrier and minimize access when there are children at play and to assist in monitoring when there is short staffing. Mr. Pilat confirmed the area is modeled as a berm on the plan. Ms. Connelly added that the slope would be 3-1.

Ms. Black asked about the lighting plan at the entrance of the building. Ms. Yurkus said the final lighting design is being developed and she is hoping to install lighting in the columns or the flooring to illuminate the canopy.

Ms. Black asked if there were any plans for an irrigation system. Ms. Connelly said there is no active irrigation necessary with the proposed native species and rain gardens. Ms. Black asked if there is a one year guarantee on the vegetation. Ms. Connelly said that the standard lawn carries a one year warranty cycle and the buffer enhancement area would have a two year warranty as requested by the Conservation Commission. Mr. Michener said that an irrigation system would be installed for the new field within the athletic track.

Ms. Black was pleased with the proposed outdoor seating and suggested providing additional seating. Ms. Nistler commented that the seating area can be revisited. Mr. Michener noted that it is a limited area and it would be furnished as favorably as possible and noted that there would be bench seating provided along the building wall in this area.

**MOTION**: Mr. Burke made a motion to continue the public hearing to the next scheduled meeting on May 26, 2022 at 7:00 PM. Mr. Barringer seconded the motion.

A roll call vote was taken, which resulted as follows:

Yea: Ms. Black, Mr. Barringer, Mr. Burke, 5

Mr. Bonnett, and Mr. Wilson

Nay: 0

**The motion carried. 5-0-0**

***Discussion- Hayes Woods permit modifications at Maple Avenue***

Stan Dillis and Attorney Bob Collins were present for the discussion. There are three changes being proposed on the revised plan by Dillis and Roy Civil Design Group, dated May 3, 2022.

1. The acreage of the estate lots on Maple Avenue has been reduced.
2. The amount of open space that will be gifted to the Conservation Commission has increased to approximately 60 acres.
3. The dwellings on lots 4 and 6 were relocated, as was the driveway on lot 6.

Attorney Collins stated that the changes would reduce the area of disturbance. Lot 6 involves less grading and no tree removal for the driveway.

Ms. Black questioned why the limit of disturbance is so wide to relocate the well and suggested preserving the trees between the two lots. Mr. Dillis stated that the clearing limit potentially could wrap around and provide an adequate buffer. Attorney Collins agreed that the homeowners would want an established buffer to provide privacy, especially between lots 6 and 7.

Mr. Wilson asked if any tree removal had commenced at lot 6 where the driveway was previously proposed. Attorney Collins confirmed that there was an amount of site work performed however, not at the street. Mr. Dillis said that Lot 6 been cleared for logging, but no grading work occurred.

Mr. Burke was concerned with the close proximity of the driveways between lots 6 and 7, however, agreed that the proposed changes would result in less clearing along a scenic way and minimizes the disturbances from the curb cuts.

Mr. Bonnett questioned how the runoff water is proposed to be controlled once the existing gravel driveway is paved. Mr. Dillis explained that the existing driveway is a temporary construction entrance and the original driveway, once completed, would contain recharge trenches located on both sides. The Stormwater Committee would be inserting a condition into the Stormwater Management Permit to assure that the trenches are installed. Mr. Dillis also pointed out there would be a rain garden next to the driveway on Lot 4.

Ms. Black about the driveway slope for Lot 4. Mr. Dillis said that the access point of the driveway would be 4%-5% and then transition to 10% maximum slope.

Deb Collum, 137 Maple Avenue, stated that there is a significant cut in the treeline approximately 40 or 50 feet wide in the vicinity of Lot 6 on Maple Ave and requested that the contractor plant new trees to fill in the gap. Attorney Collins agreed that trees could be planted and that the natural vegetation would regrow in that area. Mr. Kiley commented that the homeowners would have a picturesque view looking out across the field and assured that no excavation was performed. He agreed to plant three Red Maple Trees in the restricted area. Attorney Collins said that he would compile a letter that would be recorded and referenced to the special permit.

**MOTION**: Mr. Burke made a motion to accept the revised plan dated May 3, 2022, as a field change to the special permit with the condition that applicant will plant three Red Maple Trees in the disturbed area located on lot 6 of 2’-2.5’ caliper. Ms. Black seconded the motion.

A roll call vote was taken, which resulted as follows:

Yea: Ms. Black, Mr. Barringer, Mr. Burke, 5

Mr. Bonnett, and Mr. Wilson

Nay: 0

**The motion carried. 5-0-0**

***Discussion – Field change request to remove the riding arena at Groton Hill Music Center (Indian Hill Music), 122 Old Ayer Road***

Mr. Wilson briefly discussed the proposal to demolish the riding arena, re-grade the area to the match the existing grades, and reseed with grass. The Conservation Commission approved these minor changes at their last meeting on Tuesday, May 10, 2022.

Mr. Bonnett requested confirmation that the work would include the removal of the riding arena foundation, which appears to extend above ground on the east side, where the land begins to slope downhill toward Old Ayer Road.

