



BEAL COMMONS

APPLICATION FOR SITE PLAN REVIEW & SPECIAL PERMITS

Town of Shrewsbury Planning Board
November 1, 2022



Introduction

Shrewsbury Hascall MM LLC (the “Applicant”) is a partnership between Civico Development, LLC and Greenly Development LLC (“Civico-Greenly”) for the redevelopment of the former Beal School property located at 1-7 Maple Avenue (“Beal Commons”). The Town of Shrewsbury selected the Civico-Greenly team to redevelop this Town-owned site through a competitive RFP process, which resulted in a mutually agreeable Land Disposition Agreement (“LDA”) being executed between the parties. The basic terms of the LDA require (i) demolition of the Beal School; (ii) preservation of the World War I memorial; (iii) development of 55 residential units of which 12.5% (7 units) shall be affordable; (iv) at least 7,000 sf of ground floor retail; (v) a maximum of 1.5 parking stalls per residential unit; and (vi) a parcel at the south end of the property to be reserved for the Town’s continued use.

The Town and Civico-Greenly finalized the LDA on March 15, 2022, and the Select Board approved the Preliminary Plans on May 10, 2022. The approved Preliminary Plans and the Town’s notice of approval are enclosed as Appendix A and B.

As agreed in the LDA, the proposed project will replace the existing school building with a new three-story building, which will contain 55 apartments ranging from 1 to 2 bedrooms, as well as 7,660 sf of ground floor retail. 7 of the 55 apartments will be deed restricted as affordable to households earning 80% or less of the area median income (“AMI”). The anticipated retail tenants will include a mixture of shops, services, or eateries, but are unconfirmed at this time. The memorial will remain in front of the new building. The property will have 146 off-street parking spaces including 20 that will be reserved for use by the public. The existing parallel parking on Hascall Street is on the subject property and an easement will be granted for its use as public on-street parking. Approximately 0.7 acres at the corner of Hascall and Wesleyan Streets will be retained by the Town for public use.

Existing Site Conditions

The site consists of approximately 3.55± acres of land located at 1 Maple Avenue with approximately 339± feet of frontage along Maple Avenue. The site contains a former elementary school, paved parking, on-site utilities, a playground area, a recreational baseball field, and landscaping areas. Approximately 0.70± acres of land at the southern portion of the site consisting of a recreational baseball field will be granted back to the Town of Shrewsbury upon completion of the project.

The topography generally slopes from the north to south from the high point elevation of 660’ along the Maple Avenue and Main frontage to Wesleyan Street at elevation 633’. Adjacent land uses include single family residential homes and commercial businesses. The site and the surrounding parcels are zoned Town Center (“TCD”).

Hascall Street is a local roadway under the jurisdiction of Shrewsbury DPW while Maple Avenue is under the jurisdiction of MassDOT. Utilities and vehicular access are proposed to be constructed from Hascall Street with the exception of electric and gas which will be from a previous connection.

Proposed Site Conditions

The project proposes to redevelop the existing site to construct a new ±26,250 sf freestanding mixed-use building consisting of residential and commercial units with associated site improvements, including paved parking areas, landscaping, and a new stormwater management system. The proposed redevelopment area, including the proposed parking areas, has been designed to drain to deep-sump, hooded catch basins. The catch basins will capture and convey stormwater runoff, via an underground pipe system, to an underground stormwater basin or directed to the existing municipal system. Pretreatment of stormwater runoff will be provided by a combination of the deep-sump, hooded catch basins and isolator rows prior to discharge into the proposed infiltration basin.

Site lighting consists of 21 pole mounted fixtures, mounted at a height not to exceed 18 feet, and building mounted fixtures. The lighting is designed to minimize glare and prevent off-site impacts to adjacent properties. Refer to the Lighting Plan for light levels.

The proposed site plans also provide detailed information pertaining to proposed landscaping, snow storage, trash storage, and screening.

