



Village of Saranac Lake

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VILLAGE OF SARANAC LAKE DEVELOPMENT BOARD MEETING MINUTES February 6, 2017

Location

Village of Saranac Lake Offices
39 Main Street
Saranac Lake, NY 12983

Attendance

Members:

- Leslie Karasin- Chairperson, Present
- Donna Difara- Present
- CJ Hagmann- Recusal
- Bill Domenico- Present
- David Trudeau- Late arrival at 6:23p.m.
- Craig Catalano- Alternate
- Tom Boothe- Alternate, Present

Paul Blaine, Code Enforcement Officer- Present
Courtney Temple, Assistant-Present

Public: As per sign in sheet

Convene

Karasin opened the meeting at 6:05PM

Karasin opened the meeting with context to set stage on a few items. She stated a regular board member, CJ Hagmann had recused himself from the Aldi project due to real estate conflict with early stages of Aldi. Karasin thanked Tom Boothe, an alternate member for sitting in for CJ. Karasin thanked the public for attending and participating during the busy carnival week in Saranac Lake.

Public Hearing

Karasin stated that public interest has been high on the project and she wanted to explain who the development board is and their role in the community. She stated the Village of Saranac Lake has invested considerable amount of time and money over the years in developing planning documents and a revised land use code to better the Village and maintain and enhance the character of the Village. Karasin recognized that this is an important project, located in a highly visible gateway to the community and it's an opportunity to shape the land use code on one of the most heavily traveled roads in the Tri-Lakes and wants it to represent the best in our community.

Karasin made it very clear that the process of the meeting is not about the Village vs. Aldi, it's about what is the best project that will come out of this and serve the Village well and allow the project to proceed.

Karasin then introduced Lew Kibling, the director of real estate for Aldi and asked him to address the rumor that Aldi may possibly be closing or leaving Saranac Lake.

Kibling stated the intention of the project is to replace the existing store with a new store so they can add more refrigeration units and new products in the store while keeping existing store open for business all but 4 weeks in the late fall and re-open for the holiday season. He stated Aldi looked at several ways to lay out the new building, and retain an outparcel for future development into a bank or maybe a Starbucks. Kibling addressed that Aldi has no intentions of closing the store and re-locating, however if they can't reopen with the new proposed building size, they can't remodel existing store to accommodate the new Aldi structure.

Kibling then introduced Kurt Charland from Bergmann Associates as engineer of Aldi project to introduce the project. Charland reiterated the site had been a car dealership when Aldi came into community was retrofit into their current store. Charland stated they incorporated suggestions and comments on project already made by the board, but their main goal is to keep existing building open and operational as long as possible for the employees and community.

Charland provided a description of the project. The proposed building will act as a retaining wall with minimum impact into the hill side, would allow existing access off Will Rogers to remain, create a landscape curved island with bike rack, maintain the sidewalk connectivity and extended walkway down to Will Rogers from building to connect with Rail Trail.

Charland stated they are asking for a couple of variances on project, one for parking in front yard and one for exceeding impervious surface on lot.

Karasin invited public comments and outlined the ground rules for public comment.

Mark Kurtz, resident of Bloomingdale with a business in downtown Saranac Lake, stated he loves Aldi, their friendly staff, their interest in expanding in our community and their drive to keep store open while building new one. Kurtz acknowledged that the Village has gone through a huge process to create the master plan for the code to enforce the master plan to real life. Kurtz urged the board to look carefully at zoning law and master plan to work with Aldi to enforce the spirit of the code, parking, and architectural aesthetic issues. Kurtz urged board to look carefully at master plan on this project.

Jamie Whidden, director of Will Rogers stated he is very lucky to be a neighbor to Aldi as their prices, quality, and store is phenomenal to the residents at Will Rogers. He stated he personally is a huge fan but wants to reiterate what Mark Kurtz said, we do have this planning document that many people have invested many hours in. Whidden cited examples of other projects in the vicinity that the board has scrutinized closely - for example the quick lube project which Will Rogers opposed because of the impact the project would have had on the esker. Whidden pointed out local examples of commercial architecture which have made an effort to be locally-customized and relevant, including Community Bank, and Dunkin Donuts across the street. Whidden stated he is concerned of the corporate architectural design and if

it will clash with the historic buildings in Saranac Lake and that if property could be closer to the road for easier access to the building or up by McDonalds side for building to be closer to road. He also hopes as many of the trees on the existing lot can be saved to provide more natural beauty on proposed plan.

