

**NORTHFIELD PLANNING BOARD
THURSDAY, DECEMBER 17, 2020
REGULAR MEETING - 4:00PM
REMOTE LOCATION
MEETING MINUTES**

Members Present: Chair Stephen Seredynski (SS), Joe Graveline (JG), Tammy Pelletier (TP), Meg Riordan (MR); Homer Stavely (HS)

Members Absent: none

Others in Attendance: Wendy M. Levy (Boards Clerk), Christian Arnold, JSpencer. *Please note, because of Zoom's participation structure, attendance is incomplete.*

I. CALL TO ORDER

SS called the meeting to order at 4:05pm. SS welcomed attendees and reviewed the guidelines for online meetings.

II. MOODY CENTER PROPOSAL DISCUSSION

SS noted the meeting was an informal hearing for the proposal presented by The Moody Center's representatives, and he reviewed the process for reviewing the proposal. SS said he has received over 130 comments and questions from the public.

JSpencer and Christian Arnold, representatives from The Moody Center and Clockwork, spoke about the two components of the proposed project: the building formerly used as a book store, and Moore Cottage.

The plan is to restore the two buildings to their original condition, and to maintain them. In order to fund this project — because securing grant funding for infrastructure work is very difficult — The Moody Center seeks to create two for-profit entities: an upscale inn and event space center, and residential housing. The housing will not be rentals; residents will purchase their own units, similar to a condominium structure.

JSpencer asserted both projects are inextricably linked.

JSpencer shared slides about the project and provided details about The Moody Center's intentions. Highlights included:

- The three intended audiences are tourists, people interested in Dwight Moody, and people interested in Christian martyrs during the early colonization of New England.
- The project conforms with aspects of Northfield's Master Plan: economic development for the town, expand housing, restore historic buildings, and support the surrounding neighborhoods.
- The Moody Center plans to either pay taxes, or remit payments in lieu of taxes (PILOT) on the taxable entities in accordance with the determination by the Town Assessor. Although The Moody Center is tax-exempt, these proposed projects are not non-profit, and The Moody Center understands this. JSpencer assured the Planning Board, "We want to contribute fiscally to the town."

Christian Arnold continued the presentation and discussed additional slides that JSpencer shared. Highlights included:

- Additional details on the project's Master Plan, including providing smaller, manageable housing for elderly residents.
- Additional details on the plans for the book store and Moore Cottage.
- The project developers used Northfield's Master Plan to create the project.
- Photographs of other homes in the neighborhood to illustrate the diversity in house size and architectural styles.
- Photographs of larger buildings, such as the Northfield Inn, that inspired the proposed new construction.
- Additional details on renovating the historic properties.
- The site plan, with discussion on details, such as parking and the grounds's "walkability."
- The floor plan for Moore Cottage, including the inn's rooms.
- A preliminary site plan for the proposed residential units in Moore Cottage.
- An artist's rendering of the proposed new residential building.

SS asked JSpencer and Christian Arnold how they will proceed in getting a special permit for part of the project.

JSpencer replied: They don't want the Planning Board to combine the two projects—the renovations of the older buildings, and the construction of the new building—as a procedural process. If the Planning Board needs to separate the projects for the permitting process, that's fine, but JSpencer asserted that without the new construction, The Moody Center can't afford to renovate the older buildings.

SS replied: How does this relate to the permits the Planning Board recently approved for The Moody Center to renovate the two other buildings, Holton and Revell Halls?

JSpencer replied: Work is paused on that project because they are awaiting historical-building permits from the state.

Christian Arnold further explained the need for revenue to support renovations: The Moody Center will not generate enough revenue from the community space (in the former book store) to fund renovations and maintain the buildings, and it would be fiscally irresponsible to rely on that. The project's planners are trying to build continuity into the project.

SS responded: *The danger is, if you combine the three projects and one fails, they all fail.*

JSpencer replied: For permitting purposes, we can separate and submit three different plans, or combine them into two projects.

SS responded: The Planning Board would be challenged to approve the entire proposal as one project, so please split them.

JSpencer committed to doing so.

JSpencer responded to attendees's questions and comments. His responses included:

- The new residences are not solely for an aging population, and plans were not drafted in conjunction with the Council on Aging or any other similar entity. They may appeal to older residents because they are energy-efficient, smaller than most area homes, and are low-maintenance.
- A query about whether the proposed site—a tennis court—is considered "open space." SS said he was not sure and would research this. JSpencer asserted the group will comply with zoning bylaws.
- It's unclear who will own the residential building once it's built, but The Moody Center and

Clockwork are the presenting entities, and the current owner is The Moody Center.

