



Proposed rendering of new Stop & Shop building. *Courtesy Sullivan O'Conner Architects*

Tisbury Stop & Shop Expansion Plan Will Have Public Airing

Ivy Ashe *Thursday, May 2, 2013 - 9:39pm*

Commercial expansion, historical preservation, affordable housing and traffic patterns will all be on the docket Tuesday when the Tisbury selectmen and representatives from Stop & Shop will discuss a major expansion planned by the grocery chain at the gateway to the Island's main port town.

The meeting begins at 5:30 p.m. in the Katharine Cornell Theatre.

Located across from the Steamship Authority, Stop & Shop recently expanded its 13,731-square-foot store space to include the former Midnight Farm building.

A plan to completely overhaul the store would consolidate the current space, the Midnight Farm annex and an adjacent building on Water street formerly occupied by the Golden Dragon restaurant into a single two-story structure. The plan calls for more than doubling the size of the current building to 28,093

square feet, with the main store on the second level and a 43-space parking garage beneath. An elevator at the current entrance on Water street would carry customers to the shopping floor. A separate access is planned near the Midnight Farm side of the property.

The actual store floor space would increase to about 22,000 square feet, with the remaining 6,000 square feet used for food storage. Stop & Shop consultant Greg O'Brien said Thursday that the increased storage space was a main impetus for the expansion.

"There's very little storage right now," he said. "A lot of times with supermarkets you have shelf space and then backup storage." The Vineyard Haven store has little backup, so it requires more truck deliveries. The expansion, Mr. O'Brien said, would decrease the number of trucks coming and going from the property.

The new store would feature "wider aisles, higher ceilings, far better displays, and better food departments," he said, as well as a larger selection of Stop & Shop products and services. "They want to work with Vineyard officials and work with Tisbury residents to find out what they would like in the store," he said.

Before any new seafood departments or bakery cases appear, however, the expansion plan must be approved by the Martha's Vineyard Commission as a development of regional impact. The plan is under review by the commission's land use planning subcommittee; a public hearing before the full commission has not yet been scheduled.

"We're hoping to get as many things as possible resolved before starting the formal process," commission executive director Mark London said.

Size, traffic impacts, parking issues and proposed demolition in a commercial area are all topics for discussion.

Under the plan, a 19th-century house at 15 Cromwell Lane (next to the Midnight Farm annex) would be torn down. A snag in demolition plans came up recently when the house was deemed eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places.

"It's a big project for Martha's Vineyard — it's highly visible and in a critical location," Mr. London said.

Stop & Shop, based in the New England-New York region and owned by international food retailer Ahold since 1996, has been operating in its Vineyard Haven location at Five Corners since 2003. The store space was purchased from the Atlantic and Pacific Tea Company (A&P), which first constructed the building in the 1950s. The A&P opened its doors in 1952. In the 1960s, the back building was built after demolition of



Plan would consolidate current space, the Midnight Farm annex and an adjacent building on Water street formerly occupied by the Golden Dragon restaurant. — *Courtesy Sullivan O'Conner Architects*



Under plan, 19th-century house next to the Midnight Farm annex would be torn down — *Ivy Ashe*

the Hillman house (built in 1810) and used by the A&P until 1994, when Midnight Farm began leasing the space. Last year, in anticipation of the expansion, Stop & Shop ended the lease agreement and Midnight Farm moved to Main street.

The front of the Stop & Shop building is one of the first things ferry passengers see when arriving on the Vineyard.

“We feel that with this project we are building a new gateway, so to speak, with Vineyard Haven,” Mr. O’Brien said. “When you get off the ferry right now and you look at the existing Stop & Shop building, it isn’t necessarily the best introduction to Vineyard Haven; I think everyone at Stop & Shop can see that.”

Vineyard architect Chuck Sullivan’s design for the proposed new building features a cedar-shingle façade and a sloping gabled roof — “what you would call Vineyard style,” Mr. O’Brien said. The parking garage would be incorporated into the design.

“It’s going to be part of the store; it’s not going to look like a parking garage,” he said.

“The main issues are the architectural design of the building, because it’s at a major entry point to the Vineyard,” Mr. London said. “[And] traffic’s going to be tricky . . . it’s not only vehicular but it’s pedestrian [and] bicycle.”

Traffic is a major concern for Tisbury town officials, as well.

“We want to ensure that traffic in particular is mitigated to the greatest extent possible,” Tisbury town administrator John (Jay) Grande said last week.

As part of the review process, Stop & Shop commissioned a traffic study, which will be reviewed by the MVC.

The traffic study was conducted by the Boston-based traffic engineering firm Vanasse Hangen Brustlin. The parking garage would increase overall capacity for the area — Stop & Shop customers currently park in the 73-spot municipal lot on Water street. Commission staff and the town planning board have asked the project designers to include a sidewalk at least 10 feet wide on Water street and a sidewalk on the Norton Lane side, to better accommodate foot and bicycle traffic. Because the proposed site is in a flood plain, they also asked for a plan to handle flooding from a so-called 25-year storm.

“The two main things we’re looking at are the traffic study and the house,” Mr. London said.

The Cromwell Lane house was purchased by Stop & Shop in 2012 from the Chase family. Built between 1844 and 1855, the home is “a remarkably well-preserved example of wood-frame Greek Revival residence,” deputy state historic preservation officer Michael Steinitz wrote in an April 29 letter to the commission.” The home also has many surviving interior features, and is one of a handful of buildings that survived an 1883 Main street fire. A historical analysis was conducted on the site by the Public Archaeology Lab, which recommended it be preserved.

“It’s another issue to work through,” Mr. O’Brien said.



In another wrinkle, a rundown house on Water street next to the Golden Dragon building was purchased last year by Cronig's Market owner Steve Bernier. Mr. Bernier donated the building to the Island Housing Trust to be used for affordable housing. Trust executive director Phillippe Jordi said Thursday that a concept plan is in the works to build small apartments in the space.

Mr. O'Brien said he hoped the new building and its design would help with the overall revitalization of downtown Tisbury.

"There appears to be community will for this," he said. "There's some issues that we have to work through, but everyone is saying yes, if you can do it in a way that works, this is very important. And so that's what we want to do."