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October 19, 2020

Ashley Clark
Director of Community and Economic Development
TOWN OF WALPOLE
135 School Street
Walpole, MA 02081

RE: Diamond Hill Estates (Dupee Street) 40B Development
Architectural Preliminary Peer Review Report

Dear Ashley:

I'm writing to provide you with a preliminary Peer Review Report in accordance with my proposal submitted to you dated August 13, 2020. I expect to make a virtual presentation to the ZBA on October 26, 2020. In accordance with my proposal, my review is organized as follows:

1. Review of the developer's application, plans, and drawings, reports from other peer reviewers and Town officials, letters from neighboring residents, etc.

Documents reviewed (comments on documents contained in Section 5 below):

- Diamond Hill Estates Project Eligibility/Site Approval letter from MassHousing dated December 6, 2019.
- Site Development Plan "Diamond Hill Estates" prepared by GLM Engineering Consultants, Inc. dated August 5, 2020 (12 sheets).
- Architectural Plans and Elevations prepared by Morabito Architects dated 6-3-20 (3 sheets).
- Diamond Hill Estates Site Development and Design Overview (undated).
- Preliminary Request for Waivers dated February 27, 2020.
- Diamond Hill Supplemental Traffic Information prepared by Green International Affiliates, Inc. dated July 16, 2020.
- Traffic Review slide deck prepared by Green International dated September 21, 2020.

Town and Peer Review Reports:

- Memo to ZBA from Ashley Clark (Office of Community Development) dated March 9, 2020.
- Memo to ZBA from Richard Kelleher (Deputy Chief of Police) dated March 17, 2020.
- Memo to ZBA from William Abbott (Board of Sewer & Water Commissioners) dated April 7, 2020.
- Email to ZBA from Board of Health dated April 10, 2020.
- Memo to Ashley Clark from Carl Balduf (DPW-Engineering) dated May 5, 2020.
- Memo to Ashley Clark from Paul Barry (Deputy Fire Chief) dated June 5, 2020.
- Memo to Board of Appeals from Paul Barry (Deputy Fire Chief) dated August 14, 2020.

Communications from citizenry:

- Email to "Amy" from Kristin Morrison dated 5/2/2020.
- Letter to Walpole Zoning Board of Appeals from Kristin Morrison dated July 17, 2020.
- Letter to ZBA from Janis Selett dated July 20, 2020.
- Letter to ZBA from Janis Selett dated September 30, 2020.
- Email to Ashley Clark from Janis Selett dated October 2, 2020.
- Letter to ZBA from Julie Sullivan dated 10/6/2020.
- Letter to ZBA from Julie Sullivan (undated, with attached petition).
- Email to ZBA from Houle Family (undated).
- Email to ZBA from Julie Sullivan (undated).
- Email to ZBA from Ciaran Martyn (undated).

(REFERENCE MATERIALS)

- Local 40B Review and Decision Guidelines published by MHP and Edith Netter, November 2005
- Handbook: Approach to Chapter 40B Design Reviews, prepared by The Cecil Group, Inc. for DHCD, MassDevelopment, MassHousing, and MHP, January, 2011

2. Participate in an initial meeting at the site with the developer's design team and a representative(s) of the Town

This reviewer has not visited the site with the development team at this point, nor has there been any contact with the development team.

3. Conduct site visit and reconnaissance assessment of surrounding residential and nonresidential areas within 1/2 mile of the project site.

Dupee Street is a "paper road" that is laid out in roughly the same pattern as nearby parallel built and occupied streets, including Sybil, Merrick, and Harding. Approximately 200 feet of Dupee Street off of High Plain Street is occupied by residences and maintained by the Town.

Merrick, Sybil, and Harding are all narrow "double-loaded" residential street without sidewalks. Most of the home sites on the parallel streets are laid out with abutting back yards. Homes are typically one or two stories, and generally uniformly set back from the curb-less, paved road. Virtually all of the homes have driveways off of the street. Many of the homes have garages. This is the typical residential pattern of development within ½ mile of the project site.

