The Planning and Zoning Commission of the Town of Avon held a meeting at the Avon Town Hall on Tuesday, February 19, 2019. Present were Linda Keith, Chair, Peter Mahoney, Mary Harrop, Brian Ladouceur, Jr., and Alternates Elaine Primeau (sat) and Linda Preysner (sat). Thomas Armstrong, Vice Chair, Lisa Levin, Joseph Gentile, and Alternate Jill Coppola were not in attendance. Also present was Hiram Peck, Director of Planning and Community Development.

Ms. Keith called the meeting to order at 7pm.

**APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

Mr. Ladouceur motioned to approve the minutes of the January 15 meeting, as submitted. The motion was seconded by Mr. Mahoney and received unanimous approval.

Mr. Mahoney motioned to approve the minutes of the January 29 meeting, as submitted. The motion was seconded by Mrs. Harrop and received unanimous approval.

**PUBLIC HEARING**

App. #4889 - Brighenti Enterprises, LLC, owner, Kimberly Thomas, applicant, request for Special Exception under Section VI.B.3.e.of Avon Zoning Regulations to permit luxury cat boarding and grooming, 300 Country Club Road, Parcel 1940300, in an NB Zone

Present were Jeff Brighenti, owner, and Kim Thomas, applicant.

Kim Thomas explained that her proposal is for a luxury cat boarding and grooming facility aiming for excellent customer service such that clients would know their cats are in good hands. Spaces will be created to replicate a clean home environment; cats like to be at home. Ten suites ranging in size from 250 to 400 SF per cat, or cat family, allowing plenty of space for play and sleep. Premium cat trees, scratchers, perches, and soothing music would be provided with plenty of out of crate time. Clients would also be provided with 24/7 camera access to their cats’ units/crates. Grooming will also be offered, which many facilities do not offer. She noted that she has been a cat lover and owner her entire life such that she understands them very well. She noted her other businesses, West Hartford Pet Sitters, (an in-home pet boarding and grooming facility) and a mobile pet grooming spa. She noted that she is a certified groomer, having attended The National Cat Groomers Institute of America; grooming equipment as well as cats themselves are very quiet. No outdoor facilities are proposed and cats would be required to arrive via a cat carrier by appointment only (8am-9am drop off and 5pm-6pm pickup); grooming would also be by appointment only a couple of days per week. There will be very little impact and minimal disruption to the surrounding community. Two staff personnel would be on site with three people during peak times. The facility would be very clean and sanitary with plenty of air flow in cat suites, which would be cleaned daily and litter plans cleaned twice daily (double bagged and placed in outside trash dumpster). All cats would have to be up to date with all vaccinations; physical assessments would be done for each cat to ensure health (no disease). There are plenty of vets nearby should any cats become ill. The existing building is up to date and Code compliant and FEMA guidelines are followed and adhered to.

In response to Mrs. Harrop’s questions, Ms. Thomas explained that 10 suites are proposed with a capacity of four cats per suite (total 40 max) but she pointed out that it is not common for people to bring four cats (cat family). The Department of Agriculture inspects the facility and also issues licenses annually.

In response to Mr. Ladouceur’s questions, Ms. Thomas explained that there is one existing tenant in the building with the potential for one another tenant. Mr. Brighenti explained that each unit has their own separate HVAC unit as well as separate gas, electric, and water; he noted that each space used to be a condo. There would be no air exchange between units.

There being no further comments, the public hearing for App. #4889 was closed, as well as the entire public hearing portion of the meeting.

**PLANNING AND ZONING COMMISSION MEETING**

Mr. Ladouceur motioned to waive Administrative Procedure #6 and consider the public hearing item. Mt. Mahoney seconded the motion that received unanimous approval.

Mr. Mahoney motioned to approve App. #4889 subject to the following conditions:

1. Applicant shall demonstrate compliance with all requirements of the Farmington Valley Health District, the Avon Water Pollution Control Authority, and all Building and Fire Codes.
2. Applicant shall apply for a tenant fit out permit with the Avon Building Department.
3. Wall signs in the NB Zone require special exception application and approval by the Commission prior to sign installation. Applicant should work with Town Planning Staff for any future wall sign proposal.

The motion seconded by Mrs. Primeau received unanimous approval.

**OTHER BUSINESS**

Status update of Village Center Plans

Present were Robert M. Meyers, on behalf of the applicant/developer; Kelly Coates, President and CEO, David Chamberland, Senior VP Construction, David Taglianetti, VP Development; and Joe Pierik, VP, Leasing and Acquisitions, Carpionato Group LLC; Eric Brown, Architect at PCA, Cambridge, MA; Joe Venie, CM&B, Contractor for Phase One; Mike Cegan, ASLA, and Joe McDonnell, ASLA, Richter & Cegan, Inc.

