

TOWN OF WESTPORT ARCHITECTURAL REVIEW BOARD

DRAFT MEETING MINUTES JANUARY 25, 2022

Members Present: Ward French, Chairman; Jon Halper, David Mann, Vesna Herman. Staff: Donna Douglas. Minutes from the December 21, 2021 meeting were approved.

1. **1076 Post Road East:** Review proposed signage at 1076 Post Road East (Parcel ID# F09//050/000) submitted by Gary Potts for property owned by Post Plaza LLC in an HSD Zone. (Site plan Atlas 1/4/22; Sign design Atlas 1/4/22; Site views provided by Elizabeth & Mitchell Higgins, 3A Iris Lane)

Appeared: Gary Potts for Professional Permits representing Amazon and Atlas Sign Holdings

Mr. Potts said the sign is a wall sign over the entrance to Amazon Fresh, a grocery store. It is 73.14 square feet and requires ZBA approval. The sign consists of individually lit channel letters saying Amazon Fresh with the “smile” logo under. There is just the one sign, identifying the entrance, and a spot on the common sign monument on the Post Road. He described the sign:

- Approximately 8 ft tall by approximately 9 ft wide
- Individually lit channel letters and logo
- Amazon letters are white, Fresh and the smile logo are green

Vesna Herman verified the colors and asked if it is national sign scheme and was told yes. She verified that the variance is needed for the sign’s height.

David Mann asked about the site plan. Mr. Potts said it is a truncated version. Mr. Mann asked if there are renderings of the sign from the Post Road and was told no.

Jon Halper had no questions.

Ward French said members of the public had asked to speak. Elizabeth and Mitchell Higgins of 3A Iris Lane identified themselves.

Mr. Higgins said the sign does not face the Post Road, it faces west to Church Street South. Their property is to the south at the side of parking for the Post Plaza mall. The sign will be visible from their kitchen and the 2nd and 3rd floors. Mrs. Higgins said the previous tenants, Barnes & Noble, had a smaller, less bright sign. The height and illumination are the problem.

Mr. Potts said he doesn’t have the lumen output for this sign but one he just did in Pennsylvania was much larger and there was only a 97 ft output from the radius of the lights. The sign lights are only on from 7 am to 10 pm.

Mrs. Mitchell asked if the sign has to be as high as it is. Mr. Potts said it is only 2.9 ft above what is normally allowed. Mr. Mitchell said if you want it to be seen from the Post Road, why not move it closer to the Post Road. Mr. Potts said the goal is for it to be seen above the entrance.

Attorney Fred Lott, who was also observing the meeting, said because it is an older development, there is no buffer, as is required now, between the commercial and residential. Mrs. Mitchell said the street lighting is also taller than before. Ward French asked if the new street lighting is installed. Mrs. Mitchell said the poles are in and are substantially taller than before but the lights have not been installed. Before, they arched down so the light wasn't seen.

Mr. French asked Mr. Potts if this had been approved by Planning and Zoning. Mr. Potts said he was only concerned with signage and not privy to that information. Mr. French said the ARB is only concerned with the signage and suggested that the Mitchells take up street lighting with the P & Z. He asked if there were additional comments from the public. There were none.

David Mann asked Mr. Potts if they had considered linear signage as opposed to the stacked, or any other approaches since the size and height are above regulations. Mr. Potts said no, as far as he knew there were no other versions of the sign.

Vesna Herman said from a design point of view, it is an attractive logo. Since it is only 2 feet above allowed height, could you bring it down? Mr. Potts said it would make the logo less visible. Ms. Herman said you will not lose any impact from the parking lot and it will be less visible to the residences. She suggested he should take it into consideration. Mr. Potts said he would take it back to the client but felt the candle production would not be a nuisance. Ms. Herman said the building is very horizontal, there is an option to develop a more horizontal sign. But overall, it is a handsome design.

Jon Halper said, regarding the Mitchell's concerns, he wondered if there was a point on the façade where the light becomes not so visible. Mrs. Mitchell said the problem is the height and illumination, Barnes & Noble was discreet, it did not project light. She did not think moving it away from the house would help. Mr. Halper said the sign is an attractive design and actually modest for the size of the façade. But he does understand the neighbor's issue and also thought a linear sign might mitigate problems for the neighbors.

Ward French said a business is allowed to have an appropriate sign, and it has to be in balance with the needs of its neighbors. We can only weigh in on the aesthetics of this sign.

David Mann agreed the design is attractive but not the only solution. He had found a linear Amazon sign design in the UK. He did not feel it was unreasonable to ask for an architecturally appropriate sign.

Ward French said the board seems to feel the sign is not appropriate as proposed and asked the applicant to return with another solution for the design.

THE APPLICANT WAS ASKED TO RETURN WITH A MORE LINEAR SIGN DESIGN
(Herman, Halper and Mann Yes, French No)

2. **1680 Post Road East:** Review proposed removal of existing wood siding, cleaning, repairing and repainting of existing CMU block at 1680 Post Road East (Parcel ID

3. #H09//173/000) submitted by Eric Bernheim, FLB Law, for property owned by 1480 Post Road East LLC, c/o Little Branch Inc, located in a GBD

Appeared: Will Krause, Architect

Mr. Krause said proposed renovations had been submitted but still haven't been completely decided. Tonight he just wanted to discuss the removal of the awnings and wood siding that is on 2 sides of the building down to the cement block. They know that the block will require repairs and want to see what it will entail. The CMU will be painted 2 colors, Yosemite Blue up to 42 inches off the ground and Cotton Ball White above. They will return to the board with other items and signage.

