



City of Auburn, Maine

Economic & Community Development

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PLANNING BOARD STAFF REPORT

To: Auburn Planning Board

From: Audrey Knight, City Planner

Re: Mount Auburn Plaza, request for Special Exception and Site Plan Approval for an auto sales and service center at the corner of Mount Auburn Avenue and Turner Street, at 649 Turner Street in the General Business zoning district, Mount Auburn Plaza PUD.

Date: March 12, 2019

PROPOSAL – Mike Gotto, on behalf of Evergreen Subaru, is seeking approval of a Special Exception and Site Plan, for the development of two parcels into a Subaru Sales and Service Center, that would include a 16,000 square foot expansion to the 20,000 square foot existing former Best Buy building and surface parking for new and used Subaru vehicles. The proposed project would complete the commercial PUD at this intersection, commonly known as Mount Auburn Plaza and zoned General Business.

The original project was approved in 2006 as a 14.32 acre Planned Unit Development, proposing 7.5 acres of impervious surface, 7 buildings and 48,000 square feet of retail, to be developed in 3 phases. In 2007 a Special Exception and Site Plan amendment to the PUD was approved with conditions (see attached), and additional review and permitting by MDEP. This amendment expanded the development plan to encompass 9.5 acres of impervious surface, 85,500 square feet of mixed retail/office/restaurants, associated parking of 496 spaces, detention ponds and amended circulation and drainage. This project proposes to build-out the remaining parcels for a total PUD development of 9.1 acres of impervious surface. The 2018 Subdivision of the PUD and existing land use is as follows, with Lots 3 and 4 the subject of this application:

	Approved Bldg.			Existing Land Use
	Acres	Sq.Ft.&	Parking	
Lot 1	1.6	6,000	50*	1, bldg. I-Hop Restaurant
Lot 2	3.79	15,500	127	3 bldg., Ruby Tuesday, Androskoggin Bank, Longhorn
Lot 3	2.97	22,000	110	Vacant, Best Buy building
Lot 4	5.86	42,000	210	Vacant, detention ponds & circulation
Total	14.2	85,500	497	Commercial Mixed-Use

*As the project evolved between 2004 and 2007 with different prospective tenants, the parking calculations fluctuated to address restaurants (1 space per 3 seats), retail (1per 200sq.ft.) and office (1per 300sq.ft.). The Phase III Site Plan and project approval numbers differ and are partially reflected

in the table. The Phase III Site Plan [November 2006] depicts 643 spaces, the text approved project calculated 497 spaces (85,500 sq. ft./200sq.ft [retail] = 427 parking spaces + 50 additional spaces for restaurant calculations).

The project is within an approved PUD-C, in the GB zone, which requires concurrent review pursuant to Division 9, Planned Unit Development, Sections 60-359, 360, 361, 387, 419 and 420. Flexibility to achieve the purposes of the zone should be considered as needed for incorporation into the Final Development Plan. The Plaza retains shared facilities and maintenance through an Easements, Covenants and Restriction (ECR's) agreement to ensure common utility, circulation, drainage, lighting and maintenance are retained as one unit. The planning board needs to make the determination that the proposed use and site design are consistent with the approved PUD-C.

The original 2005 project was subject to a Traffic Movement Permit (TMP) for the projected buildout of uses. At that time the TMP was issued for a mix of retail, office and food establishments for a total of 459 AM peak hour trips and 622 PM peak hour trips. The change of use to an auto dealership and service center, combined with the existing uses, would potentially generate far fewer trips at 104 AM peak and 291 PM peak (See Traffic Solutions, letter dated 2.24.19 submitted by the applicant.)

Due to substantial site elevation changes, large areas of impervious surface and wetland relocation issues, the Plaza acquired permits from MDEP. Both the original and amended development project was reviewed under the Site Location of Development Act (2007#L-14010-87-J-B; 2006 L-14010-7-H-M/L-14010-tG-I-N), and subsequently these MDEP permits were transferred to Schilling Drive LLC, the applicant. (#L-14010-87-L-T). The City cannot act as the delegated authority in the administration of the revised MDEP permits as the total project exceeds 7-acres in size.