**MOTION**: Mr. Burke made a motion to approve the field change to demolish the riding arena including the foundation, to grade the area to match the existing grades, and to loam and seed the area, as proposed in the letter from Gary Shepard received on May 5, 2022. Mr. Bonnett seconded the motion.

A roll call vote was taken, which resulted as follows:

Yea: Ms. Black, Mr. Barringer, Mr. Burke, 5

Mr. Bonnett, and Mr. Wilson

Nay: 0

**The motion carried. 5-0-0**

**Project Updates**

* Bank of America lighting

Mr. Barringer created a list of comments and notes in regards to the bank's illumination. Mr. Tada was requested to compile a letter using the provided list and forward it to Bank of America. Mr. Barringer requested a comparison of lighting plan V5 versus lighting plan V3.

* Village at Shepley Hill construction

Mr. Tada said that a portion of the initial infrastructure for the subdivision entrance has been performed. Nitsch Engineering has been inspecting the major steps and will be returning next week to observe the installation of the middle retaining wall located in close proximity to the two wetlands. Mr. Burke informed the Commission that he observed the intermittent stream flowing unobstructed with apparently low turbidity.

* Academy Hill paving

Mr. Tada said that the final coat of pavement was completed on Cherry Tree Lane last December and the top coat on the sidewalk commenced last week.

**Committee Updates**

* Complete Streets Committee

Mr. Barringer said that the two sidewalks have been approved and currently there is no update on when the project will commence. Mr. Tada said that the delay is due to the Town having additional sidewalk projects to include in the bidding process.

* Community Preservation Committee

Mr. Burke said all the recommended projects were approved for funding at the Spring Town Meeting. He thanked Mr. Barringer for presenting at the meeting. Mr. Tada said he received a phone call from a resident who also commended Mr. Barringer for standing up for the Town.

* Spring Town Meeting

Mr. Wilson commented that he was glad that the Town did not agree to allow a developer to rewrite the zoning bylaw.

Mr. Bonnett said that there were concerns from residents about the Age-Restricted Housing provisions and suggested that the matter be monitored and acknowledged on future agendas.

Mr. Barringer stated there are multi-family and age-restricted zoning issues and there is a significant amount of interest within the community. Promoting housing diversity is something that requires public engagement. He stated that the funding for a master plan has been approved and housing will be a component. There are obsolete provisions that have been in place for over 30 years and unfortunately no one wants to revise them and residents tend to be supportive of multi-family housing until a location is set. The Montachusett Regional Planning Commission is performing an initial study and the Planning Board can utilize that data. The Planning Board requested that the item be added to future agendas.

**General Business**

* ZBA Updates

Mr. Tada said at the next ZBA meeting there would be requests for special permits for lots located around Lost Lake including the construction of two new dwellings and a garage.

* Master Plan RFP

Mr. Barringer commented on the Destination Groton Committee (DGC) request to participate in the master planning process. The DGC has proposed an earmark request from the State legislators to secure $50,000 in funding for the Master Plan. Mr. Barringer expressed that the DGC should be allowed to work collaboratively, as should any other committee interested in the planning process. But he potential for funding should not be seen as buying any influence in the planning process.

Mr. Burke noted that there are issues with respect to the funding and agreed that Mr. Barringer has a legitimate concern. The Planning Board has authorization under Chapter 41 to prepare a master plan and cannot allow someone to impair their responsibilities by leveraging their way in. Mr. Wilson agreed that J. Gordon and other persons participating in the group are welcome to join the subcommittees that will be set up and participate as individual citizens. Mr. Tada noted that the funding that was approved at Town Meeting would be available beginning July 1st.

* Meeting Minutes

**MOTION:** Mr. Barringer made a motion to approve the meeting minutes from the April 7, 2022 special meeting as submitted. Mr. Bonnett seconded the motion.

A roll call vote was taken, which resulted as follows:

Yea: Mr. Barringer, Mr. Burke, 4

Mr. Bonnett, and Mr. Wilson

Nay: 0

**The motion carried. 4-0-1 (Abstained- Ms. Black)**

**MOTION:** Mr. Burke made a motion to approve the meeting minutes from April 14, 2022 as submitted. Mr. Barringer seconded the motion.

A roll call vote was taken, which resulted as follows:

Yea: Ms. Black, Mr. Barringer, Mr. Burke, 5

Mr. Bonnett, and Mr. Wilson

Nay: 0

**The motion carried. 5-0-0**

**Adjournment**

**MOTION:** Mr.Barringer made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 9:40PM. Ms. Black seconded the motion.

A roll call vote was taken, which resulted as follows:

Yea: Ms. Black, Mr. Barringer, Mr. Bonnett, 5

Mr. Burke, and Mr. Wilson

Nay: 0

**The motion carried. 5-0-0**

Respectfully submitted:

Kristine Fox

Per Diem Minute Taker

*Approved 6/9/2022*