

Mill Site Study Committee

Meeting minutes - November 5, 2009

Present: **Committee Members:** Stephanie Cronin, Joan Ladik, Ken Morgan, Matt Nesbit, Georgette Rogers, Sharon Santy, Jeff Sauer, Joseph Sergi, and Stephen Themelis
Members absent: Kurt Amidon, Roger Goscombe, Albert Harris, Ronald Karr, and
Also present: Geoffrey Morrison-Logan and Matt Kealey of VHB, Dominic Rinaldi of BCS, Don Eriksson, Dan Spinoza

Mr. Sergi called the meeting to order at 7:20pm and noted that an executive summary of existing conditions at the Mill Site and two maps were supplied by VHB to Committee members via email prior to the meeting and are now available on the Committee's webpage. He also mentioned that VHB had had a site walk on Monday.

VBH Presentation: Mr Morrison-Logan offered a quick review of site assumptions and regulatory constraints discussed at previous Mill Site Study Committee meetings and then introduced Mr. Kealey, who has been studying the traffic around the Mill Site.

Traffic: Mr. Kealey first reminded the Committee that VHB had not done a traffic count itself, noting that such would be beyond the scope of the current contract, but that he had used NMCOG data showing 10,400 vehicles per day on Main St. He said that VHB had conducted a site visit and had observed existing traffic conditions, noting that the current 20 and 25 MPH speed limits were not being observed by the majority of vehicles moving past the Mill and Main St. intersection, as well as the current Main St. entrance to the Mill Site. He said that this is a concern because there is only a 160-foot site distance from Mill St. looking toward bridge and just a 150-foot site distance from the Main St. bridge to the Main-Mill St. intersection. The queuing of vehicles cause by left turns against traffic can reduce site distances even more.

Potential Re-use of Existing Buildings: Mr Morrison-Logan discussed VHB's site visit on Monday. Based on information from the Bartram & Cochran Market Study and discussions with the Mill Site Study Committee, VHB focused on Buildings 1, 2, 2A, 4, & 6 for possible reuse. He noted that none of these buildings meet current code, that all are in fair to poor condition, and that all would require costly renovations ranging from \$175-250/sf depending on final build-out. The current layouts of buildings, he said, didn't really lend themselves to reuse, with the possible exception of Buildings 1 and 4. Possible site contamination may cause even more problems and potential expenses, but that is not known. He further noted that the removal of Building 3 could increase cost of retrofitting nearby buildings. Site access from Main St. is problematic due to traffic visibility, making the best location for new Main St. access to the site is at the location currently occupied by Building 2.

Mr. Morrison-Logan stated that VHB recommends that Buildings 2 and 6 not worth saving. Buildings 1, 2A and 4 may be worth saving, but a more detailed survey would be necessary.

Opportunities: Mr. Morrison-Logan presented renderings of three possible build-out footprints based on the three Scenarios discussed at the preceding Mill Site Study Committee meeting.

Scenario 1: For this first scenario, VHB specifically targeted the uses recommended in the Bartram & Cochran Market Study. The layout presented included retail space near Main St. of 6,000 sq. ft.; 12,000 more sq. ft. of retail and restaurant space slightly in from Main St.; a B&B with historical tie-in (noting the "hospitality" recommendation from the Market Study); a 13,000 sq. ft. health club; a two-story medical office building; and 22 residential townhouses units.

Mr. Morrison-Logan noted that this scenario as rendered still some access problems. Ms. Ladik asked whether access to Main St is a requirement. Mr. Kealey suggested limited access might be possible, but for almost any retail establishment, Main St. visibility and access would be critical. Mr. Morrison-Logan noted that this scenario as

rendered would include no reuse of any existing buildings. Building 1 would not be used due to improved site access and new retail on Main St., Building 2A would not be reused due to the riverfront. And Building 4 would not be reused simply in order to best lay out the new structures. The total square footage of this rendered scenario is close to market study, but is a little short due to site constraints.

Scenario 2: New retail square footage would be the same as scenario 1 (6000 sq. ft.), as would the restaurant and retail (12,000 sq. ft.), although the health club (10,000 sq. ft.) and professional office building (15,000 sq. ft.) would be smaller and moved more toward the front of the site, leaving room for an arts & culture facility in the middle third of the site and open space, maybe park and a gazebo, in the rear. The arts & culture facility as rendered showed an indoor theater and outdoor amphitheater.

Mr. Sergi asked if snow removal had been planned for in this scenario. Mr. Morrison-Logan said that this plan has not reached that point. He noted that again no existing buildings were reused in this scenario. However, Mr. Morrison-Logan showed a second version of Scenario 2, labeled **Scenario 2b** that did reuse Building 4 as the site of the health club. New retail in the front of the site was reduced to 10,000 sq. ft., the B&B that was omitted from Scenario 2 returned, and the arts & culture theaters remained. Mr. Morrison-Logan cautioned that the site topography may cause some difficulties with roadways through the site in this scenario.

Scenario 3: New retail (6,000 sq. ft.) and restaurant and retail (12,000 sq. ft.) were the same as scenario 2, professional office was increased to 20,000 sq. ft., and the health club was rendered at 13,000 sq. ft. The dominant feature of the middle third of the site was rendered as a 60,000 sq. ft. soccer field, with the same park, civic use, and gazebo in the rear of the site.