II. DEPARTMENT REVIEW- The Plan Review Committee reviewed the proposed project on February 20, 2019.

- a. Police- No comments were received from Police.
- b. Auburn Water and Sewer District- No comments.
- c. Fire Department- No comments.
- d. Public Services – No comments.
- e. Lewiston Auburn Airport- No comments.
- f. Economic & Community Development- Site Design Considerations Discussion

The Mount Auburn Plaza is in a highly visible location where new development and reinvestment are occurring. Located at the intersection facing a Starbucks, Panera and a Residence Inn by Marriott, the project site is home to 3 high demand restaurants and a bank.

When Phase III was approved in 2007, the expanded PUD-C was approved with the understanding that the project may evolve as market conditions change, and that a mix of office, retail and food establishments would ultimately occupy the site. The project was approved with the condition that site and landscape plans be reviewed as development of each pad and associated parking comes in. A Master Site Plan for the entire Auburn Plaza development was also required to be submitted. All recommendations of the 2007 Staff Report are incorporated by reference as the continued recommendations and requirements for this project. The following subjects should be considered by the planning board pursuant to Site Plan, Special Exception and PUD-C Final Development Plan, with any discussed and suggested improvements added as a condition of approval to the Special Exception.

Parking – The final parking plan and overall PUD design should reflect the shared space, complimentary uses and design standards. The project plans for 38 customer spaces in front of the new showroom, and 60 employee spaces to the rear of Lot 4, for a total of 98 business spaces. The remainder of Lot 4 is proposed for new and used Subaru vehicle inventory parking. This form of outdoor storage has the visual impact of a large parking lot. A better balance between paving and landscaping would vastly improve the image and cohesiveness of the overall development and the Plaza and is required by the zoning code. Consistency with Sec.60-607, General Provisions and Design Standards for Parking should be addressed specifically if this standard is to be waived: 16. *“A parking lot cluster containing more than 80 stalls shall contain landscaped areas within the perimeter of the overall lot, in the form of a landscaped perimeter and islands.”*

Landscaping & Open Space – A Planting Plan was submitted in 2005 as part of the PUD application. No further master landscape plan, that includes parking, lighting, pedestrian and auto circulation was resubmitted with subsequent site plans. With Lot 4 now proposed to serve as a storage lot for vehicle inventory, landscape islands should be considered, as would be the case for any large parking area required for a commercial office or retail project. It would also be appropriate to consider a landscape screen along the perimeter of the inventory area, as it is visible from the residential area to the south, across the detention ponds. While a small landscape strip is incorporated into the drive curbing, and foliage is retained to the rear of the property, the majority of almost 3 acres (Lot 4) is proposed to be an unrelieved parking lot for automobile inventory.

Lighting – Because this project is adjacent to a residential area, it is recommended that these elements be taken into consideration for limiting off-site light spillage with timed light shut-offs. The residential apartment complexes to the south and east will be immediately impacted by any continual light source overnight. A landscape screen could help with this as well. The submitted lighting plan should be amended to bring any off-site casting well within the site (Per Sec.60-607 (11) *lighting shall be shielded or directed away from residential and public highways.*).

Signage – As a PUD this project has one large marquee entry sign on the round-about, and very visible and prominent street frontage for all of the existing structures and businesses. Lot 4 is also very visible from both Mount Auburn and Turner roads. There is not an approved master signage plan on record for the PUD-C which would be a normal practice. The applicant is proposing one 21-foot-tall Pole sign of approximately 71 square feet, at the corner of Lot 3, along Mount Auburn Avenue, and an internal Plaza car display mound at the frontage of Lot 4, along the entrance drive to the proposed dealership and service area. No additional signs are being proposed at this time and a sign permit would be required as a separate application. The proposed sign meets the standards of the ordinance, and the “display island” is within the purview of the PUD-C if agreed to by the association.

