

BROCKTON PLANNING BOARD MINUTES
Wednesday, September 3rd, 2025 - 6:00 PM

Chair Toni Goncalves opened up the meeting with a Roll Call...

Members present are

- Toni Goncalves - Planning Board Chair
- Iolando Spinola - Planning Board Vice-Chair
- Marty Crowell - Planning Board Member
- Matthew Gallagher - Planning Board Member
- James Sweeney - Planning Board Member
- Rob May - Director of Planning & Economic Development
- Evan Sears - Planner II
- Brendan Weeks - Deputy Fire Chief
- Isaiah Thelwell - Administrative Assistant

Review and Acceptance of Minutes

The Board reviewed the minutes of the last Planning Board meeting that took place on **08-05-25**

A motion to accept was properly made by James Sweeney, seconded by Matthew Gallagher. The motion was unanimously approved (5-0).

1. Site Plan Review - ADU

Property: 446 Forest Avenue / 7 Breer Street

Parcel ID#: 026-123

Applicant: DeBarros Enterprises

Representative: J.K. Holmgren Engineering

Scott Faria of J.K. Holmgren Engineering presented the Site Plan Review application for an Accessory Dwelling Unit at 7 Breer Street, a newly built single-family home with an attached garage located at the corner of Forest Avenue and Breer Streets. The proposal involved converting the basement into a 650-square-foot ADU containing a kitchen, living room, and two bedrooms. Faria explained that the project had gone through two technical review meetings and incorporated feedback from the Planning Department, Building Department, and Deputy Fire Chief Weeks regarding egress and driveway design. James Sweeney raised concerns about parking, noting the site's location at the end of a one-way street and the potential for the garage to be used for storage instead of parking. Faria responded that the plan provided four off-street spaces—two for the main dwelling and two for the ADU—while conforming to zoning limits on

curb cut width. After discussion, Sweeney recommended shifting the curb cut six feet to improve access to ADU parking, which Faria agreed to.

A motion to approve with the condition that the curb cut be moved six feet was properly made by James Sweeney, seconded by Matthew Gallagher. The motion passed by unanimous vote. (5-0)

2. Site Plan Review

Property: 30 Intervale Street

Parcel ID#: 167-018

Applicant: Rising Community & Housing, Inc

Representative: PMP Consulting, Inc

Edward Jacobs of PMP Consulting presented the Site Plan Review presentation for 30 Intervale Street, explaining that the project site, the former Sandara Club, was entirely paved and previously approved for redevelopment. The new proposal was to construct a 22-unit residential building, reduced from the original 28 units to meet the one-to-one parking requirement with 22 on-site spaces. Jacobs recounted that the earlier plan was denied due to parking deficiencies but later received approval from the Zoning Board of Appeals and the Conservation Commission before returning to the Planning Board for final review.

Chair Goncalves asked Planning Department staff whether any outstanding issues remained. She cited two known items: the lack of an elevator and the department's recommendation to revise the building's window design for consistency with surrounding redevelopment in the Montello neighborhood. Planner Sears explained that most prior review comments had been resolved through the Conservation process, except for the elevator and exterior design. The elevator issue was deemed acceptable because the project still met ADA accessibility standards, but the façade and window treatment remained unresolved. Sears emphasized that the department was not demanding full design revisions but requested that the applicant engage in a collaborative discussion to find reasonable adjustments aligned with the Montello Neighborhood Plan and upcoming form-based code standards. Sears expressed concern that the applicant's written response, declining to make any exterior changes for cost reasons, did not sufficiently address the comment or provide justification. He stressed that the department sought only good-faith cooperation to reach a compromise. Chair Goncalves agreed, noting that newer buildings in the district followed a consistent, urban-style window pattern similar to downtown storefronts, which visually unified the neighborhood. She asked Jacobs to confirm whether the request involved matching that emerging design character. Before Jacobs could respond, Attorney John McCluskey joined the meeting and indicated he wished to address the matter on behalf of the applicant.

