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Martha's Vineyard Commission

DRI 659-M North Bluff Modification

MVC Staff Report – 2022-11-1 UPDATED

1. DESCRIPTION

- 1.1 **Owner:** Town of Oak Bluffs
- 1.2 **Applicant:** Town of Oak Bluffs; Tim Wong (Waterfield Design Group)
- 1.3 **Project Location:** 21 Sea View Ave. Extension (Map 9, Lot 58), and 30 Circuit Ave. Extension (Map 8, Lot 293), Oak Bluffs
- 1.4 **Proposal:** Modification of North Bluff Seawall project, including roundabout and parking.
- 1.5 **Zoning:** R1 (21 Sea View Ave. Extension), B1 (30 Circuit Ave. Extension)
- 1.6 **Local Permits:** Conservation Commission, ZBA (for stormwater and repaving in the floodplain)
- 1.7 **Surrounding Land Uses:** Residential and commercial uses in the area between Oak Bluffs Ave. and the inlet to Oak Bluffs Harbor, which includes properties in the R1, B1, and B2 districts; public fishing pier; Steamship Authority Terminal; Island Queen, Fast Ferry, and Patriot Boat dockage; public parking and pedestrian/bike infrastructure; vehicle queuing and loading areas.

- 1.8 **Project History:** The MVC approved DRI 659 (North Bluff Seawall) in 2016, allowing for the replacement of a 720-foot-long concrete seawall on the North Bluff with a sheet metal pile-driven seawall four feet higher and built over the existing concrete wall, with timber boardwalk on top and stone revetment in front. DRI 659 was originally referred as a Discretionary Referral in 2015, and the applicant later opted to go straight to a hearing. The boardwalk runs from the fishing pier to the harbor parking lot, and an ADA accessible ramp connects the parking lot to the beach. The approval included conditions related to lighting, landscaping, and maintenance. The seawall project was completed in 2016.

Concept plans for the current proposal were presented in public forums in 2016-2017 in conjunction with the Oak Bluffs streetscape master planning process.

- 1.9 **Project Summary:** The proposal is to redevelop the vehicle and pedestrian infrastructure in the North Bluff area, including a landscaped roundabout

According to the applicant, “This redevelopment plan aims to organize vehicular circulation, shorten waiting times, improve vehicular and pedestrian safety, reduce impervious area, improve stormwater recharge, and beautify the aesthetics of the area to enhance the experience of both ferry passengers and Oak Bluffs pedestrians.”

The project coincides with streetscape improvement efforts in downtown Oak Bluffs, as outlined in the 2015 Oak Bluffs Streetscape Master Plan.

More information, including a discussion of possible impacts as identified in Chapter 831, is available in the [project narrative](#).

2. ADMINISTRATIVE SUMMARY

- 2.1 DRI Referral:** Self-referred, March 28, 2022
- 2.2 DRI Trigger:** 1.3D (Previous DRI)
- 2.3 LUPC:** Sept. 12, 2022
- 2.4 Public Hearing:** Oct. 13, Nov. 3, 2022

3. PLANNING CONCERNS

3.1 Stormwater

The project area is mostly paved, including the roadways and a concrete walkway along the seawall. The project would reduce impervious surface area by about 1,500 ft². Existing drainage is via a series of pipes that discharge into Oak Bluffs Harbor. According to the applicant, “The proposed system will collect stormwater runoff from the roadway in new catch basins placed along the roadway curbing. These catch basins will tie into the existing drainage system. Stormwater runoff from a portion of the new concrete plaza will be collected through curb gutter inlets and directed to stormwater planters where the runoff will be infiltrated and treated by the vegetation.” (See Landscape and Lighting below.) The applicant has stated that the drainage system is not designed to contain runoff from a 25-year storm, but that runoff exceeding the system capacity would drain into the harbor. A conceptual drainage plan has been provided.

3.2 Traffic and transportation

The project aims to improve circulation and infrastructure for vehicles and pedestrians.

Access to the North Bluff area is currently via Sea View Ave. Extension, with a space for cars to turn around at the bottom. The applicant has stated that the confluence of vehicles in that area leads to slow and disorganized circulation at busy times such as ferry arrivals and departures. There are currently no crosswalks in the vicinity, which creates further disorganization.

The project would feature a roundabout to address traffic flow. The roundabout would channel traffic into 1) active drop-off lanes and a taxi stand area just to the south, 2) a 15-minute parking area to the north, or 3) back onto Sea View Ave. Extension.

