

Doc.# 127 - MINUTES OF A HEARING HELD ON DEC 1, 2015 FOR AN APPLICATION FROM MELISSA MILLMAN, PROJECT MANAGER, FOR APPLICANT BOSTON ANDES CAPITAL LLC, REQUESTING MODIFICATION OF A SPECIAL PERMIT ORIGINALLY GRANTED IN 1987 FOR VIEWPOINT AT BIXBY CROSSING, AT 170 WASHINGTON ST.

SUBJECT: Document 127- Application from Melissa Millman, project manager for applicant Boston Andes Capital LLC requesting Modification of a Special Permit originally granted in 1987 for Viewpoint at Bixby Crossing at 170 Washington Street

Present: President John Michitson, Councillor Robert Scatamacchia, Councillor Melinda Barrett, Councillor William Macek, Councillor Thomas Sullivan, Councillor Mary Ellen Daly O'Brien, and Councillor Colin LePage.

Absent: Councillor William Ryan and Councillor Michael McGonagle.

City Clerk Linda Koutoulas: An application from Melissa Millman, project manager for applicant Boston Andes Capital LLC requesting Modification of a Special Permit originally granted in 1987 for Viewpoint at Bixby Crossing at 170 Washington Street

President John Michitson: Opened the hearing.

William Pillsbury, Jr.: I wanted to give you a brief preface to this. I think it's an exciting story for us tonight. It was several years ago that I first met Mr. Jim Hughes who you are going to meet this evening, principal of Boston Andes Capital; when he and his corporation decided to look at Haverhill and wanted to think about investing here, they did. They heavily invested in purchasing the Bixby building, many of us call it the Bixby building, but it is the Viewpoint building. It's exciting tonight that they are back to re-invest some additional resources in Haverhill and their project. It is before the council this evening as a minor modification to the Special Permit. I wanted to explain that to you. I had an opportunity to converse with their team and also the City Solicitor as to the best way to bring this forward. Since it involves no essential changes to the footprint of the building. Minor adjustment to the total number of units and a minor adjustment to the parking spaces we determined that it would best be a minor modification to their Special Permit therefore not requiring a public hearing before the Planning Board. That's why we have this one hearing tonight. Notice has been given to abutters. We are ready to go. I want to introduce the team. Mr. Jim Hughes is here. I will let the team take over as to how they want to proceed to introduce the project to you. Be happy to give comments if there is any questions.

I'm Jim Hughes, my partner Renza Piza is right here. He and I and some other partners have been very pleased to invest in Haverhill and have seen the transformation of Haverhill in a very positive way for the last several years as we've owned the Viewpoint project. We've come to the conclusion we could bring much more vitality to our project by transforming the first floor in the way that our architects will quickly demonstrate and also the floor below which has been largely unused since it's construction back in '88. We have projects in various parts of suburban Boston and also in various parts of Latin America. We really enjoy being here and enjoy the idea that Haverhill's vitality is increasing and we'd like to increase the vitality of our project and improve its quality. That's really our objective. But really I think the story is best told by the architects.

My name is Melissa Millmann, I'm the project manager with Cube 3 Studios, we are an architecture firm in Lawrence, 316 Merrimack Street. We have been working with the Bixby team for about 6-8 months trying to put together a plan of how to revitalize the building, the project. It's an existing 12 story building, residential units. There's 120 units in the building. The ground floor level is partially above grade partially below grade facing the river. It was predominately parking spaces that are unused currently as well as storage areas. The goal of the project was to add units and make the ground floor and