Circulation – As a partially constructed project the current overall circulation for both automobiles and pedestrians is confusing. Improved design, access, open space and all mode circulation are goals of a PUD, so the landscape, circulation, access and parking plan are of importance to the Final Development Plan. The project proposes to significantly clarify the internal vehicle circulation by defining the drive-way entrance into the Plaza and dealership with limited curb-cuts and one identified pedestrian walk from the proposed showroom to the Longhorn Restaurant and bank area (Lots 3 & 2). There is a potential for waiting customers to dine at any of the three existing establishments while waiting for their vehicle or walking over to finish loan paperwork at the Androscoggin Bank. Other than one pedestrian connection on Lot 3, no other potential pedestrian, bicycle or transit

circulation has been designed into the site plan. A cross-walk across “Subaru Drive” would be an appropriate safety consideration.

III. PLANNING BOARD ACTION- The Planning Board is being asked to review and approve this project according to Division 9 – PUD, General Standards, Sec. 60-361, PUD-C Final Development Plan, and Sections 60-1277 and 60-1336 of the Zoning Ordinance (Chapter 60).

A. PUD, General Standards, Sec. 60-361

(6) *Before granting approval of the final development plans, the planning board must find that said plan addresses each of the following criteria or that one or more of the criteria are not applicable to the proposed development and/or that a practical substitute to one or more of the criteria has been achieved:*

- a. The proposed development has an appropriate relationship to the surrounding area; **See considerations**
- b. Circulation, in terms of internal street circulation system, is designed for the type of traffic generated, safety, separation from living areas, convenience, access and control of noise and exhaust. Proper circulation in parking areas is designed for safety, convenience, separation and screening; **See Considerations**
- c. Adequate open space has been provided with consideration given to preservation of natural features including trees and drainage areas, topographic features, recreation and views. **See Considerations**
- d. Privacy in terms of needs of individuals, families and neighbors; **See Considerations**
- e. Pedestrian and bicycle traffic in terms of safety, separation, convenience and access points; **See Considerations**
- f. Building types in terms of appropriateness to density, site relationship and bulk;
- g. Building design in terms of orientation, spacing, character, storage, signs and lighting; **See Considerations**
- h. Landscaping of total site in terms of purpose such as screening, ornamental types used, and materials uses, if any; **See Considerations**
- i. Preservation of historically or architecturally significant buildings or places, if any; **NA**
- j. There is public sewer available to the lot or will be made available by the developer prior to certificates of occupancy being issued, except as allowed by [section 60-360\(a\)](#) in the case of a PUD-RR. **NA**
- k. That the proposal meets the requirements of [section 60-1335](#), special exception of this ordinance. **See Considerations**

B. Site Plan Review, Section 60-1277

1. Does the site plan protect 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? **See Considerations**
2. Is the convenience and safety of vehicular and pedestrian movement within the site and in relation to adjacent areas adequately addressed? **See Considerations**
3. Are the proposed methods of disposal for wastes adequately addressed? **NA**
4. Does the site plan provide adequate protection of environment features on the site and adjacent areas? **See Considerations**

C. Special Exception, Section 60-1336

1. That the special exception sought fulfills the specific requirements, if any, set forth in the zoning ordinance relative to such exception. **See Considerations**
2. That the special exception sought will neither create nor aggravate a traffic hazard, a fire hazard or any other safety hazard. **No change**
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. **NA**
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. **See Considerations**
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. **See Considerations**
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. **See Considerations**
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. **No change in service requirements are foreseen at this time.**

IV. STAFF RECOMMENDATION

The Staff recommends APPROVAL of the proposed project with the findings that the project can meet the requirements of Chapter 60, Sections 361, 1277, 1336 and of the Auburn Code of Ordinances with the following conditions:

- 1) Site Plan improvements discussed and recommended by the Planning Board at Public Hearing be incorporated into a revised site plan;
- 2). Before construction and earth movement the project is subject to performance guarantee and inspection fee at building or demolition permit;
- 3) A General Construction Permit be applied for through the MDEP; and,
- 4). All Staff Recommendations and conditions of approval from Phase III, January 2007 are reaffirmed, including on-going maintenance and clearing of drainage basins and retention ponds.

Audrey Knight, AICP City Planner