Attorney McCluskey strongly objected to the Planning Department's comments, stating that Planner Sears was "off base" and misrepresenting the scope of site plan review. He cited Section 27-89 of the Brockton Zoning Ordinance, claiming that site plan approval was limited to evaluating traffic, infrastructure, drainage, safety, parking, and waste disposal—not building design or window style. McCluskey accused the department of previously misleading the board on procedural matters and claimed Sears had improperly prevented the applicant from being heard at the August 5th meeting, constituting an open meeting law violation. He insisted that issues such as elevator design and window configuration were irrelevant under the ordinance and that the Planning Board must focus only on the legal criteria for site plan approval.

Chair Goncalves responded that the Planning Department had not misled the board but merely offered design suggestions to encourage consistency with the emerging aesthetic of the Montello neighborhood. She clarified that no one was demanding revisions, only asking whether the applicant could explain why the proposed window adjustments could not be made. McCluskey reiterated that the building design had already been approved by the Zoning Board of Appeals more than a year earlier and that re-evaluating window styles at this stage was improper. Goncalves explained that the suggestion was intended to align with the city's broader vision for the district, where new buildings were adopting a uniform, downtown-style window pattern that enhanced neighborhood character. She emphasized that the board sought only a rationale, not enforcement. McCluskey deferred to Edward Jacobs, who explained that the project had already endured significant delays and costs, particularly during Conservation Commission review. Jacobs said that redesigning the façade or flipping the building, as once requested, would require new architectural drawings and impose costs his client could not absorb.

Chair Goncalves acknowledged the delays but pressed whether cost alone was preventing the design change. Jacobs reiterated that the proposed adjustments would require re-engineering the building and that the process had already been exhausting. Architect Steven Gribbin then clarified that the building's original design had a modern look, and the team had already made prior aesthetic revisions, including color and trim enhancements, as requested early in the process. However, altering the window design now would not be a minor change—it would necessitate a full redesign inconsistent with the approved plans and outside the original zoning standards. Gribbin explained that these modifications would have cost implications for both the owner and his architectural services. Chair Goncalves thanked Gribbin for clarifying, noting that his explanation helped the board understand the constraints and reasoning behind the design choice. Sweeney acknowledged the update but stressed that it would be unfair to hold the current project to future zoning standards.

A motion to approve with standard conditions was properly made by Marty Crowell and seconded by James Sweeney. The motion passed by unanimous vote. (5-0).

3. Definitive Subdivision

Property: 1036 Ash Street

Parcel ID#: 023-011

Applicant: Affordable Properties, LLC

Representative: E.T. Engineering

Azu Etoniru of E.T. Engineering presented the Definitive Subdivision application with applicant Steve Torrey. The project is a proposed three-lot subdivision off West Chestnut Street. Etoniru explained that the site contained an existing dwelling and would be divided into three conforming lots, each meeting minimum lot area, frontage, and setback requirements. He emphasized that the layout had been designed to avoid wetlands impacts, with all homes set back over 200 feet from West Chestnut Street. The roadway, currently a 12-foot-wide private way, would be widened to 24 feet and improved with new drainage, a stop sign, fire hydrants, a water main, and a sewer main. He clarified that the subdivision would require a waiver from subdivision control for roadway design, and subsequently a variance from the Zoning Board of Appeals because of the unique frontage circumstances.

James Sweeney questioned traffic impacts, noting that the intersection of Ash Street and West Chestnut was already narrow, congested, and had poor sightlines. He asked how the proposed improvements would alleviate these conditions. Etoniru responded that the widened roadway, clearing of vegetation, and installation of signage would improve safety, while the subdivision itself would add only about nine daily vehicle trips. Spinola raised concerns about pedestrian safety, pointing out that students regularly walk along West Chestnut Street to school despite the lack of sidewalks. Etoniru acknowledged this issue, explaining that the subdivision road itself was too constrained to accommodate sidewalks, but that coordination with DPW could help explore improvements at the intersection to benefit pedestrians and drivers alike.

Deputy Chief Weeks asked for clarification on the distance of the farthest proposed house from West Chestnut Street, and Engineer Etoniru confirmed it would be about 325 feet. Sweeney then raised additional concerns about traffic at the intersection, explaining that cars often back up and cut around vehicles, which could worsen with the new subdivision. He recommended adding curbing as a physical barrier to keep cars from driving onto the shoulder and improve visibility for vehicles exiting the new road. Etoniru agreed that such a measure could be stipulated and coordinated with DPW.

