

**CITY OF ESSEX JUNCTION  
DEVELOPMENT REVIEW BOARD  
MINUTES OF MEETING  
FEBRUARY 16, 2023  
APPROVED APRIL 20, 2023**

**MEMBERS PRESENT:** John Alden, Chair; Cristin Gildea, Maggie Massey, Dylan Zwicky.

**MEMBERS ABSENT:** Robert Mount

**ADMINISTRATION:** Regina Mahony, City Manager; Jeff Kershner, City Engineer; Chris Yuen, Community Development Director

**OTHERS PRESENT:** Greg Dixon, Krebs & Lansing; Brett Grabowski, Milot Real Estate; Ron LaFountain; Kristie Wildes-Lafountain

**1. CALL TO ORDER**

Mr. Alden called the meeting to order at 6:32 PM.

**2. ADDITIONS OR AMENDMENTS TO AGENDA**

No additions or amendments.

**3. PUBLIC TO BE HEARD**

None.

**4. MINUTES**

**a. Regular Meeting – January 12, 2023**

**MOTION by CRISTIN GILDEA, SECOND by MAGGIE MASSEY, to approve the minutes. The motion passed 4-0.**

**5. PUBLIC HEARING**

**a. Conceptual site plan to renovate 2nd floor of two story building into 6 one-bedroom apartments at 1 Jackson Street in the MCU District, by Fat Tire, LLC, Ron LaFountain and Kristie Wildes, owners.**

Mr. Alden disclosed a potential conflict on interest, stating that he had worked with the applicants in the past, however he is not currently working with them. He said that he does not believe that this work is germane to his review of the project, but asked if the Board had an objection. No objection was given.

Chair Alden swore in all individuals who intended to speak during this hearing under the following oath: “I hereby swear that the evidence I give in the cause under consideration shall be the whole truth and nothing but the truth under the pains and penalties of perjury.”

Applicants Mr. LaFountain and Ms. Wildes-LaFountain presented to the Board. Mr. LaFountain said that they brought the property a few years ago, and moved their long-distance moving business into the space. They had additional space in the building that they did not use and wanted to convert it to housing. Ms. Wildes-LaFountain described the interior of the building, and its historical features. She said that all exterior features are existing. Mr. Alden said that the Board is looking to see what site plan elements would be required for this new use.

Mr. Kershner, of Hamlin Consulting Engineers, discussed the possibility of removing parking spaces from the plan. This will provide more space for cars backing up to exit spaces, and allow for the safer movement of traffic. The applicants expressed concern about removing the parking as it could hamper future development. Mr. Kershner said that the building elevation plan was not to scale, and asked for confirmation about the height, which was given. Mr. Alden noted that this was one of the oldest buildings in the City, and detailed some of its previous uses. Mr. Kershner said that the access drive is narrower than required by the code. This is existing and does not need to be changed, however now that it is going to be a residential use more pedestrian traffic is anticipated. He suggested that a sidewalk or traffic calming measures be included to mitigate this. No changes to screening or landscaping are included in the application. The lighting in the parking lot will need to be made more uniform throughout the area. The lighting mounting heights will need to be confirmed, as will the lighting levels. No changes need to be made to the curb cut, as it is existing. Ms. Wildes-LaFountain discussed a concern regarding the existing rooftop air conditioning unit and Mr. Alden said that existing equipment is not subject to review. Mr. Kershner said that if there will be exterior disturbance erosion controls need to be put in place.

Ms. Gildea expressed support for the project. Mr. Alden expressed concern that residential units will be included in an industrial area and asked that the Board and applicants be sensitive to connectivity. He discussed the proximity to the train tracks and Public Works Department. Regarding the landscaping, Ms. Wildes-LaFountain described the grassy areas near the building which could be used for potential gardening for tenants. Mr. Zwicky expressed concern about pedestrian accessibility and Ms. Wildes-LaFountain said that there are few sidewalks in the neighborhood to which new sidewalks for this property could connect to. Mr. LaFountain said that he would resolve the lighting issues. Mr. Yuen said that lighting is especially important in areas where cars will be backing up. Ms. Wildes-LaFountain expressed concerns about trespassing and said that she was concerned that a sidewalk would increase this. Ms. Massey expressed support for the project and suggested adding in an outdoor gathering space. Mr. Alden discussed potential connectivity changes with expected construction of the Crescent Connector.