the first floor more usable space for the tenants as well as accessing the river views. There's a view here, the first plans. We submitted a revised package based on the application that was submitted about a month or so ago and the updated drawings are mostly graphic changes. The first page is basically the view from the river looking at the building next to the Comeau bridge. The lot is abutting on the corners of 170 Washington Street, is the address, so its Washington Street and the bridge. There's proposed deck that is going to be added on the backside. The main goal of the renovations for this building is to bring up to par with other properties that are in the area. There's other new developments as well as existing developments that are being renovated that we are trying to bring the amenity packages both for the current tenants of the building as well as future tenants but also to provide better pedestrian access to the riverfront potential connection with the Riverwalk project that's going on a little bit further down the river. The second page shows the competing projects that are in the area. We have a great spot that's close to the commuter rail which is highlighted in the blue zone for commuting tenants. The third page shows the existing connection to the riverfront. The highlighted blue area is where the existing Riverwalk is behind the Tap Restaurant that goes up to Washington Street. There's the potential discussion as to whether or not that could be connected further down and whether the Bixby/Viewpoint project could be part of that with the new pedestrian access that we are providing from Washington Street to the river. The main scope of the project, on the ground and first floor. Currently the main entrance is from Washington Street for tenants and visitors, we are proposing right now the way that site is set up that there's an existing parking garage, most tenants come in thru that parking garage, park their car and then walk out to the entrance up to Washington Street. We've proposed a new entrance for the tenants that's directly between the existing building and the existing parking garage. There's an accessible ramp that goes down to this entry as well as stairs access. This could be for public or the tenant's to use to access the river. Once inside there's amenity spaces that are being added. There's a clubhouse lounge with a gas fireplace and a gaming area. A new café and club room that could be utilized for the tenants to host family events or rent out the space as needed. There's a new leasing office as well as a larger mailroom and function room behind the scenes as well. Currently, there's an existing laundry room on that level which will remain. The main feature of this tying to the river is the large deck that we are proposing on the riverfront side. The structure would tie back to the existing building. It will not need new piles to disturb the land and would access for the tenants to have better views of the Merrimack River. On the first floor there's additional units. There's two existing units that we are renovating and appropriately sizing and four new units that would be studio apartments. There's an existing exit to the street on the north side of the plan and the elevator shafts which would go down to the ground floor which is the main entry for the building currently. The last page shows the elevation and the deck that's being proposed. It would wrap around the corner of the building both on the riverfront side as well as the new pedestrian access facing the garage. The goal of that obviously is to take advantage of the beautiful views that are being created now and the improvements that are being done along the riverfront side. The parking, I know that was an issue that was raised earlier, we would meet the 1.2 parking space per unit requirement that's required as part of the zoning that is accommodated thru the existing parking structure.

President Michitson: Thank you very much. Is that the end of your pitch?

Jim Hughes: I think it is, unless there are questions. We'd be happy to take questions.

President Michitson: Is there anybody else that's in favor that would like to speak on behalf of this project? Is there anyone else in favor? Is there anyone opposed? Is there anyone opposed that would like to speak? With that, I now close the hearing. Council what is your wish?

Councillor Macek: Move for passage of the document for the modifications to the Special Permit.

President Michitson: Motion by Councillor Macek seconded by Councillor Daly O'Brien.

Councillor Daly O'Brien: I think you've picked a terrific time to do this. We've got that beautiful new bridge which has really just changed that whole area. They are well along in doing the railroad bridge over which has been a noisy project and I think you've been thru the worse of it. I'm glad to see that you've come back. Are you going to be doing anything else to freshen up the building while you are doing this? Because the building has been there since 1988 so I didn't know if anything else on the exterior or, I can see you are going to update a couple of the units. As far as the other, it's 12 stories.

Melissa Millman: Right now we've gone thru a design development stage of the project. We are in current discussions and pricing with contractor to figure out what scope we can invest in the existing façade improvements. We have talked about potential paint improvements, if the budget allows. There is some proposal for, maybe not as part of this project, but phased throughout to upgrade the egress stairs on the upper floors and part of that would be improving the façade along the Washington Street side.

Councillor Daly O'Brien: If I could make a comment, anything you can do to make more outdoor space. Because one of the problems with even some of the existing buildings that have been done over, is that there's not a lot of outdoor space especially on congregate. You are putting the decking but one of the things that I encouraged another project to do is to think about what can you do on the roof? This has become a really popular venue. People are using them, 7/8 months a year. I think is the time to be really serious about doing things like that in Haverhill, especially on the river. It's got to be a big plus to have that outdoor space that could be used by the whole community whether it includes cooking outdoors or having pets accessible to some outdoors. Things like that. Those are the things people are looking for to get out of that cube like living. I'm not an architect, I'm not an interior designer, I'm just someone who likes to live, enjoy Haverhill. My husband and I are on the plan, we have an 11 room Victorian two blocks away from here. The four children are gone, we're on the two to four year plan of selling and we want to move downtown. I want you to create that space because I am not the only one that is looking for that kind of housing. I'm that generation.

Jim Hughes: I would just answer about the roof. We love the idea about the roof. The views from the roof are just spectacular. The problem is our elevator does not go to the roof and we've looked in the cost and the feasibility of making that happen and it really is impossible without access to everybody. You can't have it limited. There is some use of the roof by those tenants on the top floor who have a stairwell inside their unit up to part of the roof.

Councillor Daly O'Brien: So, you've given me a clue.

Jim Hughes: But what we are doing in addition to the deck, is there is actually more ground freed up because we are taking away the connecting link between the under of the building area and the garage so there is significant amount of landscaping and room to create much more interesting outdoor areas.

Councillor Daly O'Brien: It's so important now. One of the things that we have been wrestling with is this downtown pets. People are looking for places to walk their dogs and have dog play area because we don't really have a space like that in downtown Haverhill. I am hoping that at the end of all this, not because of you, but on the other side of the bridge that we are completing near the other parking lot that we can do something. That we can do something like that.

Jim Hughes: If you finish the circle of the boardwalk it is going to be dynamite. It is really going to distinguish Haverhill relative to any other city on any river. It's really going to be fantastic.