When asked again about building reuse, Mr. Morrison-Logan said that VHB had stayed away from reusing Building 1 due to site access. He noted that Building 2A is interesting, but perched up high next to the riverfront and that the topography of the site made it difficult for that building to remain given the access and inner roadway requirements.

Mr. Kealey discussed traffic effects of each scenario, noting that in all cases VHB believed that site access has to be pushed eastward toward the Main St. bridge to afford better and safer site lines to the Mill and Main St intersection. He said that Scenario 1 will likely generate the most peak hour traffic, that Scenario 2B would likely be the least, and that scenarios 2a, 2b, and 3 all could require special event traffic control. He said that further traffic evaluation would be necessary. Ms. Santy asked if a one-way traffic pattern might work better. Mr. Kealey said it might, agreeing that left turns out of the site would be very difficult, but saying too that limiting access to the site could be unreasonable for potential retail success. Ms. Ladik noted that with the completed covered bridge could yield more reasonable access from Mill St. and that it could make more sense for many purposes.

Open discussion: Mr. Morrison-Logan invited the committee to openly discuss its impressions of the scenarios as presented.

Ms. Santy said she preferred Scenario 1 because a developer would be more likely to get a return on investment, particularly due to the housing component. She said she liked the health club, but was unsure about the potential for success of a B&B in downtown Pepperell. When asked by Mr. Sergi, Ms. Santy said she would support a restaurant having a full liquor license, although not a bar, in the interest of making it financially viable. Acknowledging Ms. Santy's comment about the B&B, Mr. Morrison-Logan reminded that Scenario 1 specifically followed the Market Study and that the B&B seemed to be the most logical "hospitality" usage.

Ms. Cronin asked for confirmation that Building 1 is gone in all scenarios. Mr. Morrison-Logan confirmed that it would. Ms. Cronin asked whether new site access is truly necessary and whether Building 1 is at all salvageable. Mr. Morrison-Logan noted that if it is saved it means other trade-offs. Mr. Kealey said if the retail component goes away, then saving Building 1 might be possible. With regard to Scenario 3, Ms. Cronin commented that the Town really doesn't need more soccer fields and that maybe a rink or a larger park would be a better fit.

Mr. Sergi asked the committee to discuss how strongly members felt about the reuse of existing buildings. Mr. Nesbit said he liked Building 2A for the location for a restaurant. Ms. Ladik asked if Building 1 could be physically

relocated. Mr. Morrison-Logan said he didn't know about the cost, but suggested that moving the building would likely not be practical. Mr. Morgan said that the renovation cost of any of the existing buildings would likely be more than that of new construction. Mr. Sauer asked if new construction done in the style of the old buildings would still be price prohibitive. Mr. Morgan said that it would probably still be cheaper than renovation. Mr. Sergi asked if the committee if it was OK with no reuse of any buildings. Ms Rogers said that the style is more important than the actual buildings. Ms Santy said that she'd like to see Building 1 saved given its history in Town, but understood the reality and would understand if it had to be taken down. A discussion followed about the possible reuse of materials from the existing buildings for redevelopment in their style. Mr Sergi summarized that the charge would be to preserve the integrity of the history and heritage, but not necessarily the buildings.

Ms. Ladik said that Scenario 2 seems to have a lot of open space and wondered if adding some of the residential component of Scenario 1 might make it more viable to a developer.

Mr Sauer said he understood the up-front economical argument for Scenario 1 in terms of attracting a developer and that it could work. But he was concerned about Scenario 1 turning into empty space like other empty retail spaces that currently exist in Pepperell. Because of its location and lack of frontage, he said he believed that a redevelopment of the Mill Site has to be something special if it's going to succeed. Mr. Nesbit agreed that a redevelopment can't be generic and that there has to be something to make a future Mill Site development a destination. He said he envisioned a gathering area or outdoor courtyard and asked about moving the restaurant down closer to the river. Several Committee members agreed. Mr. Morrison-Logan said that it might be possible and would look into it, although again noted the topography of the land as an issue. Mr. Sergi said Scenario 2 offers daytime usage, evening usage, and possible weekend usage and that it could truly become a center of activity for the Town. He expounded that no other town in the region has a chance to do something special with its downtown and suggested that Pepperell should make the best of this opportunity. Mr Sergi further commented that it might sound crazy, but that the giant smoke stake of the co-generation plant might be a possible attractor if saved, even though it seems ugly.

Mr. Sergi confirmed that the town is not married to the redevelopment requirements of 43D.

Mr Themelis said that he had expected that Scenario 3 would be open for municipal usage, such as a police station or public safety complex.

Mr. Sergi said that he didn't like the idea of splitting Scenario 2 into 2a and 2b because it ultimately means four scenarios. He suggested that 2b should be eliminated. Several members agreed.

Mr. Morrison-Logan summarized the discussion, saying that for the public meeting on November 18 Scenario 1 would stay pretty much the same, with the possible exception of looking at the south east corner near the river for the restaurant or other use. Scenario 2b would go away and that VHB would look at repositioning the buildings and parking. In Scenario 3, VHB would remove soccer field in favor of a rink or just park space, change the layout to address a possible municipal building.

Ms Cronin asked whether department heads would be invited to the public meeting. Mr Sergi said that all would be invited.

Next Meeting: Wednesday, November 18, 2009, at 6:30pm at the Senior Center.

Adjournment: The meeting was adjourned at 9:18pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Jeff Sauer, Mill Site Study Committee Secretary