



October 18, 2019

Weymouth Board of Zoning Appeals
Attn: Eric Schneider, Principal Planner
75 Middle Street
Weymouth, MA 02189

OFFICE: (617) 492 2200
FAX: (617) 876 9775

130 Bishop Allen Drive
Cambridge, MA 02139

hmfh.com

Re: Maria Weston Chapman Middle School Variance Application

Dear Mr. Schneider:

Please see below responses to the four questions from the Variance Findings of Fact portion of the Variance Application for the new Maria Weston Chapman Middle School located at 1051 Commercial Street:

1. Describe how a literal enforcement of the provision of the Town of Weymouth Zoning Ordinance would involve a substantial hardship, financial or otherwise, to the petitioner.

A literal enforcement of the height provision of the Town of Weymouth Zoning Ordinance would involve a substantial financial hardship to the petitioner for the following two reasons:

- Due to the way building height is calculated in the Zoning Ordinance, portions of the building at the high end of the sloping site start with a floor plate significantly higher than the mean grade of the proposed building. The existing site rises from south to north. The proposed building modifies the site significantly, raising the grade at the south of the site and lowering the grade at the north side. Additionally, the proposed building steps with the site. The northern most wing's first floor elevation starts significantly above the building mean grade such that the main upper roof, over the cafeteria, is 40' above mean grade. Also, flattening the site more than proposed, to bring the uphill part of the building to mean grade, would involve significant costs associated with importing fill and excavating ledge.
- The building height for a school building is taller than a standard two-story building of another type. The floor-to-floor height of 14'-0" is best practice for classroom wings due to reasonable ceiling heights, centralized MEP systems and distribution, including supply and return ductwork, mechanical piping, electrical and I.T. cabling, and insulated plumbing lines.

Therefore, relief is respectfully requested from this provision of the Weymouth Zoning Ordinance.

Alicia Crothers, AIA
Arthur S. Duffy, AIA
Colin R. Dockrill, AIGA
Deborah A. Collins, AIA
Devin E. Canton, AIA
Erica Metzger
Gary Brock, AIA
George R. Metzger, AIA
James Liebman, AIA
John F. Miller, FAIA
Julia Nugent, AIA
Laura A. Wernick, FAIA
Liza Bouton
Lori Cowles, AIA
Matthew LaRue, AIA
Melissa A. Greene, AIA
Peter Rust, AIA
Philip S. Lewis, AIA
Robert P. Williams, AIA
Stephanie MacNeil, AIA
Suni Dillard, AIA
Tina Stanislaski, AIA
Tracey Clarke
Vassilios Valaes, AIA

2. Describe how the hardship is owing to circumstances relating to the soil conditions, shape, and/or topography of the land or structures and how the hardship especially affects said land or structures but does not affect generally the zoning district in which it is located.

As described above the hardship is owing to circumstances relating to the topographical slope of the existing site. See description in question 1 above.

Because the proposed building is a large middle school facility, replacing an existing large two-story middle school, located in a primarily residential district, the challenge to meet the zoning height limitation especially affects this project for the following reasons:

- The large footprint of the proposed building required for the program, and the priority to maintain a two-story building height, necessitates that the building navigate a significant portion of the site, and therefore much of the slope across the site.
- There is ledge present on the site that inhibits the viability of constructing the building without internal steps to match, to the maximum extent practicable, the existing site topography.
- As described in question 1 above, the floor-to-floor height required for a large educational facility is much larger than that of a residential or typical commercial building.

The unique program, the building size required to meet the school's needs, and the topography of the site requires special consideration that other building types in this district will not require. For this reason, this hardship does not affect other structures within the zoning district in which it is located.

3. Describe how desirable relief may be granted without detriment to the public good and without nullifying or substantially derogating from the intent or purpose of the Town of Weymouth Zoning Ordinance.

The building height relief may be granted without detriment to the public good. This project is for a public school which provides an amenity for all of the residents of the Town. The proposed uses on the site are consistent with the uses that were established with the existing school in place since 1961. The proposed structures and activity areas appurtenant to the primary use are located at similar distances from the lot line as exists today. The portions of the proposed structure which are higher than 35 feet are at a substantial distance from the abutting properties.

As shown above, the proposed height is a result of the program and building type. The community voted overwhelmingly in support of funding

the building of this facility on this site. This new middle school facility will be, by nature, a public good.

4. Describe how the dimensional variance as it relates to floor space, bulk, number of occupants or other relevant measures, if granted, shall be no greater than the minimum necessary to provide relief from the statutory hardship.

The requested variance for roof height, if granted, is proposed to be 40' above mean grade, with bulkheads, fly-tower, light monitors and raised roof areas extending above the 40' height. The raised roof areas have significantly different material finishes than the majority of the building, being clad in metal, and are mostly set back within the middle of the building footprint. This will break up the façade and prevent the appearance of a "wall" of building for the abutters. This will mimic the appearance of a compliant building to the maximum extent practicable in order to present desirable relief without detriment to the public good.

The heights of the spaces are programmatically driven, accommodate required structural depths and building systems, and bring natural light into the middle of the large floor plate. The school, with a student population of 1470 students, is a large building with programs that require height (theater and fly tower) and natural light (theater, media center, art rooms) to provide an adequate learning environment. The minimum necessary relief is being requested from the statutory hardship while providing the floor space, bulk, and number of occupants for which the school is projected to accommodate.

Thank you for your consideration.

Very truly yours,

HMFH Architects



James Liebman, AIA
Associate

cc: Samiotes Consultants, Inc., file

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