

Draft: November 6, 2007

Village of Bingham Farms
Design Review Board
November 5, 2007

Approved: December 3, 2007

The regular meeting of the Design Review Board was called to order by Chairperson Scarcello at 7:30 p.m.

Present: Freedman, Hagaman, Hatt, Modell, Scarcello & Valiquett

Absent: Murray-Charles

Also Present: Village Attorney Kolb, Clerk Hagaman & McDermott.

Agenda

Motion by Hagaman, second by Freedman to accept the Agenda.

Motion carried.

Minutes

Mr. Modell requested that the word "a" in the motion on Pg. 2 be positioned after the word "man-made"

Motion by Modell, second by Hagaman to approve the meeting minutes of October 1, 2007 as amended.

Motion carried.

House Plans – 32883 Bingham Lane

Mrs. Patton introduced herself as the property owner and builder for a proposed new home to be constructed on the current vacant lot. Mr. Steve Powers will be assisting her in the building process. She indicated that these are informal plans and hoped to have final plans for the December meeting.

The plans are for a 4800 sq. ft. French Country home made of stone, stucco and brick. She believes the style of the home fits in with other homes on Bingham Lane and in the Village. The home conforms to the requirements of the Village as well as the Homeowners' Association restrictions. Walter Melonio, a Northville architect, who has designed and built homes in the Northville area for the past 30 years, designed this home.

Discussion ensued on the dimensions of the home and the setback requirements. In response to a question relative to the width of the proposed home, Mr. Powers indicated it was approximately 100 ft. wide, including the garages. Mrs. Patton explained that this lot is the second smallest on the Lane and it was difficult to fit the home within the required building envelope that conforms to the association deed restrictions.

Mr. Modell indicated that the final plans should also include a landscape plan. He indicated that the plans are not in conformance with the existing requirements, specifically, the 2-story entrance and the motor court. In his opinion, the overall design and materials look good.

Discussion continued on the motor court and the pillars and fencing. It was noted that the owner could remove the pillars and use just a driveway into the garages. This would eliminate the need for the horseshoe driveway. Mrs. Patton indicated that she believed the motor court yard added a decorative impact to the home and softened the look of the garage. In response to question regarding the motor court enclosure, Mrs. Patton indicated the columns were about 6-feet tall.

Mr. Hagaman addressed a number of concerns.

1. The Village discourages garages facing the street. However, it is set back and given the building parameter and the requirement for a four-car garage, the setback of the garage reduces the impact from the street.
2. The roof appears to be too tall and there is a question whether the cupola falls within the roof measurement. He recommended that the pitch of the roof be reduced to 4 on 12.
3. The two-story entrance can easily be redesigned to eliminate that look.
4. The window to the side of the main entrance appears to be 2-story.

Mr. Powers indicated that the architect measured the roof at 24-feet. The window at the side of the entrance is at the stairwell and is in essence a 1-½ story feature.

Mrs. Freedman explained that the Village is working very hard to maintain the charm and character of the Village. What may be acceptable in a new subdivision in Novi may not be in keeping with the Village character.

Discussion ensued on the guidelines established in the Village master plan. There are many elements in the house design that are not French country, specifically the columns and the wood element over the front entrance. Mrs. Freedman recommended reducing the peaks of the windows or curving them to soften the look. The DRB is making an effort to minimize the “grand” look of a home and to make sure a home does not overpower neighboring homes, especially in scale.

Mr. Hatt expressed concern over the scale of the structure and the street-facing garage.

Mr. Valiquett questioned the use of the rooms over the garage. Mr. Powers indicated the house is basically a ranch-design and that the only two-story level was over the garage where the children’s bedrooms were located. The great room and foyer were 2-stories high.

The Chair advised the property owner to review the Village ordinance and Master Plan, which provide the requirements for home building.

It was recommended that Mrs. Patton address the issues discussed and if desired, submit new drawings of just the house façade prior to the next Board meeting and those plans would be submitted to the DRB members. She would then be able to receive feedback prior to a formal submission.

Landscape plans – 30029 Bristol Lane

The Chair requested clarification of the site plan and colored renderings as there appeared to be discrepancies between the two plans. Mr. Lasser, the property owner, indicated that the site plan provides the grading plans whereas the color renderings depict the landscape plans. He then described the color-coding of the plan and elements of the proposed structures.

Mr. Rabinovitz (attorney for Mr. Lasser) summarized the discussions before the Zoning Board of Appeals and the direction of that Board that his client proceeds to the DRB for review of the proposed structures. His client is proposing to move the trellis to the front of the home whereby it would encroach approximately 2-ft. into the required front yard setback. He feels that it will barely be visible from the street. The trellis has been painted to match the existing house color.

Grading is proposed to bring the koi pond to grade level and eliminate the raised feature of the pond. The waterfall structure is used as the filtration system for the koi pond.

The plan shows extensive plantings in the front and side yards of the home to screen the formal garden from view of neighboring properties and from the street. The plantings are consistent with the natural look the Village seeks. The Village ordinances encourage originality and his client has made every effort to bring the plan into harmony with the neighborhood.