The proposed stormwater management system has been designed to meet the requirements of the Town of Shrewsbury and the MA DEP Stormwater Management Regulations and Guidelines. The project will limit peak rates of runoff from the site and will infiltrate runoff to approximate existing groundwater recharge. A stormwater runoff from the parking area will be directed towards deep sump hooded catch basins. Portions of that area will be directed via an underground stormwater network to a subsurface infiltration system. As such, stormwater design for this application has been prepared to reduce runoff flows generated by the subject parcel. An analysis of the proposed stormwater management system and the supporting calculations are included in the Drainage Report provided with this application.

Zoning Analysis

Pursuant to the Town of Shrewsbury Zoning Bylaw and M.G.L. ch. 40A §9, the Applicant is seeking the following permits from the Planning Board:

- Special Permit for Mixed-Use Development – Vertical Mix that includes, in total, nine (9) or more residential units (§VI Table I)
- Special Permit for height over 35 feet but less than 40 feet (§VII.U.4)
- Special Permit for front yard setback greater than 10 feet (§VII.U.4)
- Special Permit for side yard setback greater than 10 feet (§VII.U.4)
- Special Permit for parking at the side of the building (§VII.U.6.b)
- Site Plan Approval (§VII.F.3.a.)

The table below provides a summary of applicable dimensional requirements of the Shrewsbury Zoning Bylaw within the Town Center Zoning District:

Zoning Summary Table

	Required:	Provided:
Minimum Lot Area:	5,000 sf	154,559+/- sf
Minimum Frontage:	50 ft	389'+/-
Front Yard:	0 ft min / 10 ft max	27.8'+/- (SP)
Side Yard:	0 ft min / 10 ft max	59.8 ft (SP)
Minimum Rear Yard:	10 ft	121.2 ft
Minimum Open Space:	10%	52.4%+/-
Maximum Building Height	35' –2.5 stories 40' –3 stories (by SP)	40' (SP)
Minimum Interior Landscaping	10% of parking area	38+/-%
Parking	No minimum in TCD	126 spaces dedicated to project (20 additional public)

Criteria for Special Permit

The Shrewsbury Zoning Bylaw, Section IX.E., requires the following findings for the grant of a Special Permit:

“The Board of Appeals/Special Permit Granting Authority may grant upon appeal or petition a Special Permit for those uses as specified in this Bylaw upon satisfaction that said use is appropriate and that it will not create a nuisance by virtue of noise, odor, smoke, vibration, traffic generated, unsightliness or other conditions detrimental to the public good.”

The proposed project is an appropriate use for the property and fits with the vision of development anticipated by the Town Center District (§VII.U.1). Specifically, the TCD envisions a mixture of uses, both vertical and horizontal, that create the synergy of activities typically associated with successful downtowns. The TCD envisions a “traditional New England village center” where a variety of activities are walkable to one another, including residential, commercial, and cultural. In order to make a village walkable, a certain level of density is needed—the TCD calls for the “efficient use of private land and public infrastructure.” Efficiencies gained by density and proximity of uses mean that traditional town centers often rely less on on-site parking and car trips in general. For this reason, the Town’s minimum parking requirements do not apply in the TCD (§VII.D).

The retail uses intended for the ground floor fronting on Maple Avenue are allowed by right in the TCD. Since retailer and restaurants are not individually subject to special permits, we are requesting that these uses be approved prior to identification of tenants and that any conditions imposed by the Board with respect to the Mixed-Use special permit be of a general nature without the need to revisit the permit for each new tenant.

The proposed project generally complies with the design vision for the TCD, including the scale, pedestrian orientation, and massing. No dimensional variances are being requested for the project, although special permits are requested for height and exceedance of the maximum front and side setbacks:

Height – The project proposes 40 feet where the by-right maximum is 35'. The additional height is due to the aesthetic preference for a gabled roof, which gives a more traditional village architectural appearance, and is proposed to respond to the Town's design guidelines.