Public Comment

Veronica Stephens, Resident, first thanked Director Rob May for his service and wished him well in retirement. She then questioned an unbuilt road shown on the plans and learned that its right-of-way connected to another neighborhood but was never constructed. Veronica expressed concern that if completed, it could become a cut-through, feeding more traffic into the Ash Street intersection, which she described as one of the most dangerous in the city due to poor sightlines and topography. She argued that while curbing and minor improvements may help, a traffic light had long been needed at that location, and this project should be the push to install one. Veronica added that drivers often bypass traffic by cutting onto lawns, further proving the need for stronger traffic controls. She concluded by reiterating her support for property owners' right to develop but stressed the importance of addressing safety issues.

Etoniru responded to concerns about traffic by noting that the project did not meet the warrants required for a traffic light, adding that the “paper street” referenced by Stephens had long been absorbed into existing properties, making it impractical to construct without removing structures. He emphasized that an 18-inch granite curb at the intersection, which followed city standards, would be sufficient to prevent cars from cutting across. Chair Goncalves suggested any approval should include a stipulation requiring the applicant to meet with DPW to craft a safety plan acceptable to the department. Commissioner Sweeney, however, argued that the project should not advance without a definitive plan in hand, pointing out that uncertainty around DPW’s response could delay matters further.

Etoniru clarified that the applicant would fund the improvements, not the city, and estimated the widening of the roadway and installation of hydrants would already exceed \$800,000 in costs. Developer Steve Torrey added that he had prioritized investing in road widening, sightline clearing, and emergency access, including bringing a new six-inch water line and two hydrants to the area. He stressed that while safety improvements were a priority, additional conditions like a traffic signal would render the project financially infeasible. Chair Goncalves reiterated that she was not asking for a traffic light, but rather modest safety measures, such as curbing or a small sidewalk, to be designed in collaboration with DPW. Sweeney recommended a continuance so the applicant and DPW could finalize a feasible safety plan, ensuring the city and developer were aligned before moving forward. Etoniru closed by affirming that the applicant had consistently met past conditions and would comply with any requirement to work with DPW, though he asked that the process not stall the timeline for other necessary approvals.

Sweeney moved to approve the project on the condition that the developer meet with DPW to determine the best course of action for the intersection design. Crowell seconded. The board voted unanimously in favor—Spinola, Crowell, Gallagher, Sweeney, and Chair Goncalves all supporting the motion. With the approval secured, Goncalves shifted the discussion to the applicant’s long list of requested waivers, asking whether they should be addressed one at a time or read off together.

A motion to approve 1036 Ash Street with standard conditions and the special condition that the developer meet with DPW to determine the best course of action for the intersection design was properly made by James Sweeney, seconded by Marty Crowell. The motion was unanimously approved (5-0).

Waivers:

Section IV. A. 1 – Frontage
Lots 1 – 3

A motion to approve the waiver was properly made by James Sweeney, seconded by Iolando Spinola. The motion was unanimously approved (5-0).

Section V. A. – Street and Roadway

A motion to approve the waiver was properly made by Marty Crowell, seconded by Iolando Spinola. The motion was unanimously approved (5-0).

Section V. B. 3. – Utilities (Street Water Main)

A motion to approve the waiver was properly made by James Sweeney, seconded by Matthew Gallagher. The motion was unanimously approved (5-0).

Section V. C. – Curbs and Sidewalks

A motion to approve the waiver with the condition that any determination from the DPW at the end of the street that impacts traffic safety between the intersections of Ash Street and West Chestnut Street, any suggestions from them must be adhered to, was properly made by James Sweeney, seconded by Matthew Gallagher. The motion was unanimously approved (5-0).

Section V. D. – Street Trees

A motion to approve the waiver was properly made by Matthew Gallagher, seconded by James Sweeney. The motion was unanimously approved (5-0).

Section V. E. – Monuments (Streets)

A motion to approve the waiver was properly made by Marty Crowell, seconded by James Sweeney. The motion was unanimously approved (5-0).

Section V. I. – Fire Department

A motion to approve the waiver was properly made by Matthew Gallagher, seconded by James Sweeney. The motion was unanimously approved (5-0).