

Village of Croton-on-Hudson Visual Environment Board (VEB) Minutes

September 18, 2013

Present: Tom Smith, Seana O'Callaghan, Seth Weintraub, Douglas Wehrle (Chairperson), Kevin Davis (VB Liaison), and Mayla Hsu (new member candidate)

Absent: Joe Sperber,

Member(s) of the Public: Jim Picciano

Discussed:

Straddles Gymnastics

Sign Application from Carmela Picciano, *Straddles Gymnastics*, 425 South Riverside Avenue

Straddles Gymnastics will move its location from 420 S. Riverside Avenue to 425 S. Riverside Avenue. The new location will utilize a portion (approximately 25%) of the structure at 425 S. Riverside, also requiring a change of use permit from the Village's Planning Board. Previously the approximately 3,250 square foot of space to be occupied by Straddles was used as a tractor and equipment showroom. The remaining portions of the structure will continue to be used as a body shop, storage, and tractor/vehicle repair and service facility. Parking for Straddles will be within an existing parking lot along the western side of the building. In addition to the paved parking lot, the site plan shows a gravel storage area and a paved storage area immediately north and running contiguous with the parking area. Following comments are intended to address signage for the purpose of the sign permit, and to address "change of use" for the purpose of providing comments to the Planning Board.

Sign Permit:

- Straddles Gymnastics will recycle its existing sign which will be mounted in a new light box and positioned below the fascia above the windows.
- VEB proposed and Mr. Picciano (applicant's representative) agreed that this sign would be best positioned so as to fit into the geometry of window mullions. VEB members Photoshopped the applicant's proposal during the meeting to show Mr. Picciano, who enthusiastically agreed on the revised placement of the sign.
- Mr. Picciano was advised to paint the fascia above the new sign a dark grey or black as the existing moss green color clashes with the Straddles sign, as well as appearing to be quite old and in need of renewal.
- Mr. Picciano was also advised to consider window treatments that would allow customers to see into the space while also providing some elements to soften and animate the large expanse of glass. One suggestion centered on the use of silhouettes of gymnasts along the bottom row of windows, also with possible use of gauze type curtains.

The VEB wishes the Picciano's continued success with this valued community centered business.

Change of Use:

While the VEB is pleased to see Straddles Gymnastics change its location to one more favorable to its continued success, we wish to note several areas of concern with respect to site plan issues.

- Parking as shown on the site plan would allow for 31 auto spaces and an additional 3 handicapped spaces. However, it is not clear how the adjacent gravel and paved storage yards would be accessed. There appears to be no separate egress since the parking lot completely closes off these areas. It would be appropriate to separate and screen these two uses (retail parking and industrial equipment storage) by a solid fence and provide a separate and dedicated line of access.
- In addition, the body shop, located in the northwest quadrant of the structure, has 2 overhead doors to provide entrance to equipment vehicles. Again it is unclear how access will be provided to this area under the current parking space layout.
- The adjacency of a body shop and the Straddles Gymnastic raises questions concerning safety from fumes (paint, fuel, solvents, adhesives etc), fire hazards and other aspects associated with vehicle equipment repair. The VEB recommends that the Planning Board insures that these concerns are adequately addressed.
- Finally, the VEB recommends that in its review of this “change of use”, the Planning Board consider opportunities to improve the site’s landscape features, which will help move the image of the facility from retail/industrial to retail/residential. In this light we advise the planting of street trees in the two traffic islands separating the facility and S. Riverside Avenue. Additionally, improvement to the foundation planter, which runs along the front of the building, would further soften this “front door” visual frame.

Other Issues

New VEB Board Member

The board met with Mayla Hsu, a candidate to fill the vacancy brought about by the resignation Valerie Leis. By unanimous agreement, the board feels that Ms. Hsu will provide significant value as a new member and Chairperson Wehrle will propose her candidacy to Mayor Wiegman for approval.

Proposed Cell Tower

The board discussed its limited understanding concerning a cell tower proposed to be sited in Village parklands adjacent to CET and Croton Gorge. A tall (150 feet) cell tower at this location would likely have significant visual impacts to the surrounding parklands, as well as to the residential neighborhoods that it would abut. In addition, there would be significant amounts of forest removal, storm water runoff, habitat destruction and potential water quality impacts that separately and together could negatively impact the Village’s visual environment. In conformance with Section 60-3, the VEB wishes to be consulted by the Planning Board if this project progresses to consideration under Special Permit authorization.