Hugh Law, village resident of Saranac Lake stated planning is good, zoning is good and that Aldi is an affordable place to shop for residents. Law stated he knows the master plan is not perfect as there already had been projects that didn't meet standards move forward but the bottom line is the people. The project should not hurt Saranac Lake. If no people are in Saranac Lake it won't matter, the younger generation is having a harder time to live here, overall economics should be the key.

Dianna Dudley, resident of Saranac Lake, asked why Aldi wouldn't be grandfathered in after ten years in its location. Dudley feels the plan looks very reasonable in its layout, added greenery and setting aside for future development. Dudley made a comment in regards to front parking as it shouldn't be a concern if Aldi already has front parking currently. She stated she can't imagine anybody driving into the Village from Lake Placid that would be upset with the project. Dudley asked board to please use common sense when considering the Aldi store.

Wendy Foley, resident of Saranac Lake and owner of the Christian Bookstore. Foley feels the building looks fine, and we really need a store like Aldi. She feels the building code is great but feels it could stop businesses from coming to the Village. Foley feels we need to do everything we can to let Aldi come in and expand.

Mark Wilson, resident of the Village, stated his chief comment has to do with choices presented. Wilson stated that lots of effort went into creating the master plan, a process that was intended for the long-range view for the future of the Village. Wilson feels keeping Aldi open is a short term choice; the long-term picture is the character of the Village. Wilson stated the work that went into the comprehensive plan took the long-range view to this area in particular in consideration and the gateway entrance view is to draw more visitors and residents into the Village of Saranac Lake. Please protect the long-range view.

George Cook, village resident stated the difference between a good and bad haircut is 2 weeks, we will all become very rapidly adjusted to the appearance of the building. Cook asked the board to please consider the idea that this is something we need, it would be heart breaking to lose something that is such an asset to this community.

Mike Kellam, Bloomingdale resident, stated when Aldi moved here 10 years ago he was excited as he shopped his first Aldi store in 1997 in Germany and hoped it would be the same experience as he remembered as a teenager. Kellam stated looking at the façade; he didn't see an issue with it, corporate culture; everybody has their basic design to maintain brand recognition. Aldi does a very good job providing a variety in town. He feels Aldi has done a better job making façade blend in with Village.

Karasin clarified that Aldi believes they can keep the existing building open and construct the new building with a short time period of store closing. The board has talked about whether the proposed site plan is the only configuration on the site for that outcome. Karasin stated that if anyone believes that this board is asking the company to shut down the store during construction, it's not the case.

Rick Weber, resident of Saranac Lake. The board should take under strong consideration the amount of time and effort spent on the comprehensive plan and development code. Weber stated it really is meant to be the long view being a consensus being built through public process. This hearing is addressing 4 matters: special use permit, site plan review and two variances. Weber is most interested in variances and materials submitted in pre-application, the plan hasn't changed from the beginning. Weber asked whether the record that was being developed adequately demonstrated the need for the variances. The project is a gateway to the community, and the concept of planning over the long term is to

gradually develop new opportunities to move them in conformance of the code. Weber asks why the building can't be moved to the NW corner, move parking to the back and address the matter of review why that couldn't happen in the NW and move parking in the rear or side of the building.

Jeremy Evans, village resident, expressed his appreciation for the public process. Evans stated that he is critical of what's happened to this point on the project. The site plan could be much better. Using the parcel more productively is a great thing, but that can be done better on this site. Evans believes the project can be thought of as a Venn diagram with two goals: one of the Village and one for the company. The two circles are not in alignment, we haven't hit the sweet spot. Evans feels ideally the building could go in the SW corner, parking could go in the side and rear of lot, still have outparcel in NW corner, and would do wonders for the Village and its goals, great exposure for the store. Evans hopes to see the public comment period stay open.

Jason Brill, village resident, stated that Aldi's is an incredible place to shop, It is critical to maintain the look and feel of Saranac Lake, and the authenticity of the community. Brill urges that there should be compromise regarding the look and feel of this new store, negotiation of a true compromise. Let's work together to keep the store here and make it right so it doesn't look like a cookie cutter store.

Paula White, resident of Vermontville. White stated that she depends on Aldi to feed her family on a budget. The employees are friendly and and not once has she heard a negative thing on Aldi, White stated. She hopes it's well thought out for the community's sake.