Dupee Street feeds onto Route 27 (High Plain Street). Unlike the nearby parallel streets, there is no plan to connect Dupee through to Summit Avenue (i.e., it is planned to be dead ended). There is a pedestrian walkway on the Dupee Street side of Route 27, but not on the opposite side until one reaches Hummingbird to the west of Dupee and Old Post Road to the east. Amenities within ½ mile of the site include Walmart, Starbucks, Applebee's, and other commercial uses. The site also appears to be within ½ mile of the Bird Middle School and Bird Park. Access to transportation options, as well as other drive-able Walpole amenities and institutions are described in the materials submitted by the proponent (see Site Development and Design Overview).

4. Consult with the applicant's design team, as appropriate.

There has been no contact between this reviewer and the development team.

5. Provide an initial oral presentation to the ZBA. Said presentation shall include comments and preliminary recommendations on the following:

This report will be presented a ZBA hearing on Monday, October 26, 2020.

a. Orientation of building in relation to parking areas, open space, and on-site amenities.

The proposal is to build six, virtually identical (at least as rendered on the site plans) duplex condominiums, for a total of 12 units. The application materials state that 10 of the units will be 2-bedroom, and 2 will be 3-bedroom. The current architectural plans (dated June 3, 2020) only show plans of the 3-bedroom type.

Each unit is a "townhouse" style, with an attached garage within its residential footprint. Each unit has its own driveway that is long enough to accommodate one outdoor parked car (25 feet to the curb line). The street is not wide enough to provide on-street parking while maintaining space for two-way vehicular circulation or adequately sized fire truck access (it is proposed to be 20 feet wide). There is a turn-around area proposed between two of the duplex structures.

The proposed site plan places a cluster of four of the two-unit buildings, each 11 feet away from the other. After the turn around area, there is a cluster of two buildings, again spaced 11 feet apart. The spaces between the buildings are not adequate to be considered usable outdoor space. Each unit has a proposed

“deck” off of the rear of the building, at least as annotated on the civil engineering plans. The architectural plans indicate that there is a “covered porch/deck” at the rear of each unit. A more significant discrepancy between the civil and architectural plans is at the street side of the units, where the architectural drawings indicate garages separated by adjacent unit entries, while the civil drawings indicate adjacent driveways and garages with building entries on the outside corners of each townhouse. Also, the architectural drawings indicate a small shift in the footprint of the building at the party wall, while the civil drawings show the two adjacent units as flush to each other. It is not clear that the dimensions of the building footprints are consistent between the civil and architectural sets. These plans will need to be coordinated to ensure that the design intent is clearly stated in the drawing sets.

While there is a 30-foot rear setback indicated at the rear of townhouses, it is not clear that the space can be considered as usable open space, as the civil drawings show a 4-foot wide “Grass Swale”. Given that there is no other usable open space indicated within the site, it would make sense to be able to privatize that space with fencing (which is not indicated on the landscape plan).

Regarding the number of available parking spaces (24), while outside of his expertise, this reviewer concurs with others who have reviewed the project that the provision of visitor parking spaces should be considered.

b. Function, use and adequacy of open space and landscaped areas.

As noted above, there appears to be no usable open space on the site (unless the space behind the townhouses can be privatized). This is not comparable to the situation at virtually all of the other homes in the area that have significant yard space. From the building rear elevations, it appears that the entry-level decks are elevated a half story above grade, and no stairs are indicated that would provide direct access to the rear yard space (it is possible that provision of a stair in this location would be required in order to fulfill egress requirements for the building).

c. Use and treatment of natural resources.

Other than significant clearing of mature tree growth, this reviewer is not aware of any natural resources that are threatened by the proposed development.

d. Building design, setbacks, massing and scale in relationship to the surrounding context and topography.

While it is informative to compare how these buildings sit on the site, as well as their proposed architectural character, it is important to point out that this development is a “stand alone.” As noted above, the typical streets in this area feature single, free-standing residences set in the middle of discreet lots, with significant open space on all sides. The proposed development is a “cluster” model, with all twelve units occupying the same street frontage that two to three homes of the existing homes typically occupy. This development is at the end of a dead-end street, which means that as far as its street presence, it will primarily be seen only by the residents and their visitors.