Councillor Daly O'Brien: I applaud what you did in 1988 because you are part of the key of where we are now. You did that building at a time when people weren't doing things like that in Haverhill. I really thank you for that. It started the ball rolling in many ways. I will support this project.

Councillor Sullivan: I, too, am going to support this project. It's a win-win, providing amenities to the residents in the building, things that they've had to go outside for all these years makes perfect sense especially, given where we live and the winter months when perhaps someone doesn't want to go out to a gym or go out to get a cup of coffee or whatever. I applaud you for that. I love the green space idea to further Councillor Daly O'Brien's point, if you want to make one of those spaces into a dog park you'd be a true hero to a lot of people downtown. I am curious on the prices. I know people who have lived there in the past and I've been in the building and they are very nice apartments especially the ones with the water views. What does a studio cost?

Renza Pisa, I'm with Boston Andes Capital, we are in Boston. The studios we propose will be market. So we think will be between \$1.90 and \$2.00 a square foot. There are roughly between 650 sq. feet to 700 sq. feet. \$1300 \$1400.

Councillor Sullivan: And one bedrooms, what are those?

Renza Pisa: The one bedrooms would be a little less per sq. foot we are projecting and hoping for \$1.70 per sq. foot.

Councillor Sullivan: Do you have a large turnover rate? Do you have a waiting list for apartments? How does it work there?

Renza Pisa: We actually do not have a large turnover rate right now and we don't have a waiting list either. We just rent them as we go.

Councillor Barrett: I was just wondering, how does your landscaping tie into the potential Riverwalk?

Melissa Millman: We haven't proposed an actual connection yet because there is nothing to connect to. What we've shown right now is that you see the staggered lines toward the left side of the plan, that's showing some kind of steps or connection down to the lower level where the Riverwalk level is. There's about a 2 level change between the bridge adjacent to the building to the existing Riverwalk so there would have to be some kind of plan of how the Riverwalk connects. It would depend on where that hit on the land of how we actually connect. It would be thru that zone for pedestrian access.

Councillor Barrett: So you would put up access from the general public thru you.

Melissa Millman: That's part of the plan.

Councillor Barrett: I also had a question on the parking. Right now are you at capacity in the parking garage?

Melissa Millman: No. There are 7 extra units, we have enough parking in the existing garage to accommodate that.

Councillor Barrett: You wouldn't be putting people out on the street

Melissa Millman: No, we would be meeting the 1.2 zoning ordinance requirements. We would stay within that and I think there is one space per unit that's designated.

Councillor Barrett: You don't have overflow issues?

Melissa Millman: Not that I am aware of.

William Pillsbury: I was going to add a comment about the Riverwalk and the tie into the Riverwalk because one of the things when Jim and his team came to us, that was the first thing they said. We're real interested in tying into this Riverwalk, how can we do it? That's usually not the way development goes in Haverhill. It was warming to my heart that we had that kind of initial conversation, but it has challenged us. It's challenged us to think about how to tie that in. We are working with them. They are going to be going thru Conservation but we are going to be working with them on the riverfront to try to tie that into the boardwalk so we can make that continuous loop that Mr. Hughes mentioned that would be so exciting for us to get to.

President Michitson: Madame Clerk, please call the roll.

Clerk Koutoulas: Councillor Scatamacchia-yes, Councillor Barrett-yes, Councillor Macek-yes, Councillor Sullivan-yes, Councillor Daly O'Brien-yes, Councillor LePage-yes, President Michitson-yes, 7 yeas, 0 nays, 2 absent

President Michitson: That passes.

Respectfully submitted,

Barbara S. Arthur
Administrative Assistant

December 15, 2015

REASON FOR VOTES - DOCUMENT 127
170 WASHINGTON STREET
MODIFICATION OF SPECIAL PERMIT
DEC 1, 2015

President Michitson: I voted in favor because it met the requirements.

Councillor Scatamacchia: I voted in favor because it was a good plan.

Councillor Barrett: The plan as presented represents a significant investment in and improvements of the property. Expanding tax base with minimal impact to surrounding area. It also allows for public access to the potential Riverwalk in keeping with zoning.

Councillor Macek: I supported the Special Permit modification as the request was for property improvements and to provide additional housing units and parking.

Councillor Sullivan: I voted in support of the special modification for the Viewpoint building because I believe the new apartment units and enhanced amenities will benefit the residents of the Viewpoint as well as enhance and update the overall appearance of this important corner of our downtown area.

Councillor Daly O'Brien: I voted yes for this project because it will be a benefit to the city, add to the tax base, represents a substantial investment in downtown Haverhill and will be an enhancement to our river edge property.

Councillor LePage: I voted in favor of this modification of a Special Permit as recommended by the Planning Director as it will provide additional housing and potential future public access to the Merrimack River.