Kelly Coates explained that a general contractor has been retained adding that they have built Whole Foods from the west coast to New England. He indicated that he met with the President of Whole Foods who has approved revised drawings to be submitted tonight. He explained that a couple of modifications are needed for Phase One of the project such that guidance from the Commission is needed.

Joe McDonnell presented PowerPoint slides. Mr. Coates addressed Buildings R4 (proposed Whole Foods) and R5 and R8, noting that both approved and proposed plans are shown. He pointed out the back side of the building proposed for Whole Foods noting that it is a service corridor; this side of the building will be finished block but will not have windows. The backs

of the buildings will be visible so they need to be dressed but at the same time we don’t want to encourage people to drive around the back. The preferred path for truck deliveries is via the main entry; trucks circle around, back in and then drive out. This method is used by Whole Foods in many hundreds of locations; they have consolidated their loading dock to one, particularly in village settings. The intent is to isolate the loading dock area for this building as much as possible from the public (to avoid people walking in front of trucks) and not make it visible from the main parking lot. He noted that the bike path is nearby for access to the main roads. He explained that the proposal/request is to combine/consolidate Buildings R5 and R8 into one with no increase in size; the building would contain approximately 60K SF. He noted that there is not currently adequate parking for this building and identified areas on the drawings where parking is proposed.

In response to Ms. Keith’s question, Mr. Coates demonstrated/pointed out on the drawings how and where vehicles, as well as pedestrians, would enter the site to get to Building R4 (Whole Foods).

Mr. Mahoney asked about taking parking away from Whole Foods; the parking on the side of the building along the tree line near the bike path was meant to serve as overflow parking.

Mr. Coates pointed out parking areas for Whole Foods and explained that Whole Foods has reviewed the parking layout and has approved what is being shown. Whole Foods is driving the proposed modifications, as they are needed to anchor the project; however more parking is needed to make it work. He explained that no changes are proposed to the side parking lot and front street angled parking.

Eric Brown architect, addressed Buildings R5 and R8 and explained that no architectural changes are proposed. All the gathering space such as storefronts, grading, plantings and street furniture remains unchanged as approved.

Mr. Coates pointed out that the street is steep (17-foot grade change in total) such that the building (R5 and R8 proposed to be combined) would never appear to people as one big slab, as it may in the drawings presented. Planters would also be placed to break up the sloping to meet the street grade with the building grade. The area would never appear or function like a suburban retail center but rather be more like a main street in a mountain town.

Mr. Brown explained that changes in elevation creates character with gathering spaces and places to sit along the way.

Mr. Coates clarified that the first request is to combine buildings R5 and R8, as just discussed.

In response to Mrs. Harrop’s question, Mr. Coates explained that an additional 28-30 parking spaces have been added to the plans, over what was approved.

Mr. Peck asked that the boards showing proposed plans be left for the Staff to compare with approved plans.

In response to Mr. Ladouceur’s questions, Mr. Coates outlined on the displayed plans (PowerPoint) the path/route trucks would take entering the site from Route 44 to reach the rear of Building R4 (Whole Foods). The trucks would exit the site via the same path to reach Route 44.

Mr. Ladouceur said that an 18-wheeler would pass the Whole Foods on Climax Road, turn right at the back of the building and travel down a narrow passageway (located between Building R4 and Buildings R5 and R8, proposed to be squished together) and then turn around. Mr. Coates indicated that that path is correct and pointed out the circle turnaround area on the plans large enough for a 65-foot trailer. The contractor Joe Venie explained that all trucks for Whole Foods are scheduled such that there is never more than one truck per day per location. Mr. Coates explained that the tenants for proposed Buildings R5 and R8 (to be combined) will be small and the loading dock will be located in the back of the building but noted that some loading may also occur, on occasion, in the front of the building but added that that would be discouraged. Loading happens in the morning when the store is not busy and the tenant would be directed to have loading take place to the rear where there’s a sidewalk.

Mike Cegan, landscape architect, explained that the aforementioned road (narrow passageway) behind the proposed Whole Foods building is 30 feet wide.

Mrs. Primeau commented that there isn’t enough parking in the front for the proposed 60K SF building (R5 and R8 combined). People won’t go to the building if there’s not enough convenient parking near the store they want (multi-tenant building).

Mr. Coates noted his agreement and displayed drawings of both approved plans and proposed plans. The intent is to ensure that no one walks in front of the loading dock area; no mingling of delivery trucks with cars. He pointed out a couple of area where additional parking is proposed. He stressed that businesses will have to enforce that employees never be allowed to park in front of the building.

In response to Mr. Ladouceur’s question, Mr. Coates explained that the net add for parking is 28 spaces.