- The Moody Center is an independent entity, affiliated with no other entity, including The Signatry. He detailed exactly what this means for the center's funding, how the center receives funding, and the exact relationship between the center and The Signatry.

SS noted the difficulty in reviewing the Highland Avenue portion of the project because The Moody Center has not submitted a site plan or special permit application.

SS said a grassroots group, Northfield Community Action Network (CAN), wants to meet with the project's organizers for a "non-contentious" discussion. SS asked Christian Arnold and JSpencer if they are willing to do this.

JSpencer responded: He is concerned about doing this because of the inaccuracies and misinformation disseminated on social media. He does not want the proceedings of such a meeting published or sent out as innuendo or misinformation.

SS encouraged JSpencer to follow through. He noted the Planning Board eventually has to make a choice.

MR also encouraged this meeting, and noted it could be an opportunity to create shared understanding.

HS asked for more details on the plans for the book store, specifically its proposed use as a meeting space. He asked if this includes community meetings, or just for The Moody Center's use.

JSpencer replied: Both.

HS asked about the price-point of the residences: affordable, or upscale?

Christian Arnold replied: Market-rate, not subsidized or "affordable."

A discussion ensued on the long-term plans, affordability for most local senior citizens, and fiscal benefits, of the residential housing.

JG asked if the proposal includes a cost analysis to determine the burden on the municipal services in town, such as water/sewer, police, fire, roads, etc. JG noted the sewers are especially challenged in that part of town. MR agreed that the proposal should include this. Christian Arnold noted the taxes collected from this project support municipal services, just like any other home in town.

JG asked for clarity on the project's accounting and funding (donations, borrowing), and for the center's annual budget.

JG asked if the residential building's size can be decreased.

JG asked if the attendees's questions' answers can be submitted in writing so others can review them.

JSpencer said the project's organizers will have to submit site plan approval documents, which will answer some questions. Other questions, he said, are outside of the scope of this process.

JG responded: Answering these questions will build confidence in "the thought process" of this project.

JSpencer asserted the center's annual budget isn't relevant to the scope of this project. He reminded JG that members of the public have misinterpreted his comments, then shared the information incorrectly with the public. He said that when his group works with the Planning Board, that information will be public.

JG responded: This is a conversation about building trust, and it's mutual. Knowing the financial situation of the center and Clockwork will help.

SS reminded attendees that the Planning Board's criteria for making decisions are bylaws and review. Religion and the project organizers' financing are not part of the Board's decision-making process.

JSpencer said The Moody Center likes to build trust, too, and he and the other project organizers are trying to parse what the Planning Board needs from what the community needs.

MR and SS discussed which attendees' questions posed in Zoom's "chat" section are relevant to the Planning Board's process, and which are about building trust. SS, MR, JSpencer, and Christian Arnold discussed which chat questions they will review.

MR asked why this project is so important.

JSpencer responded with some background on The Moody Center, its ethos—especially regarding Christianity and its history, the tourism market, and how it all points to the importance of this project.

MR asked how many residences are planned for the housing center.

Christian Arnold replied: The number could vary, but currently the plans call for 24 units on the top two floors, with additional smaller units on the first floor.

MR asked if the town could provide input on the design.

Christian Arnold replied: They are interested in opinions, but everyone has one and it's subjective.

SS asked about some scuttled plans for senior assisted-living housing.

JSpencer said the proposed site was in a wetlands area. Christian Arnold noted the difficulties in finding someone to manage it.

MR asked about the site's setback from Main Street.

JSpencer replied: currently unknown. Christian Arnold added: probably not visible from Main Street.

A discussion ensued on Native American artifacts/activity on the site, and how it will be addressed should artifacts emerge.

MR followed up with more questions about The Signatry. JSpencer and Emmitt Mitchell provided further information about what the organization does, how it relates to The Moody Center, and what donor-advised funding is.

MR shared more questions, and brief discussions ensued on:

- There are no current plans for a hotel on this property.
- Compatibility of the plans with the neighborhood. Design elements will emerge, and they are all in-line with an inter-generational, walkable campus.
- Sidewalk width.
- Residents and visitors.
- Future ownership possibilities for the residences.
- The tennis courts.
- The relationship between the Holton & Revell Hall renovations and the proposed residences.
- Memorial plaques.

SS noted this is a new way for the Planning Board to gather information prior to the hearing, which is helpful. He asked if the Campus-Community Collaborative could be reinstated.

MR asked representatives from CAN and Moody/Clockwork to schedule a meeting. MR shared contact information for the general manager and president of The Moody Center.

MOTION BY SS TO ADJOURN THE MEETING AT 6:04PM. MR SECONDED.

Respectfully submitted by Wendy M. Levy from minutes taken by Wendy M. Levy

Approves 1/14/2021 