Ward French thanked Mr. Krause.

Vesna Herman asked if the openings would stay the same. Mr. Krause said 2 small doors on the north elevation will be infilled and a new door opened on the back of the building. The main façade stays the same. Ms. Herman verified that the signs depicted would not be discussed at this time.

Jon Halper asked if there are proposing any more landscaping. Mr. Krause said yes, they will upgrade the parking and add some landscaping, including plantings along the east property line. Mr. Halper asked how much more green would be added. Mr. Krause said none now but it will be added. They want to create less impervious coverage.

David Mann asked if they know the condition of the block under the siding. Mr. Krause said no, but they will repair or replace anything that is needed. Exposed block on 2 sides of the building is in pretty good shape. Mr. Mann said he was concerned that there could be attachment holes and other disrepair. Mr. Krause said they will be patching as necessary. The paint proposed is special for CMU. Mr. Mann said there was a discrepancy in the heights in the renderings. Mr. Krause said the heights are correct on the elevations, the color on the renderings.

Ward French said it is the creative reuse of a gas station. He liked it but felt there might be too much signage and recommended taking some of it away.

Jon Halper agreed and said it looks like a fun place.

Vesna Herman said it is simple and appropriate. The new parking will be better and she agreed they should be careful with the amount of signage.

Ward French said the board appears to appreciate the design so far and we look forward to seeing it when you come back.

THE BUILDING DESIGN IS APPROVED AS FAR AS IT HAS GONE. THE ARB WILL GIVE A FINAL RECOMMENDATION WHEN THE APPLICANT RETURNS.

(Unanimous)

4. Discussion with the Westport Bus Shelter Working Group regarding bus shelter for riders using the Coastal Link Bus Service on the Post Road in Westport. Comment offered at the meeting will be considered in anticipation of further zoning review and approvals.

Appeared: Jennifer Johnson, Pippa Bell Adler, Melissa Kane, Attorney Larry Weisman

Jennifer Johnson said they wanted to bring the ARB into the conversation about bus shelters on the Post Road. The State is involved and has been very cooperative as it is encouraging the use of more public transportation.

Pippa Bell Adler said they are concerned citizens who are members of various Westport boards and commissions. The state and local municipalities want to provide shelters along the coastal link. The route through Westport on Rt 1 is 5 miles long and there is only one shelter, at Stop and Shop.

Melissa Kane said she was the former chair of the Downtown master plan. It is important to expand public transportation and encourage people to take advantage of buses. They are evolving to electric power and there is one electric bus on the route in service now. More people need to use them and there is a need for broad base support. Ideally shelters should be provided every ¼ mile. We have identified 8 possible segments with east and west bound shelters in each segment. There is funding for 4 – 6 shelters. Norwalk Transit also has to approve shelter locations.

Jennifer Johnson said, over all, there is a need for 8 – 10 shelters. From 4-6 property owners are on board. There are location issues, regulatory issues with the state, w local zoning and state regulations. There are maintenance and legal issues, ADA requirements.

Ms. Johnson provided an illustration of an 8 ft x 14 ft black metal shelter with a barrel vaulted roof on a 10 ft x 15 ft concrete pad. They will need to be smaller down town. There should be solar lighting and benches. Hopefully, it can all come together.

Ward French said the shelter design is as clean as it can be. The ARB has seen a number of designs through the years. Does this have DOT approval? Ms. Johnson said the state is being very cooperative as it is interested in promoting public transportation.

Attorney Larry Weisman said we need encroachment approval from the state. We are working with them so as not to do this piecemeal. Now we need property owners approval.

Melissa Kane said we want continuity using state designs in ARPA shelters.

Attorney Weisman said town regulations prohibit advertising in shelters, which is how some municipalities pay for maintenance. Also, we are looking at solar sheeting on the roofs and are figuring out the costs.

Ward French asked if there was a particular resolution you need from the ARB or general support.

Attorney Weisman said general support and design approval.

Jon Halper said he had no questions and definitely supports the project.

Vesna Herman agreed. She suggested they keep the shelters as transparent as possible, it is a safety issue.

David Mann was glad they are studying the solar solution, panels are an eyesore. Mr. Weisman said they are talking to the solar sheeting manufacturers who are helping price things out. Ms. Johnson said they are working with Duoguard.

Mr. Mann asked about digital readouts of bus schedules in the shelters. Ms. Johnson said the state needs to move to a single information system. Every bus system has its own, on the Coastal Link Norwalk, Fairfield and Milford each have their own systems. It needs to be a single LED screen. Mr. Mann asked how it would be integrated with the design. Ms. Johnson said it's just a box. We want the state fund one information system.

Ms. Adler said the solar sheeting company is from Canada so it has cold weather experience.

Ward French said we are very supportive of your efforts. When you solidify the components, let us know. Board members agreed.