Front Setback – The project proposes 27.8' where the maximum by-right is 10'. The primary reason for the larger setback is the Town's requirement to preserve the World War I memorial. In addition, the lot slopes down from Maple Street, resulting in a building that sits lower than the street. By sitting below the level of the street, the building appears shorter than it is, reducing the impact of any additional height requested. Therefore, the deeper front setback is appropriate and similar to the existing school building which also has a large setback.

Side Setback – The project proposes 59.8' where the maximum by-right is 10'. A wider side setback is sought in order to provide a fire access drive from Maple Street, whereas the main vehicular access point is to the rear of the site off of Hascall Street. The site is also very large and extending the building further to the lot line would require enlarging the building, resulting in a less efficient footprint.

For the above reasons, the special permits for use and dimensional relief are appropriate. The project will not result in any nuisances or impacts beyond what is typical for downtown retail or apartment buildings.

In addition to the general special permit requirements, below we address the specific criteria for special permits in the TCD:

- a. *The social, economic, or community needs which are served by the proposed development;*

As stated above, the project generally complies with the vision of the TCD by contributing needed housing in close proximity to existing town center amenities.

- b. *The potential fiscal impact, including impact on town services, tax base, and employment by the proposed development;*

As addressed in the fiscal impact report, the project will generally have a net-positive impact on the Town's finances. It will require little to no new infrastructure and will house very few school-age children. It will contribute to the town center tax base and will support other local businesses by contributing to the image of the town center as a destination and the critical mass necessary for a successful and economically vibrant district.

- c. *The degree to which the proposed development complies with the goals of the most recent Shrewsbury Master Plan;*

The 2016 Shrewsbury Master Plan includes "Policy LU4.2: Promote the Town Center as a pedestrian-friendly shopping and service area and a neighborhood gathering place." The proposed Beal Commons development contributes to a vibrant downtown by adding new commercial amenities on Maple Avenue that are pedestrian-friendly and adds walk-out residences on Hascall Street that offer a truly pedestrian-oriented building, with parking located primarily behind the structure. Policy H2.2.b. directs the Town to "Continue to pursue partnerships with developers to create new affordable housing." Beal Commons is the result of the Town creating the TCD and identifying the Beal School as an opportunity to add mixed-income housing as a support for the Town Center.

- d. *The degree to which the proposed development constitutes a high quality development with regards to construction materials, architectural design, and site design, which will enhance the downtown and the immediate neighborhood and provide significant benefit to the residents of the Town of Shrewsbury;*

The design program was selected by the Town of Shrewsbury by a competitive bid process and has been reviewed for consistency with Town objectives by the Select Board and Town staff prior to this Application. The architecture and site design are intended to minimize the impact of the large building by breaking up the façade with variation in materials and form, such that it may appear to be more than one building. The standards and guidelines in the Town Center District zoning have been incorporated to the greatest extent possible. The architectural approach is described in more detail in the Community Impacts statement below.

- e. *Degree to which the proposed development improves the functioning of the town center by at least one of the following means:*

- 1) *Provides a significant improvement to the pedestrian experience in the town center;*

The project will provide additional pedestrian-accessible amenities along Maple Avenue and walk-out residential units on Hascall Street. The front yard driveway that currently exists will be eliminated and the curb cut will be closed, eliminating an obstacle to safe pedestrian circulation along Maple Avenue.

- 2) *Provides a significant improvement to the effectiveness of the parking space allocation of the downtown area;*

By locating parking to the rear of the structure, it will be mostly screened from view. Some residential and commercial parking will be shared within a single lot in recognition that such uses have differing needs according to the time of day. Mixed-use parking creates efficiencies and reduces excess pavement in the downtown.

- 3) *Provides a significant improvement to the usage and/or number of public parking spaces in the downtown area;*

As required by the LDA, 20 on-site parking spaces and 9 parallel spaces on Hascall Street will be reserved for public use.

- 4) *Provides a significant improvement to the overall function of the town center area.*

The project will result in a significant increase in the number of people calling the TCD home, which will add pedestrian traffic throughout the day that will serve a variety of businesses, ensuring the overall success of the area.