The project would reduce the number of public 4-hour spaces, but the total number of parking spaces, including the active dropoff area, would remain about the same. The dedicated dropoff area would reduce pressure on the 15-minute spaces. The project would also reduce the need for vehicles to back into the travel way. Spaces for two tour busses would be located west of the roundabout and south of the active dropoff area. Crosswalks at the roundabout would connect the tour bus area with the pedestrian area to the north.

Proposed parking changes, based on site plan:

TYPE	EXISTING	PROPOSED	CHANGE
4-hour	24	19	-5
2-hour	11	10	-1
15-minute	15	11	-4
Harbormaster	3	4	+1
Loading for fishing boats	1	1	0
Parking for fishermen	3	3	0
Bus	2	2	0
Taxi	6	6	0
Active dropoff/pickup	0	8	+8
TOTAL	65	64	-1

The applicant has stated that the new taxi areas would not be for rideshare vehicles, which are supposed to arrive on request and not require staging. Rideshare vehicles would be allowed to use any of the active dropoff areas, which may raise concerns about the availability of those spaces for other vehicles. The applicant has stated that the project would make it easier for the town Police Department to monitor the area, and that the Harbormaster Department could potentially be deputized for that purpose. The applicant is also researching ways to prevent idling of vehicles, including busses, which is prohibited under MGL Chapter 90, Section 16A.

The plan was revised in November to relocate the taxi stand areas to the north side of the roundabout and roadway, and increase the number of designated taxi spaces from four to six; and redesignate six of the spaces near the boardwalk entrance from 15-minute to four-hour parking. The applicant has also clarified that the all of the four-hour, two-hour, and 15-minute spaces will be available as overnight spots for commuters by permit, as is currently the case.

[Maps](#) showing the existing and proposed parking uses and turning radiuses have been provided. [Alternative concepts](#) that were considered have also been provided.

The project would create a larger area for pedestrian traffic, including queuing areas for the passenger ferries, a harborside walk, landscaped areas, granite sitting walls, and benches. The harborside walk would wrap around the end of the North Bluff area and connect to the existing boardwalk, which continues south to the Steamship Terminal. The pedestrian areas including the harborside walk would consist of concrete pavement. The project does not include any shelter for pedestrians waiting in the area, in part to avoid obstructing views of the ocean and harbor and reduce maintenance. However, the applicant has indicated that the benches would not need to be fixed to the ground, so changes could be made to the pedestrian area if required in the future.

More information, including company input from the Island Queen Ferry, Rhode Island Fast Ferry, Patriot Boat, MV Sightseeing, and the Oak Bluffs Harbormaster, as relayed by the applicant, is available in the [project narrative](#).

MVC transportation staff concurs that the project would be a geometric improvement to the existing traffic infrastructure in the area.

3.3 Scenic values

The project site is heavily traveled by automobiles, boats, and pedestrians, and has wide views of Oak Bluffs Harbor and Nantucket Sound. It is a gateway to the Island for visitors traveling on the three non-SSA ferries into Oak Bluffs.

The project would include a larger area for pedestrians, including landscaped islands, sitting walls and benches, and would connect to the existing boardwalk to the south.

No buildings or roofed structures are proposed for the site.

The project was revised in November to relocate the proposed tour bus parking from the end of Sea View Ave. Extension to the area west of the roundabout, in part to preserve the ocean views from the road and abutting property at 26 Sea View Ave. Extension.

3.4 Landscape and Lighting

Existing landscape in the proposed pedestrian area is minimal, and would be expanded with additional plantings and landscaped areas. The applicant consulted with Polly Hill Arboretum on the plant selection, which includes only native or Island-appropriate shrubs, which are more tolerant to wind and salt than trees and perennials and require less maintenance. (The applicant stated that the Polly Hill did not recommend planting trees on the site due to the environmental conditions.) The planting beds would be contained by granite curbs and concrete sitting walls. The town stormwater system would be partly diverted to water the beds.

The site currently has 10' pole lighting, which is installed throughout the downtown area. The project would involve replacing the existing fixtures with LED Dark Sky compliant globe fixtures, as the town has already done on Circuit Ave. New poles would also be installed in the pedestrian area.

The project will also involve new signage, including wayfinding signs at the ferry docks, parking signs, and pavement markings. The wayfinding signs would be similar in style to others in the downtown area.

Landscape and signage plans, as well as the proposed lighting locations, are shown in the [plan set](#).