

Marblehead Planning Board

April 8th, 2025 Minutes

The Marblehead Planning Board convened on the evening of April 8th, 2025, to hold public hearings for two zoning by-law updates/amendments scheduled for the May 2025 Town Meeting.

The public hearings for all articles were posted in accordance with Massachusetts General Law Chapter 40A, Section 5.

Additionally, the Planning Board held two site plan review public hearings for the following addresses: 363 Ocean Avenue and 421-423 Ocean Avenue.

The following warrant articles were opened for public hearing on April 8th, 2025:

ARTICLE 23: Amend Zoning Bylaw - 3A Multi-Family Overlay District

ARTICLE 45: Zoning bylaw by adding provision for the Storage of Fishing Gear and Lobster Traps

The board had a quorum with members Robert Schaeffner (remote), Andrew Christensen, Barton Hyte, Edward Nielsen, Marc Liebman, and Steven Leverone present. Town Planner Alex Eitler facilitated the meeting.

Planning Board members present for the March 11th public hearing:

Edward O. Nilsson	Member
Robert J. Schaeffner	Chair (attended virtually)
Steve Leverone	Associate Member
Andrew Christensen	Member
Barton Hyte	Member
Marc Liebman	Member

The Planning Board opened the public hearing at 7:15pm, April 8th, 2025. Andrew Christensen opened the public meeting and took roll call attendance.

Board member Marc Liebman was voted unanimously to be acting chair for the meeting.

Site Plan Review #1: 363 Ocean Avenue

Applicant & Presenter

- Tobin Schulman, Principal Architect at SV Design, presented the project on behalf of the applicant.

Project Summary

- Requesting a special permit for site plan approval for a house addition and garage addition to a single-family residence
- Scope:
 - Add a new three-car garage closer to Ocean Avenue.
 - Modify and expand connections between the main house and a secondary wing.
 - Construct new open decking around the back and side.
 - Reconfigure the driveway to accommodate the new garage with better vehicle access.
 - The overall design will match the existing home's character and materials (shingle siding, painted trim, wood decking, stone foundation, asphalt and standing seam roofing).

Design Considerations

- Additions are designed with small massing volumes to prevent overpowering the existing structure.
- A roofline break separates the old and new sections, maintaining architectural hierarchy.
- Driveway modification aims to reduce overall paved surface area, especially near the ocean.
- Site maintains current utility connections (single-family residential).
- Stormwater runoff will be managed through an engineered drainage system.
- Lighting: Low-angle wayfinding lights to minimize glare.
- Mechanical equipment: Ground-mounted and shielded by landscape screening.

Board Discussion

- Concerns about the garage orientation: A board member questioned why the garage doors face the street rather than the courtyard. Schulman explained that due to existing vegetation and grading, the chosen orientation makes the doors less visible from the street and allows for a smaller paved courtyard.
- Driveway width:
 - The proposed width inside the property is wider than the narrow street entrance to facilitate easier access and reduce reversing challenges.

After the presentation by the applicant's representative, the Planning Board proceeded to open up the public hearing for public comment.

Public Comment:

There was no public comment.

After public comment, the Planning Board closed the public hearing and deliberated.

After deliberation, board member Andrew Christensen motioned to approve the Site Plan Special Permit with standard conditions. Barton Hyte seconded and polled the Board. The Planning Board unanimously voted (5-0) to approve the Site Plan Special Permit.

The vote: To approve a Site Plan Special Permit with standard conditions for 363 Ocean Avenue

Vote History for the MBTA 3A By-law Zoning District(s)

Edward O. Nilsson	Member	In Favor
Robert J. Schaeffner	Chair (attended virtually)	In Favor
Marc Liebman	Member	In Favor
Andrew Christensen	Member	In Favor
Barton Hyte	Member	In Favor

Site Plan Review #2: 421–423 Ocean Avenue

Board member Andrew Christensen recused himself from this public hearing.

Applicant & Presenter

- The applicant's representative (Tom Saltsman) presented the proposal.

Project Summary

- Requesting a special permit for site plan approval for the demolition of an existing garage, the construction of a new two-story garage structure in its place, and exterior landscaping work at a single-family residence. The applicant is also looking to get approval for an ADU use for the newly constructed two-story garage.
- Existing Conditions:
 - Current structure is a 3,259 sq. ft. two-story garage with living quarters (4 bedrooms, 2 bathrooms, kitchen, living space).
 - The building encroaches on town property and lacks city sewer connection.
- Proposed Structure:
 - A 1,732 sq. ft. three-car garage, perpendicular to Ocean Avenue.
 - Includes a 680 sq. ft. ADU (Accessory Dwelling Unit) on the second floor.
 - Peak height reduced to 30 ft (from 31.9 ft).
 - Includes a new parking court and looped driveway for better circulation.
 - Restores stone wall along the street and reduces curb cut width to 14 ft.

After the presentation by the applicant's representative, the Planning Board proceeded to open up the public hearing for public comment.

Public Comment:

Two letters from neighbors raised issues:

- Curb cut width: Concerned about oversized entrance and landscaping impacts – Applicant explained that the curb cut would be narrowed to 14 ft and surrounded by new plantings.
- Deed restriction: Previous documents might prohibit residential use of the structure or ADU conversion - The applicant was unaware of its exact terms

After public comment, the Planning Board closed the public hearing and deliberated.