- f. *Where the proposal would make existing conditions more detrimental relative to the criteria above, the SPGA may require alterations to the proposal that mitigate or eliminate those effects and may condition approval upon compliance with those measures.*

Any additional congestion created by adding development to the TCD is outweighed by the benefits of accommodating such growth in an already-developed area, which is preferable to alternative locations.

Impacts Statements:

Traffic, Transportation and Circulation

See attached Appendix C.

Stormwater

Please refer to the detailed Stormwater Management Report provided with this Application. The report demonstrates compliance with the MassDEP Stormwater Management Regulations and Standards.

Public Service and Fiscal Impacts

The proposed plans are generally consistent with the Applicant's original proposal selected by the Town of Shrewsbury. As the property is currently vacant and providing no benefit to the Town, the redevelopment of the property will return the property to the tax rolls generating significant revenue compared to the costs of servicing the property. It will also eliminate the Town's carrying cost for the property and liability exposure.

The Applicant reviewed the proposed development with the Town at a pre-submittal meeting on September 21, 2022 which was attended by Planning, Conservation, Engineering, DPW, and Fire staff. From that coordination meeting, staff noted that connection to the water and sewer system is available and no known capacity issues should be anticipated. Additional feedback was incorporated from DPW and Fire on the location and construction of dumpsters and hydrants. The Applicant has also been coordinating with SELCO on service and anticipates using the existing services on the property with updated transformers for the development.

Although the total development cost of the project is estimated at around \$23 million, we have conservatively estimated the assessed value at \$16.75 million for the purpose of projecting revenue. Based on the FY22 tax rate of \$14.11, the estimated annual property taxes for the property will be at least \$236,000. In addition to property taxes, the Town will receive revenue from the Community Preservation Act surcharge; vehicle excise tax revenue for an estimated 83 residential personal vehicles; meals tax from any eateries operating on the premises; personal property excise tax for businesses operating on the premises; and any one-time tax assessments and fees such as the supplemental real estate tax, building permit fees, and inflow and infiltration fees.

The biggest impact to municipal budgets is the addition of school-age children to the public school system. Studies have repeatedly shown that urban infill-style apartment buildings typically have few school-age children especially when compared to single-family subdivisions or more suburban-style garden or townhome apartment communities. Apartment buildings with 1- and 2-bedroom units and minimal green space, such as the proposed Beal Commons, are not very attractive to families with children.¹ Household sizes are generally falling as people choose to have smaller families.

A study on school enrollment linked to housing in Massachusetts showed that between 2010 and 2016, Shrewsbury's school age population grew by 253 students, while the number of housing units grew by 617 over

¹ "Housing the Commonwealth's School-Age Children: The Influence of Multi-Family Housing Development for Municipal and School Expenditures." Citizens Housing and Planning Association. 2003.

https://www.chapa.org/sites/default/files/f_1239203891HousingSchoolAgeChildren.pdf

the same period, for a ratio of 0.41 students per housing unit.² However, between 2018 and 2020, the Town permitted 940 housing units while school enrollment rose by only 54 students, or 0.057 students per housing unit.^{3,4} These data indicate that not all housing developments bring significant numbers of students. Since Beal Commons does not feature units that are typically attractive to families with children, it is likely on the lower end of students per unit. If 5.7% of the 55 units at Beal Commons have a school-age child, the development will bring only 3 to 4 students. If the more conservative ratio of 0.41 per unit is used, there would be 23 students. The average of the two estimates would be 13 students, which is still conservative given the type of housing.

Environmental Impacts

The proposed project as designed will minimize environmental impacts. The stormwater management system is design to mitigate proposed impervious surfaces and its impact on surface water, groundwater, and flooding. The proposed use does not entail the storage of hazardous materials, will not emit offensive odors or impact air quality, nor will the project generate noise levels in excess of normal background levels.