Kate Semo, village resident, stated she is a huge Aldi fan and appreciates many things about the business, such as the fair wage they pay their employees. Semo stated it's hard to live in the North Country, and parking is a necessity, not an issue as being perceived, already parking in the front at current store. Semo stated she appreciates the board being conscious on the look of things, and thanks Aldi for investing in our community as we all depend on Aldi.

Paul Van Cott, village resident and Village Trustee. Van Cott stated we shop at Aldi all the time, we love Aldi's, we love the idea of an expanding Aldi. Van Cott stated that he doesn't like being threatened. It's concerning to him to see some of the information that was being generated. We have a process. A very dedicated board and development code office; we need to make sure the project complies with our Village code, we need to make sure the gateway entrance makes a positive change to the community, just like Hotel Saranac and Downtown revitalization has showed that. Van Cott stated our code does not favor cookie cutter stores, look at Community Bank and any Lake Placid architectural buildings. We want Aldi here, we want Aldi to expand, we need Aldi to comply with our code. We have a board of volunteer members that are working hard to work with Aldi, so that the new project will be a shining light in the gateway of our community.

Karasin thanked all of the public for their comments. The board is listening carefully to these heartfelt comments and this sort of dialogue is important because it ensures that the planning process considers all perspectives so that the project will meet as many needs and goals as possible.

Karasin addressed a few topics from the public comments: Aldi is an important business to the community; the board's job is to ensure that the project complies with the land use code; the project requires full review because it exceeds the jurisdictional triggers outlined in the land use code.

Karasin stated we hope to end with a project we can all be excited about at the end of the day.

Charland addressed a few issues: it's not a question of the Village against Aldi; we have worked a couple different meetings on the project; Aldi wants everyone to understand this is a very well-developed plan that they want to do their best to work with the board, the public and understand the comments being made.

Karasin asked Charland to show the alternatives placing the store in the northwest or southwest corner of the lot to illustrate if it would be feasible to locate the building elsewhere to avoid the variance of front parking.

Charland stated putting the building on the McDonald's side of the property would require the store to be shut down during entire construction period. It also wouldn't eliminate the need for variances because there would be parking on the Will Rogers side.

Charland stated that there isn't adequate space to locate the building as proposed in the southwest corner.

Karasin asked how much narrower the building would need to be to fit. Charland stated 8 – 10 feet. He stated that this is not feasible due to the required aisle widths in the store and the fact that the store upgrade is intended to accommodate additional aisles.

Karasin asked Boothe to present Parks and Trails Advisory Board (PTAB) recommendations. Boothe showed the alternatives that the PTAB felt would have benefits for pedestrian accessibility. By increasing the amount of green space in the front of the store, pedestrians would not need to cross as much parking lot.

Charland stated option 2 of the PTAB recommendations is more feasible; Aldi feels they could work with a combination of parking and green space.

Charland stated that Aldi requires 95 parking spaces. Karasin asked why. Her observations over the past few months suggest that the most cars that are parked at the current store at any one time is 35 or 40.

Kibling explained Aldi's does frequent traffic studies done on 1-hour shopping trips. They need overflow parking during recession or if a competitor shuts down, which can boost their traffic considerably. Kibling stated they would attempt to work with PTAB recommendation 1 and ratio of traffic flow study to reach a compromise.

Karasin asked whether additional options had been considered to minimize the area of the parking lot, such as making the parking spaces smaller. The code allows spaces to be 8' x 18'; Aldi should include the smallest parking spaces they can – or at least include an area of the lot dedicated to compact cars – to minimize impervious surfaces and make the parking area more efficient.

The board discussed their preferred alternatives – locate the store in the northwest or southwest corner of the lot, go with PTAB recommendation 1 or 2, or go with the site plan as proposed. Boothe stated that he prefers PTAB Option 2 but he could also go with PTAB Option 1. Trudeau stated that he prefers PTAB Option 1. Domenico said he was undecided. Difara opted not to state her opinion. Karasin stated that she still felt that an alternative in the NW or SW corner could be viable, but given the group's sentiment she could live with PTAB Option 1. The benefits it would offer would be: decreasing the amount of front parking (and thus helping the board meet the mandate to grant the minimum variance necessary); adding more green space and thus helping with the variance for impervious surfaces and ensuring that some green space remains even after the outparcel is developed; and achieving some benefits for pedestrian accessibility.

