

Town of Charlotte Staff Report – DRB 24-048-SPA Site Plan Amendment Town Garage

DEVELOPMENT REVIEW BOARD hearing scheduled for May 8, at 8:05 pm

General Information	
Applicant:	Town of Charlotte Selectboard
Application No.:	DRB-24-048-SPA
Property Owner:	Town of Charlotte
Requested Action:	Site Plan Amendment
Purpose:	Amend site plan to approve as-built driveway and updated landscaping plan
Existing Zoning:	Village Commercial
Location:	3488 Ethan Allen Highway
Parcel ID:	00004-3205
Size:	17.30 acres
Existing Land Use:	Municipal highway garage and office
Surrounding Land Use and Zoning:	Commercial (north); residences, Pease Mtn. (east); agricultural (pasture, south) & forest/wetland (west). Eastern third of property (including garage site) in Village Commercial district; balance is within the Rural district.
Permitting / Subdivision History:	DRB-22-157-SA/SPA/VA: subdivision, subdivision amendment, and variance approval to construct municipal highway garage and office Burns Property: part of a 3-lot subdivision approved 11/85, w/ no restrictions; Town acquired land in 2000. PC 10-09-SD: subdivision to create 3 lots for affordable housing on Greenbush Rd. (Habitat for Humanity homes) 2016: 21.5 acres conserved via VT Land Trust easement.
Applicable Regulations	Table 2.3. Village Commercial District Sec. 5.5 Site Plan Review
Public Notification:	Public notification was via electronic posting of the hearing warning on the Town website on August 1, 2022, publication in <i>The Citizen</i> newspaper August 4, 2022, mailed to adjoining property owners on August 5, 2022, and hard copies of the notice were posted at the Town Office, the Post Office, and Spear’s Corner Store on August 5, 2022.

Exhibits:

1. Town of Charlotte Highway Garage Landscape Plan, Distinctive Landscaping, September 9, 2022
2. Updated Landscape Plan, April 2024

Project background:

The Town of Charlotte received approval to subdivide the Burns property, create a 17.30-acre lot, and develop a new municipal highway garage and office space in 2022. The Town seeks approval at this time for as-built changes to the original site plan approval. Those changes are an updated tree planting plan and a small increase in the size of the driveway.

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Review standards: Section 5.5 Site Plan Review

1. Site Features: as approved for DRB-22-157-SA/SPA/VA, but with an updated tree planting plan and small increase in driveway size.
2. Site Layout and Design: as previously approved, but with an updated tree planting plan and small increase in driveway size. Total new driveway coverage is 40,483 square feet, which does not trigger additional state review.
3. Access: no changes proposed
4. Parking, Loading, and Service Areas: the driveway has already been expanded to enable easier truck access to and from the garage.
5. Landscaping and Screening: the new landscaping plan was developed after the installation of geothermal energy and wastewater systems. The goal of the new planting plan is to avoid having roots damage other infrastructure.
6. Stormwater Management and Erosion Control: no changes proposed
7. Outdoor Lighting: no changes proposed
8. Water Supply and Wastewater System: no changes proposed

Staff Comments / Recommendations: The applicant seeks after-the-fact approval for improvements that have largely already occurred. The slight extension of the driveway was purportedly necessary for truck access in and out of the garage. The change in tree plantings is intended to provide the screening originally required while protecting the geothermal energy and wastewater systems on the property. The tree plantings shown in the new plan comprise a mix of native hardwood and coniferous trees and appear to meet the goal of screening the facility. It is admittedly difficult to completely block the view of a large municipal highway facility located close to Route 7. The Development Review Board should consult any recommendations the Conservation Commission has regarding the updated tree plan.

This application serves as a reminder that tree planting plans can change in response to the realities of construction sites. The decision, if approved, should authorize the Zoning Administrator to accept additional changes in the tree planting as long as the original goal of screening is met. The Zoning Administrator has experience dealing with disputes over nebulous screening conditions, such as “provide adequate screening,” and encourages the board, if it chooses to be so specific, to indicate required number of plantings, tree caliper sizes, etc. in its decision.

Materials provided in this application: See Exhibit list, above. All materials uploaded to project folder at: <https://tinyurl.com/3z3hcf62>.

Prepared by: Zoning Administrator Aaron Brown, May 3, 2024