In response to Mrs. Primeau’s question, Mr. Coates confirmed that there is no parking on Climax Road.

In response to Ms. Keith’s question, Mr. Peck indicated that the peer review group could review the proposed changes if the Commission wishes.

Ms. Keith referenced two architectural drawings displayed tonight and stressed that she doesn’t want any confusion moving forward. She noted that she wants the architecture that has been approved to remain as shown in the top drawing, not the bottom drawing. She added that she doesn’t have a problem with the proposed changes to Buildings R5 and R8 (closing them in) because it will allow for more parking in front of the stores.

Mr. Coates acknowledged his understanding and agreement.

Mr. Ladouceur commented that people parking at Whole Foods but visiting the smaller stores near it can get there by walking along the sidewalks on Climax Road crossing over the truck alley way. Trucks will come up Climax Road and turn right and have to be aware of pedestrians. He noted that the only way people parked in the Whole Foods main parking lot can get to the other nearby stores is to take the sidewalks on Climax Road and then turn right; they would also have the option of using the bike path if it was clear of snow.

Mr. Coates explained that there are stairs right near the bike path adding that there are not that many days when the path would be covered with snow. People will learn in time the best places to park to access different stores

In response to Mrs. Harrop’s question, Mr. Coates explained that the bike path would not be maintained (snow removal) due to liability concerns.

In response to questions about lighting for the bike path, Mr. Cegan explained that the parking lot that was expanded at the Town Hall is lit but noted that the bike path is generally not lit.

Mr. Ladouceur commented that if the bike path is expected to be utilized three quarters of the year for people to get from the Whole Foods parking lot up to stores on Main Street there should be some illumination to match the lighting in other common walkway areas on the site. He said at least the stretch from the crosswalk on the corner of Whole Foods up to the other shopping areas.

Mr. Coates commented that the parking lots are well lit but noted that he would look at the bike path. He noted that he would be happy to put lighting on the stretch of crosswalk from Whole Foods to the upper area.

Mr. Coates displayed the approved Whole Foods drawing; a rendering drawing and also a drawing showing massing of the building. He noted that brownstone material is used on this building with weathered cedar wood siding.

Mr. Brown, architect, referenced the displayed drawings and explained that they are trying to accommodate the needs of the tenant, Whole Foods, who likes to emphasize entryways and the produce section with a lot of natural light such that it feels like an outdoor market while shopping indoors. There is a café on the other side of the building with outdoor dining and shaded areas and windows. Mr. Brown noted that the new design of the building supports Whole Foods’ program.

Ms. Keith noted that this is not what we want and isn’t even close; it’s ugly.

Mr. Coates noted that he is trying to help the Commission understand the massing of the building and not just the design.

Mesdames Keith and Primeau expressed their dislike for the building noting that they don’t think all the Whole Foods look like the drawing just presented.

Mr. Mahoney asked what happened to the design guidelines and noted that the drawing looks nothing like what was approved.

Mr. Ladouceur commented that the building looks like two rectangular glass boxes that you might see in Seattle but not here. He noted that the Commission reviewed many drawings that showed buildings with a lot of glass that was requested to be softened with other features (wood, arches, etc).

Ms. Keith said that you guy have the design guidelines book that the Commission worked hard to create. She said that she’s seen many Whole Foods in other areas that don’t look like the boxy building just presented with all that glass.

Mr. Coates confirmed that Whole Foods does want this design. He noted that it is not what he wants adding that he has an approved drawing that he told Whole Foods to live with. He added that while he doesn’t want his team to be standing between Whole Foods and the Commission, this is where we are. He noted that his architect has the design book.

Mr. Brown confirmed that he has the design guidebook and explained that he has designed many other Whole Foods. He commented that Avon’s design guidelines are very well done and helpful but noted that they say that historic architecture does not have to be replicated but through the use of massing and form that it’s acceptable. He indicated that the guidelines were not ignored.

Ms. Keith commented that she understands the massing concept and that the building that was approved could be modified to have more windows but noted that it already has plenty of windows and light.

Mrs. Primeau commented that the building looks like a factory not a store. She noted that other chain stores have had to change their store design to accommodate requirements that towns may have.

Ms. Keith and Mr. Mahoney noted their agreement.

Mr. Coates noted his understanding adding that what was negotiated with the Town of Avon was before the tenant was known but now the tenant has requested a design. He confirmed that he hears the Commission’s comments.

Ms. Preysner said that the design is not even close and agreed that it looks like a factory.

Ms. Keith commented that modifications could be approved but not a whole new model.

Mrs. Primeau said that this building cannot be the introduction to the Town Center. Mesdames Keith and Harrop agreed; people would be furious.

The Commission agreed they don’t like the building. Mr. Coates noted his understanding.

