

Windrose Place project sees path forward after Lenox historic district panel's initial OK

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By Clarence Fanto, Eagle correspondent

LINOX — A proposed mixed-use development that would transform the north end of the downtown village has cleared its first significant hurdle, winning unanimous preliminary approval for its concept, with conditions, from the Historic District Commission.

The Windrose Place project conceived by Nathan and M. Kathryn Winstanley for their historic property at 114 Main St., would renovate the interior of the 1790 Northrup House and construct three new, two-story, 35-foot-high buildings on the 3.26-acre site, much of it within the downtown historic district.

If approved by the zoning board and ultimately by the commission in a final application, the development, estimated to cost \$17 million to \$20 million, would include 27 high-end residential units, probably condominiums, aimed at second-home owners and retirees, in addition to commercial and residential space in a new building at Main and Franklin streets.

"It's bold," commission member Kenneth Fowler said, "but bold doesn't hurt."

At its Tuesday night meeting attended by about 20 residents, the five-member commission adopted Chairman Jason Berger's motion endorsing the proposal, still in its concept-design phase, but requiring the Winstanley team to submit a new application for approval of the project's details before receiving a building permit for the site.

It's currently known as Meadow Place, referring to its location as a home for retired single women from 1928 until the mid-1980s, when Winstanley purchased it for his advertising, design and public relations business.

The final application must include the exact location, size and height of any buildings, and details of window sizes, building materials, including siding, roofing and building trim, as well as size and location of cupolas, awnings, gutters and shutters. A lighting plan and specifics on sidewalks, driveways and signs also would be necessary, Berger's motion stated.

The project is being pitched to several potential developers, Nathan Winstanley said.

"I have difficulty attracting appropriate developers if I don't have approval of buildings," he added, noting the reluctance of potential partners "with all the uncertainty of it being in an historic district and being able to build out the 3 acres."

To reduce risks, Winstanley said, he needs a master plan approval from the commission, with whatever conditions are attached, and zoning board approval.

"That way I can find the right people to do this and do it in the appropriate level of fit and finish that's called for," he said.

Project attorney William E. Martin of Martin & Oliveira suggested that the commission could approve the concept of renovating the existing historic building, even though "it can't approve the construction of something we really haven't presented."



This rendering depicts a mixed-use residential and commercial development proposed for downtown Lenox, at 114 Main St. If approved, a renovation and construction proposal for the building, which is one of the oldest homes in town, would be the most significant downtown redevelopment in many decades.

ILLUSTRATION CONTRIBUTED BY WINSTANLEY ARCHITECTS AND PLANNERS

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"It really is just getting us out of the gate," he said, "but it's very helpful because it demonstrates we have a project that can go to the zoning board. Nate doesn't have financing in place, he doesn't have a construction contract. This is a project that's only going to come to fruition if the right development partner comes on board seeing a project much closer to reality than just a conceptual plan."

Martin conceded that the project would require return visits to the commission and the zoning board, based on potential modifications suggested by a developer.

"The project will need shepherding from this board," commission member Fowler pointed out, to ensure that the end result aligns completely with the final application submitted for approval. "It's going to take a lot of back and forth to make sure we get something that everyone on this board is comfortable with."

He also suggested that Winstanley's team seek opinions from the town's Historical Commission, a separate board.

"I'm encouraged by the public comment we had this evening," Fowler added, referring to the generally positive reception for the proposal, despite one skeptical letter from a resident across the street from the site.

"I think this is a great start, and it's a good project," Historic District Commission member Kameron Spaulding said. "Overall, this has the right feel. It feels like downtown Lenox."

The Windrose Place project will be heard by the Zoning Board of Appeals at 7 p.m. Dec. 18 in Town Hall.

"We've got a long road ahead of us," Winstanley told the commission members. "I need, to the degree that you feel comfortable, for you to say, 'This is a great idea, let's go, we're optimistic about it, we support it and we want to make sure we are able to review the details once construction drawings are done.' That's certainly fair and appropriate."

Martin voiced enthusiasm for the commission's approval of Berger's motion, even though "it's symbolic and requires us to do this again formally. It delivers a message that this is a project that is not dead on arrival with the town, that the town has some belief in its credibility and validity, and that really does help us get to the next steps."

"I think that the renderings provided show really nice buildings," Berger said, "so I look forward to seeing how it evolves."

In his presentation to the commission, Winstanley noted that the front portion of the historic Northrup/Meadow Place house was built in 1790 by Col. Elijah Northrup, a member of the Lenox regiment that fought in the Revolutionary War. Additions were constructed in 1880 and 1939, he added. He described the original 1790 section as "the most structurally sound, which should tell us something."

The new mixed-use building would house commercial enterprises on the first floor, and two residences on the second floor. Two additional buildings are aimed at accommodating 18 residences, while seven would be sited in the renovated Meadow Place house, which would remain virtually untouched when viewed from the street, Winstanley pointed out.

The design was prepared by Winstanley's brother, Michael, head of Winstanley Architects and Planners of Alexandria, Va., which specializes in historic buildings.

"It's very important that we maintain the architectural character of the village," Nathan Winstanley stressed.