Town Counsel informed the Board of potential options related to deed restrictions and the legal implications should there be a relevant deed restriction on the property/structure being built/demolished.

After deliberation, board member Marc Liebman motioned to approve the Site Plan Special Permit with special conditions. Barton Hyte seconded and polled the Board. The Planning Board unanimously voted (5-0) to approve the Site Plan Special Permit with the following special conditions:

- Subject to any existing deed restrictions remaining in force if applicable.
- Requires separate water/sewer service (since it's a detached ADU).
- Applicant must meet with town engineer for addressing and service planning.

The vote: To approve a Site Plan Special Permit with special conditions for 421-423 Ocean Avenue

Vote History for the MBTA 3A By-law Zoning District(s)

Edward O. Nilsson	Member	In Favor
Robert J. Schaeffner	Chair (attended virtually)	In Favor
Marc Liebman	Member	In Favor
Steve Leverone	Associate Member	In Favor
Barton Hyte	Member	In Favor

Zoning Public Hearings for the May 2025 Town Meeting

1. Citizen Petition – Lobster Trap Zoning

This article was continued from the March 11th, 2025 public hearing. The Planning Board had no comment on this article and proceeded to open up the public hearing for public comment.

Public Comment:

Ray Bates, the sponsor of the article, stood up and recommended that the Planning Board indefinitely postpone Article 45.

After public comment, the Planning Board closed the public comment period and deliberated.

After deliberation, board member Andrew Christensen motioned to take no action on Article 45. The Board proceeded to move on to the next zoning article.

2. MBTA 3A Zoning Compliance

Town Planner Alex Eitler presented on behalf of the Community Development and Planning Department the proposed zoning amendment.

After the presentation, the Planning Board deliberated over the proposed zoning plan. The Board focused on two key items related to the warrant article: the ability for the state to come in and to draw up zoning without local input should Marblehead be non-compliant in the summer as well as the fact that all three zoning districts were intentionally selected due to how little room there is for development.

After this discussion, the Planning Board opened up the public hearing for public comment.

Public Comment:

Public comment touched on several topics related to the proposed zoning article, specifically:

1. Concerns About Traffic and Infrastructure

Multiple residents expressed anxiety about how zoning changes could worsen traffic:

- Jay Sahagan (36 Russell Street) directly asked whether there was a traffic plan. He expressed concern over current congestion and the impact of increased housing.
- Planning Board Responses clarified that although a full development could add traffic, the current overlay does not greenlight projects—it only permits zoning. Any actual developments would require site-specific traffic reviews during the permitting stage.

2. Preservation of Suburban Character

Some residents strongly objected to what they saw as a push toward urbanization:

- Christine Cuddy (8 Phillips Street) challenged the characterization of the proposed zoning as “urban development,” stating: “This is not an urban area and there’s nothing wrong with it remaining suburban.” She criticized state mandates as overreach and emphasized that local roads and infrastructure were already strained.

3. Support for Housing Diversity and Affordability

Several speakers supported the zoning changes as necessary for the future of the town:

- Kurt James (Norman Street), a member of the Marblehead Housing Implementation Committee, highlighted demographic shifts—especially a 65% decline in the 25–44 age group—and a need to support young families. He cited the 2020 Master Housing Plan, which recommended Smart Growth overlays as a top priority.
- Kathy Michael (Nicholson Hill) thanked the board for designing a plan with minimal impact and spoke emotionally about the hardship local workers and young people face in finding housing: “It’s a sorry affair when our children, our elders, our teachers, firefighters, police... are priced out of the town”.

4. Process and Public Outreach

Some residents expressed appreciation for the transparent process:

- Renee Ramirez Keeney (2 Beverly Ave) praised the planning board’s outreach and responsiveness. She regretted the proposal’s previous defeat at Town Meeting and emphasized the importance of revisiting the vote now that more information and clarity exist.
- Jeff Fowley (Cherry Street) echoed these sentiments, complimenting the professionalism of the planning team.

After public comment, the Planning Board closed the public comment period and deliberated.

After deliberation, board member Andrew Christensen motioned to recommend that Town Meeting adopt Article 23. Barton Hyte seconded and polled the Board. The Planning Board unanimously voted (5-0) to recommend that Town Meeting adopt Article 23.

The vote: To recommend that Article 23 be adopted by Town Meeting.

Vote History for the MBTA 3A By-law Zoning District(s)

Edward O. Nilsson	Member	In Favor
Robert J. Schaeffner	Chair (attended virtually)	In Favor
Marc Liebman	Member	In Favor
Andrew Christensen	Member	In Favor
Barton Hyte	Member	In Favor

Meeting Close

Board member Marc Liebman motioned to close the public meeting. Andrew Christensen seconded and polled the board. The board voted unanimously to close the public hearing (5-0).

Vote History to close the April 8th, 2025 public meeting

Edward O. Nilsson	Member	In Favor
Robert J. Schaeffner	Chair (attended virtually)	In Favor
Marc Liebman	Member	In Favor
Andrew Christensen	Member	In Favor
Barton Hyte	Member	In Favor

Public Meeting was adjourned at 8:34pm April 8th, 2025.

Minutes taken by Town Planner – Alex Eitler

