

City of Auburn, Maine

"Maine's City of Opportunity"

Office of Planning & Development

PLANNING BOARD STAFF REPORT

To: Auburn Planning Board

From: Douglas M. Greene; AICP, RLA
City Planner

Re: Mechanics Savings Bank- 100 Minot Avenue- Special Exception and Site Plan Review

Date: September 9, 2014

I. PROPOSAL- Harriman Associates, an agent for Mechanic Savings Bank, is seeking approval of an Special Exception and Site Plan Review for a new Branch Bank Building and vehicular area improvements at 100 Minot Avenue (PID # 230-067); pursuant to Chapter 60- Section 499, (b), (17) Special Exception and Chapter 60- Section 1277 Site Plan Review, of the City of Auburn Ordinances.

Mechanics Savings Bank has an existing bank at 100 Minot Avenue and is proposing to renovate the existing building along with a small 990 s.f. addition, build a new 4,140 s.f. building with drive through windows and redevelop the vehicular use area. The acquisition of a 30 foot strip of land at the rear of the property will allow an improved traffic flow and provide more on-site parking. The existing bank has 4 entrances and the proposed plan has 3 with better distances from intersections.

The property is zoned General Business (GB). New construction over 5,000 s.f. is a Special Exception with a Site Plan Review. The completed project will have 20,122 s.f. of floor area with a parking requirement of 1 space per 300 s.f. for a total required parking of 67 spaces. The revised site plan proposes 36 spaces with an additional 36 spaces at a nearby employee parking area (115 feet away) owned by Mechanics Savings Bank that will bring the total provided parking to 72 spaces.

The applicant is requesting 5 waivers in total, 4 to the Planning Board for the redevelopment of the site and 1 to the Department of Engineering

II. DEPARTMENT REVIEWS-

- a. Police- No Comments
- b. Auburn Water and Sewer- The Auburn Water and Sewer District in an email dated August 25th (attached) is requesting a new water hook up for the new building.
- c. Fire Department- No comments.

- d. Engineering- The Department of Engineering submitted comments (see attached email from Gary Johnson). A waiver of a traffic study was submitted to Day Goyette, City Engineer who gave staff a verbal approval of the waiver on 9/4/14.
- e. Planning and Development- The Department of Planning and Development has met with the applicant prior to the submission for an initial review. Issues discussed were: proximity of drive-through lanes near the Minot Avenue right of way, number and location of parking spaces, appearance of existing bank building after renovations, adequacy of utilities, phasing and continuing banking service during construction and waivers from current dimensional regulations.

III. PLANNING BOARD ACTIONS- The Planning Board is being asked to consider 4 waivers, a Special Exception and a Site Plan Review for this project at 100 Minot Avenue.

A. WAIVER REQUESTS-

1. Article V- Off Street Parking Loading - Section 60-607, 12- *"All uses containing over five parking and/or loading spaces shall either contain such spaces within structures or be subject to the following requirements:*

d. Where, in nonresidential districts, parking is planned to occupy a portion of the required front yard area, parking shall not be placed nearer than ten feet from the street right-of-way line. The area between the parking area and the street right-of-way line shall be landscaped."

The applicant is proposing to locate drive-through lanes within 10' from the Minot Avenue Right of Way. This area currently has pavement and parking directly adjacent to the Minot Avenue Right of Way. The need to circulate drive-through traffic around the new building and near Minot Avenue and the narrow configuration of the site makes this a necessary request. The applicant has revised the landscape plan to adequately provide dense screening to alleviate the potential conflict of drive through vehicle headlights shining into the oncoming northern direction of Minot Avenue. The staff now supports this waiver request.

2. Article V- Off Street Parking Loading - Section 60-607, 14- *"No portion of any entrance or exit driveway serving a residential use or building shall be closer than 50 feet from the nearest public street intersection unless prevented by dimensional or physical difficulties. No portion of any entrance or exit driveway serving a commercial or industrial use of building shall be closer than 100 feet from the nearest public street intersection unless prevented by dimensional or physical difficulties.*

The applicant is proposing to relocate an existing driveway on Elm Street that is 50 feet from the Minot Avenue intersection to 80 feet. The relocated driveway is an improvement to the current situation and the narrow property is causing difficulty in meeting the dimensional requirements. The staff supports this waiver request.

3. Article V- Off Street Parking Loading - Section 60-607, 15- *"On lots where one entrance and exit driveway or curb-cut is constructed, the curb-cut shall not exceed 32 feet in width. Where two or more driveways or curb-cuts are constructed, the curb cuts shall not exceed 20 feet in width. For automotive service stations, the curb cut widths may be increased to 32 feet for each driveway or access, but shall not exceed two driveways. These widths may be increased up to a maximum of 44 feet on arterial roads if required by the city engineering department or the state department of transportation."*

The applicant has redesigned the 3 driveway entrances into the site and tapered the curb cuts to be wide enough for easy ingress and egress. The Department of Engineering

reviewed the design and determined that driveway widths are measured at the narrowest distance in the driveway entrance. The 3 proposed driveways at their narrowest point meet the required driveway widths of Section 60-607, 15. A waiver request is not needed.