The proposed site lighting is designed to provide minimum safety level lighting only. The mounting height of site lighting will not exceed 18 feet. House side shields will also be incorporated to further avoid excessing on-site glare and avoid glare onto adjacent properties.

Temporary construction impacts will be minimized through the use of erosion control measures, anti-tracking pads to avoid soil deposits on public roadways, and watering trucks to avoid excessive air born dust during dry periods. Construction access including heavy equipment and materials deliveries will be made via Hascall Street. Construction hours during the project shall be from 7:00AM to 5:00PM, Monday through Friday and 7:00 AM to 5:00 PM on Saturdays only with the prior approval of the Assistant Town Manager for the Town of Shrewsbury or their designee. No work will occur on Sundays or the following Holidays: New Year's Day, Memorial Day, July 4th, Labor Day, Thanksgiving, Christmas Eve and Christmas Day. If during the project, construction activities are required outside of the designated times, the General Contractor will obtain prior approval from the Assistant Town Manager or their designee for each instance.

Community Impacts

The existing system of sidewalks and connections to the town center are carefully integrated into the project via the building setback, allowing for uninterrupted pedestrian movement. The large front setback on Maple Avenue allows for the World War I memorial to remain a prominent historic feature along the street. This setback also creates an additional, active commercial area where the community can gather via future seating patios, storefronts, and the primary resident entrance. The project also provides a green space for future town park development.

² Reardon, Tim and Sarah Philbrick. "The Waning Influence of Housing Production on Public School Enrollment." Metropolitan Area Planning Council. 2017. <https://www.mapc.org/enrollment/>

³ US Census Building Permit Census, 2016-2020. <https://www.mass.gov/doc/2016-to-2020-building-permit-census-ma/download>

⁴ Massachusetts Department of Education. *School and District Profiles*. <https://profiles.doe.mass.edu/analysis/enrollment.aspx?orgcode=02710000&orgtypecode=5&>

In general, design of a mixed-use, multifamily development generates a large building. But with careful design, it can integrate into the surrounding neighborhood. Beal Commons follows this path, is thoughtful in its design, and maintains a façade that keeps with the existing town center through a mixture of New England-style building typology.

The overall building design breaks the façade into smaller building components that allow for a variety of roof heights, types, and different articulations that reflect traditional New England architecture. The building materials are also consistent and compatible with traditional New England design and construction. Brick, stone, and stucco are used on the building's base to designate the commercial level of the project. To create a civic building connection with the rest of the town's center, one building on the Maple Avenue Elevation has brick prominently going up, changing material at the third-floor windowsill. Beyond that, the majority of the building body's materials are brick, high-quality cement-fiber batten, and clapboard siding to preserve the traditional aesthetic of the district. The building colors are a mixture of earth tones and neutral colors, with the use of bright colors as accent elements at the entrance of the commercial space. The roof is asphalt shingle throughout the development, except for metal roofing in a few instances to create a unique visual element that helps the articulation of the building and the façade. Gutters and downspouts have colors that complement the façade materials of the building, and all roof utilities and mechanicals will not be visible from the street, hidden on a flat roof well in the center of the building.

The building design follows the existing street geometry, creating façades that are parallel to the street and locating building entrances at the ground level on Maple Avenue. All other access doors on the side and rear of the building connect to sidewalks and pedestrian areas that vary in size but have a minimal width of 8 ft. The main façade articulation allows for the coexistence of different types of entrances, both commercial and residential, and creates an identifiable vocabulary in accordance with the New England aesthetic. Covered porches, awnings, and recessed doors are some of the design elements used to achieve the design intent.

All window fenestrations on the upper levels are designed with a 1:2 ratio on single windows and in both double and triple window organizations. The diversity of window mullion patterns throughout the building reflects the New England aesthetic. Windows for residential areas on the ground level have a sill elevation of 2ft minimum and a window head of seven feet or more, depending on the façade articulation. All commercial level fenestrations have a minimum of 50% transparency.