Mr. Coates displayed another drawing showing the Whole Foods in the background with other buildings and landscaping.

In response to questions, Mr. Coates explained that Whole Foods has a new president who has a new look that he wants to impose on every store.

Mr. Brown explained that Whole Foods wants to be innovative and appeal to the younger generation with more contemporary architecture.

Ms. Keith commented that Avon is trying to establish a Town Center that is colonial and we don’t want anything contemporary; we want to give people what New England looks like.

Mr. Ladouceur commented that the latest drawing displayed (Whole Foods in the background) could possibly work but asked why the design guideline book can’t be followed. He noted that none of what has been shown is in the guidebook.

Mr. Mahoney noted his recollection that the first building designs were discarded because they were too modern and the design guidebook was created as a result.

Ms. Preysner commented that first an ugly factory is shown and then a better drawing is displayed but is not the same thing; she asked if this is a negotiating tactic. She noted that it was manipulative adding that it’s not a good way to start.

Mr. Coates explained that there is no negotiating strategy going on except to get Whole Foods to sign a lease. He noted that Whole Foods is insistent on the design. He indicated that he told the President of Whole Foods that he has seen the Town’s approved drawings and that this design would not be approved. Whole Foods insisted that the drawing be shown and if it isn’t welcomed that the other drawing should be shown. He explained that he doesn’t have another tenant lined up for this space but if Whole Foods becomes a tenant a whole host of other tenants would come with it. He acknowledged that he’s gotten the Commission’s message loud and clear.

Attorney Meyers suggested that Whole Foods should maybe come to a meeting to hear and understand the strength and passion of the Commission’s position.

Mr. Coates noted that Whole Foods is essentially here, as Mr. Brown designs all their buildings. He indicated that he has been upfront and truthful with the Commission, reiterating that he is following orders from Whole Foods. He stated that he will return at the next meeting, scheduled for March 12, with revised drawings. He noted that the drawings would be provided to the Town and Commission in advance of the meeting to allow time for review.

Ms. Keith noted that she doesn’t like the way this was handled; the Commission agreed. She complained about many delays and scheduling that hasn’t been met. The Commission has had enough and their time was wasted tonight.

Mr. Ladouceur commented that the drawings could have been shared with Mr. Peck ahead of time, as he is well aware of what the Commission wants and doesn’t want, to keep from wasting time at the meeting.

Mr. Coates reported that step one is finished with the State Traffic Authority, which includes the plans, the project concept and all traffic generation. Work is now ongoing with the traffic plans themselves. He noted that we’re at an unpleasant spot right now but assured everyone that the team will work with Whole Foods informing them that the proposed building is nowhere near the approved drawing. He concluded by noting that it’s going to be a great project.

Mr. Ladouceur commented that he would like to see drawings from multiple angles and directions (from the parking lot and from Route 44 and Climax Road) provide reasons and explanations for deviations from the design guidebook, if there are any. There can be some give and take if adequate explanations are provided.

Ms. Keith commented that the parking lot for the building to house Whole Foods was supposed to be located higher up and the parking lot screened with landscaping.

Mr. Coates noted his understanding and explained that the civil engineering plans show all that information but the drawings displayed tonight do not contain that information. He pointed out that the building will be set very far back from the road.

Mrs. Primeau commented that she doesn’t think that Whole Foods would not want to come to Avon because they understand the demographics in this area.

Mr. Coates noted his agreement and added his appreciation for all the criticism and comments from the Commission. He indicated that they’re working towards a spring start and hoping to sign a lease with Whole Foods on February 28.

In response to Ms. Mahoney’s questions, Mr. Coates explained that all the road work has to be done first and at the same time noting that after that the first thing to do is to get the pad ready. The goal is to have the project open for spring 2020. Mr. Mahoney asked if working on the pad would impede roadway construction. Mr. Coates explained that he’s not worried about that part of the project. He indicated that while the entire project is of concern, the project team is the best of the best. He explained that he has all the road sequencing plans adding that all the information will be included in the bid documents which are currently being prepared.

Mr. Coates communicated his appreciation for everyone’s attention tonight noting that a lot of good direction has been received. He concluded by noting that the project team will return at the March 12 meeting.

In response to Ms. Keith’s question, Mr. Peck confirmed that the road sequencing has already been approved such that any changes proposed to that approved schedule would have to first be run by the Town Engineer for review and approval. He explained that the infrastructure work involved for this project is huge.

In response to comments from Mesdames Preysner, Keith, Primeau and Mr. Ladouceur, Mr. Coates explained and confirmed that detailed colored drawings and panoramic renderings/drawings showing all sides of the building will be provided at the next meeting. Some photos will not include trees/landscaping but some renderings will include landscaping.

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 8:45pm.

Linda Sadlon

Avon Planning and Community Development