4. Division 14- General Business Zone (GB), Section 60-500 Dimensional Regulations- “(3) *Yard requirements.*

- a. *Rear. There shall be behind every building a rear yard having a minimum depth of 35 feet or 35 percent of the average depth of the lot, whichever is less.”*

The narrow dimensions of the site make it difficult to meet the 35 foot rear yard setback. The proposed new building is located 30 feet from the rear property lines. The rear yard backs up to an active railroad line. The staff supports the waiver request due to the dimensional restraints of the narrow lot and that granting the waiver will not be detrimental to the neighborhood.

B. SPECIAL EXCEPTION-

A Special Exception is defined in the Zoning Ordinance (Page 14) as follows: “***Special exception*** means a use that would not be appropriate generally or without restriction throughout the district, but which, if controlled as to number, area, location or relation to the neighborhood, would promote the public health, safety, welfare, order, comfort, convenience, appearance, prosperity, or general welfare. Such a use may be permitted in such district as a special exception, if specific provision for such special exception is made in this zoning chapter and reasonable restrictions imposed by the planning board are complied with.”

For this development application, the proposed new building and addition is over 5,000 square feet in size and therefore is a Special Exception in the GB zone.

The zoning ordinance describes the conditions needed for approval in:

Sec. 60-1336. Conditions-

- (a) *As conditions prerequisite to the granting of any special exceptions, the board shall require evidence of the following:*

(1) *That the special exception sought fulfills the specific requirements, if any, set forth in the zoning ordinance relative to such exception.*

(2) *That the special exception sought will neither create nor aggravate a traffic hazard, a fire hazard or any other safety hazard.*

(3) *That the special exception sought will not block or hamper the master development plan pattern of highway circulation or of planned major public or semipublic land acquisition.*

(4) *That the exception sought will not alter the essential characteristics of the neighborhood and will not tend to depreciate the value of property adjoining and neighboring the property under application.*

(5) *That reasonable provisions have been made for adequate land space, lot width, lot area, stormwater management in accordance with section 60-1301(14), green space, driveway layout, road access, off-street parking, landscaping, building separation, sewage disposal, water supply, fire safety, and where applicable, a plan or contract for perpetual maintenance of all the common green space and clustered*

off-street parking areas to ensure all such areas will be maintained in a satisfactory manner.

(6) That the standards imposed are, in all cases, at least as stringent as those elsewhere imposed by the city building code and by the provisions of this chapter.

(7) That essential city services which will be required for the project are presently available or can be made available without disrupting the city's master development plan.

The property at 100 Minot Avenue is located in a busy commercial corridor and is being enlarged by the addition of a 30 foot strip of land at the rear. The development proposal includes an additional new building area of over 5,000 s.f. and the Site Plan adequately meets the conditions of approval for a Special Exception.

- C. **SITE PLAN REVIEW-** A Site Plan is required as part of a Special Exception review. The applicant is redeveloping a narrow lot that has had commercial use (bank) for many years. A number of existing site features do not meet current dimensional requirements. The applicant has requested 4 waivers from current regulatory standards and has either met or improved those site features. Should the Planning Board grant those waivers, the Site Plan would be in a position to meet the Objective of the Site Plan Ordinance.

SITE PLAN ORDINANCE- Sec. 60-1277. Objective-

"In considering a site plan, the planning board shall make findings that the development has made provisions for:"

- (1) Protection of adjacent areas against detrimental or offensive uses on the site by provision of adequate surface water drainage, buffers against artificial and reflected light, sight, sound, dust and vibration; and preservation of light and air;*
- (2) Convenience and safety of vehicular and pedestrian movement within the site and in relation to adjacent areas;*
- (3) Adequacy of the methods of disposal for wastes; and*
- (4) Protection of environment features on the site and in adjacent areas.*

- IV. **STAFF RECOMMENDATION-** The Staff recommend
- A. **Waiver Requests-** The Staff recommends **APPROVAL** of Waiver Requests 1, 2 and 4 for the Mechanics Savings Bank proposal at 100 Minot Ave. as they meet the intent of the Site Plan Ordinance and due to the dimensional constraints of the lot.
 - B. **Special Exception-** The Staff recommends **APPROVAL** of the Special Exception for the Mechanics Savings Bank proposal at 100 Minot Ave. as it meets the 7 conditions of approval of Section 60-1336 Special Exception Ordinance.
 - C. **Site Plan Review-** The Staff recommends **APPROVAL** of the Site Plan Review as it meets the objective of the Site Plan Review Ordinance, Section 60-1277.

The approval is subject to the following condition:

1. Prior to construction activity, the developer shall establish a bonding and inspection fee with the Department of Engineering.



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