Mr. Lasser stated that this garden will be fully planted and provide rich color throughout the seasons. He elaborated on the types of plantings to be used.

Discussion followed on the raised structure that has a fountain and planting bed. Mr. Lasser indicated that it was originally at the north property line but he moved it to the front of the house so it does not encroach on any setback requirements. The structure is 4' high. The fountain portion has a pencil-thin stream of water flowing from a mask-like element. There is a raised planting bed above that.

Mr. Modell indicated that the DRB has received the minutes of the ZBA meetings. He indicated that the DRB reviews all structures whether above ground or at grade. A structure is a structure.

Mr. Valiquett expressed concern that there is nothing like this in the Village especially in the front yard. Mr. Rabinovitz indicated that the rear yard is not suitable to create this type of garden.

Discussion continued on the rear yard and the koi ponds that currently exist in the back yard.

Mr. Hatt expressed concern that the majority of the front yard will become gravel paths with stone pavers and structures. There is nothing in the Village that comes close to this.

Mr. Lasser addressed Section 153.05 of the Village code, which encourages originality and landscaping. With the proposed screening, the garden will not be seen from the front. Within two or three years, no one will know this exists.

Mr. VanWeelden (29975 Bristol Ln.) removed his prior objections stated at the ZBA as long as Mr. Lasser completes the screening landscape as presented and promised. He does not want the formal landscaping visible from his property. He believes the natural plantings at the street will help blend this site in with others on the road. Mr. VanWeelden believes the waterfall is higher than the indicated 4-ft.

Mrs. VanCamp indicated the site is under the construction. When it is completed, it will look dense and green and will be a special feature on the street. Thirty people have signed a letter indicating acceptance of the plan (prior to the revisions presented to the Board). The DRB has to take that into consideration.

Mr. Valiquett stated that the problem is the landscaping is in the front yard and includes structures that are in opposition to the ordinance and Master Plan.

Mrs. Freedman expressed concern that approving these plans would set a precedent. This is not natural landscaping, but a formal plan with pergolas and waterfalls in the front yard.

Mr. Lasser indicated that there are several homes in Bingham Farms that have extensive gardens with structures. On Bristol Lane there is a working fountain in a front yard.

Continued maintenance of the site was questioned. Mr. Rabinovitz indicated that his client would be willing to record a deed restriction to guarantee the plantings would be kept in good condition. This would protect the Village and the neighbors in the future.

Ms. Gail Benson (friend of Mr. Lasser) commented that Mr. Lasser has gone to great efforts to accommodate the concerns of the Village and neighbors. In time, the plantings will provide a solid screen of the gardens.

Mr. Modell indicated the major issue with the plan is the structures. If there were no structures, there would be no issue.

Mr. Lasser questioned whether there would be a problem with a formal garden in the front yard if there were no structures. The general consensus was yes.

Mr. Hagaman indicated there were horse heads on the property. Mr. Lasser said they would be put on pedestals at the side of the driveway by the walkway to the front of the house. They are about 3' high. In response to a question relative to the depth of the koi pond, Mr. Lasser indicated it would be about 58" deep.

In clarification to the directive from the ZBA, Attorney Kolb indicated that the ZBA asked the DRB to evaluate the issues of these structures and whether they meet the criteria for approval without getting into the issue of setbacks.

Mr. Valiquett indicated that his biggest objection is the pond which is deep enough for someone to convert to a swimming pool and that's in the front yard. In addition there's a fire pit.

Mrs. Van Camp questioned whether the Village will go back and require other people to remove structures in their front yards. Mrs. Kolb indicated that without specifics it is difficult at this point to address whether certain items are structures in the definition of the ordinance. She recommended that any concerns be directed to the Clerk for follow up.

Mr. Richard Holloway (32711 Bingham Lane) stated that the Village has had the front yard restrictions in its ordinances for quite some time. He believes approving these plans would set a bad precedent. The ordinance states that structures must be in harmony with surrounding properties. These plans have more than two structures. There is the trellis, the pond, the waterfall and a raised pool with planters. This could change the complexion of the village forever

Motion by Modell, second by Hatt to approve the landscape plans as submitted except for the koi pond, waterfall, horse heads and further conditioned that the pergola be reduced by 2' to eliminate any encroachment in the front yard setback.

Mr. Modell and Mr. Hatt agreed to amend the motion to allow the property owner to move the pergola so it would be part of the entry to the home, which would eliminate the need to downsize the structure.

Motion carried 4-2 with Freedman and Scarcello opposing.

Mr. Modell offered a motion to approve the koi pond. There was no second.

Old Business

Clerk Hagaman updated the Board on a prior question regarding deck plans approved at 32628 Bingham Ln. The property owner did plant 25 shrubs as required. They are small and will take some time to provide screening.

The Board concurred that more specifics should be provided when approvals are conditioned upon screening.

New Business

Mr. Hagaman indicated that the DRB and PC may want to consider amending the zoning ordinance to specifically prohibit structures in the front yard, whether they are in the required setback or not.

Motion by Valiquett, second by Hatt to adjourn.
Motion carried.

Meeting adjourned at 9:40 p.m.