Karasin asked the board to turn to the architecture of the proposed Aldi store. She stated the code has specific language that corporate architecture is prohibited; certain materials are prohibited; and the code outlines specific massing requirements to avoid large, unbroken stretches of walls.

Charland passed material samples around and discussed the materials that were spec'd in the current design.

Karasin questioned Kibling on how many of the 1,600 stores in the US will be upgraded and have approximately this same form and material palette as the one proposed to the Village in five or ten years.

Kibling responded that 90% of the company's stores would be approximately as proposed in the Village.

Charland stated that he feels that corporate architecture is not defined in the Village land use code.

Karasin stated that if there are going to be more than a thousand Aldi stores that look like the one proposed, then it is corporate architecture.

Karasin asked the board to share their opinions on the proposed architecture.

Boothe said the building element he can't live with is the silver metal tower. The board discussed alternative treatments. Kibling said that this material could be replaced with smoky glass.

Trudeau said that he would prefer a design that better fit with the architecture of the Tri-Lakes. He pointed to an Adirondack-style design sketch that was in circulation.

Charland stated that a custom design would be onerous for the company. Kibling stated that their architects could consider modifying the design, but that the construction schedule would then likely be pushed to 2019.

Domenico asked if it was reasonable to ask the company to modify their corporate design. Karasin stated that the board's job is to apply the land use code, which clearly prohibits corporate architecture.

Difara stated her support for the proposed design.

Karasin stated that she would recommend removing the sloped roof, adding multiple tower elements with pitched roofs similar to the roof element on the new Verizon building that the board recently reviewed, and altering the material palette to better fit with local architectural styles. She pointed to a contact sheet of local architectural precedents as a source for ideas and inspiration.

Karasin asked the board to state whether they wanted the company to modify their existing design, or simply swap out the material palette somewhat as discussed (replacing the silver reflective material in the tower element with smoky glass, considering a green EPDM for the roofing material, and transitioning the materials palette to Aldi's "traditional" palette.)

Difara, Domenico and Boothe said that they preferred the more modest request of modifying the existing material palette.

Karasin stated that a majority of the board was in agreement to move forward with the materials changes as discussed.

Karasin asked whether Aldi could bring an alternative building concept with more of a locally-relevant design to the next meeting, so that the board could consider it and think about whether it would be worth pursuing it, even if it meant that the construction would be pushed out to 2019. Kibling said he would ask about this.

Karasin moved the discussion on to the landscape plan. She called attention to some of the code requirements, such as the requirement that parking be screened with a fence or thick hedge or berm.

Charland agreed to incorporate a hedge element to comply with the code.

Karasin stated that the board was starting to be ineffective due to the long meeting; she proposed adjourning the meeting and coming back fresh for some of the additional topics to be discussed. She stated that the Essex County review was not expected until sometime after the February 12th meeting. Paul Blaine said that he didn't know whether the recommendation would be in hand by February 20th or not until March 6. Charland stated that they could have the board's input incorporated into revised project documents by March 6th. Karasin suggested that the board meet on February 20th to review additional project topics and then again on March 6th when the revised project plans were anticipated and the Essex County review could be expected. Aldi would not have to be present at the February 20th meeting if attendance was difficult, as the board can discuss landscaping, screening, pedestrian design, erosion control, grading, utilities, lighting, signage, and garbage without Aldi's presence as they are more minor issues. Responses or concerns will be sent back to Charland for review.

Motion was made by Difara to adjourn the public hearing until February 20th at 6p.m. Seconded by Boothe. All in favor, motion carried.

Meeting Minutes

Boothe made a motion to approve January 2, 2018 regular meeting minutes. Difara seconded the motion. All in favor, motion carried.

Old Business: Mt. Pisgah Zoning

Karasin stated the village board has requested another recommendation of the draft language of the steep slopes for Mt. Pisgah zoning.

Blaine explained the history of the language since the Development Board saw it last. The language about the percentages of disturbance were included to give a developer guidance on how to comply with the code. The board expressed their support for maintaining special use permit review in these districts to ensure the correct review will be done on the proposed property.

The final recommendation to the Village Board is as follows: make uses most consistent between H2 and I2; use H2 uses to govern the I2 district; change the draft language in D regarding percentages of disturbance to change "shall" to "should". This provides an applicant with direction but still gives the board discretion on project review.

Adjourn

Difara made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Boothe seconded the motion. All in favor, motion carried.

Meeting was adjourned at 10:39 P.M.

Minutes prepared by:

Courtney Temple
Administrative Assistant