**JOHN ALDEN made a motion, seconded by MAGGIE MASSEY that the Board approve the conceptual plan with consideration for the requirements that are in the LDC that have been pointed out by the City Engineer and with the ongoing consideration for the other items that we have talked about including safety, lighting, and pedestrian connections. Motion passed 4-0.**

**b. Conceptual site plan to remove existing residential buildings and construct new building with 34 studio apartments with parking at 227-229 Pearl Street in the MF/MU1 District, by 227 Pearl Street, LLC, owner.**

Mr. Grabowski, property owner, and Mr. Dixon, Project Engineer with Krebs & Lansing, presented. Mr. Dixon said that it is intended to construct 34 studio apartments and have other buildings on the property demolished. He feels that this project fits in well with the theme of the surrounding area. Mr. Grabowski said that a fifty-foot setback will be present from the brook. This project will undergo Act 250 review. In reference to staff comments, Mr. Grabowski said that all measurements are to scale and accurate.

Mr. Kershner said that code requires 71 parking spots, however the applicant is requesting a waiver to request 49. Staff finds the reasoning for this to be acceptable. He said that the applicant has requested to reduce the aisle width in the parking lot and the width of the access drive from 24 feet to 22 feet. Staff does not support the approval of this request; however, the Board can choose to approve one or the other, none, or both. This project is not anticipated to need a state stormwater permit; however the Land Development Code (LDC) would like the applicant to maintain as much pre-development hydrology as possible. Mr. Dixon detailed the applicant's research in state stormwater standards and other efforts that have been done to mitigate these issues. Stormwater will be in a shallow, grass-lined swale on the left side of the property. The building will be four stories with a flat roof.

Mr. Kershner said that bike racks are recommended to be at the front and back of the property. Mr. Grabowski said that all units will have private locked storage units. Mr. Kershner said that a plan for erosion control, as well as a landscape and architecture plan, will need to be established. He said that lot of utility crossings will displace the sidewalk and suggested that it all be replaced at the same time. The extent of the current bike lanes and bus access was discussed. Mr. Kershner said that details regarding sewer and water allocations would be needed prior to final submission. Any work that is inside the right-of-way must follow LDC regulations. Mr. Alden discussed access for larger vehicles, and the possibility of reserving spots for them to promote the use of smaller cars. He discussed whether the current code is capturing best practices in parking and encouraged flexibility. Mr. Grabowski expressed his support for this flexibility, as it would help to produce a better project for the residents.

In regard to landscaping, Mr. Alden encouraged Mr. Grabowski to include most of it in the front of the building. He asked that a streetscape image be presented when the project is brought back to the Board. Ms. Gildea asked about the existing number of apartments present in the existing building, Mr. Grabowski said that there are seven. Some of the units are currently vacant, and all tenants are aware of the project. Ms. Mahony read a public comment that was sent to her from Steve Eustis. He said that the current sidewalk is 5'6" wide on average and asked that the new sidewalk be maintained at this size. Mr. Dixon said that he was amenable and that he intends to match the sidewalk size in front of the other apartment buildings on Pearl Street.

**JOHN ALDEN made a motion, seconded by DYLAN ZWICKY to approve the conceptual application with staff comments and additional comments that have been given tonight. The motion passed 4-0.**

## **6. OTHER DEVELOPMENT REVIEW BOARD ITEMS**

Mr. Alden welcomed Mr. Yuen to his new role as Community Development Director. Mr. Yuen said that he is excited to work with the Board and city staff. He encouraged the Board to contact him with any issues or ideas. Ms. Mahony said that there is currently no update on the timeline of the LDC updates. She said that City staff is working to speed up the development review process to get conceptual plans to the Board faster. This would be done by having the technical review done after the conceptual plan review. Ms. Mahony also suggested said that the DRB chose to continue plans if they have suggested changes, rather than approving them and requesting that staff finish the review. Ms. Mahony said that conceptual plan reviews are currently proposed to become optional, however she now thinks that it is something that should be required. The Board discussed the current process of approvals, and what responsibilities belong to respective staff and Boards.

**7. ADJOURNMENT**

**MOTION by CRISTIN GILDEA, SECOND by MAGGIE MASSEY, to adjourn the meeting. The motion passed 4-0.**

The meeting was adjourned at 8:33 PM.

Respectfully submitted,  
Darby Mayville