On the other hand, the last four homes on Victoria Circle would be very aware of the presence and character of Diamond Hill Estates. This is the case because these existing homes have significant open space in their back yards, combined with the likelihood that there is very little space behind the proposed development where landscape screening could be provided (none is indicated on the landscape plan). It is important to note it appears that the existing tree cover would have to be completely removed to facilitate construction (in fact, it is likely that the entire site would have to be clear cut).

The detailing, height, and roof forms of the proposed structures is not wholly out of character with nearby homes. What is uncharacteristic is the overall length of the clusters (the four building, eight-unit cluster, including the 11 foot gaps, is on the order of 240 feet). The two building, four-unit grouping is 115 feet.

Given proposed height of the new structures and the elevated decks at their rear, the existing homes on Victoria Circle would be significantly impacted. This could be better studied if the developer produced accurate building and site sections that reach to the existing neighbors' homes.

e. Viewsheds of the project visible from the public street, public areas and from the vantage point of nearby residential neighborhoods

As noted above, there will be significant visual, and perhaps acoustical impact to the development's neighbors on Victoria Circle. Neighbors on Sybil Street will see some impact related to the loss of trees resulting from the extension of Dupee Street.

f. Pedestrian and vehicular access and circulation, adequacy of accessible provisions. Of particular interest are the implications of access and egress in terms of pedestrians, bicyclists and motorists. Adequacy of parking, visitor loading, drop-off/pick-up facilities.

The development does not include sidewalk(s) to High Plain Street. This approach is not atypical for the nearby residential neighborhoods, and given that Dupee is a dead-end street (no through traffic), the low traffic volume may not create a significant safety issue. Once at High Plain, there is a sidewalk on one side of the street near Dupee, and on both sides of the road not far from Dupee. There do not appear to be any bike lanes on High Plain, which given the volume of traffic, does not make that road very bicycle-friendly.

This reviewer and others have expressed concern about the lack of visitor parking on the site. As currently designed, it is easy to imagine that visitors would park in the roadway (which does not include a parking lane) and/or the turn-around space.

g. Integration of building and site, including but not limited to preservation of existing tree cover, if any.

As discussed above, it is likely that the site would have to be clear cut in order to construct the project. And also noted, the elevated rear decks do not have a stair that connects to grade. If it is not possible to provide adequate screening, the users of the deck would be looking directly into the Victoria Circle resident's back yard.

h. Exterior materials.

Building elevations do not include material callouts. The Design Overview states that "clapboard and shingle style siding, architectural roof shingles, double-hung windows and a mix of masonry elements will enhance each building's façade and attractiveness." It is not clear what these materials actually are.

i. Energy efficiency

Submitted materials do not include adequate information to determine what is intended regarding energy efficiency.

j. Exterior lighting

Submitted materials do not appear to include a lighting plan. Given the tightness of the site and proximity to neighbors, a photometric plan is recommended to ensure minimal impact to abutters.

k. Proposed landscape elements, planting materials, and planting design.

The landscape plan indicates street trees, as well as shrubs at each unit entry. No screening is indicated along the backside of the structures.

l. Feasibility of incorporating environmental and energy performance standards in the design, construction and operation of the buildings.

There does not appear to be any detailed information about the proposed MEP systems or building envelope design included in the materials beyond. Nor does it appear that there is information in the application that expresses the developer's desire to design and construct to a third-party-verifiable level.

m. Any other design-related considerations identified by peer reviewer, ZBA, staff or working group.

- Floor plans in submission are schematic, and only show 3-bedroom units.
- Basement plans have not been included.
- Building elevations need to be coordinated with grades indicated on civil plans, and as noted, building footprints are not the same on architectural drawings and the civil plans.
- More detail is required regarding proposed exterior materials.
- How will trash and recycling be handled on the site? There does not appear to be a designated space in the site plan for a dumpster if regular Town pick-up is not available (which seems to be the case).
- Landscape plan does not appear to indicate any site fencing.
- It is recommended that the architect confirm that the proposed building plans are compliant with building code egress requirements.
- The developer's submitted materials indicate that upon completion, the Town would take over maintenance of Dupee. This is contradicted in the letter from Walpole DPW-Engineering that states that the entire length of Dupee should be maintained by the condominium association.
- More information is needed to understand site and street lighting plans.
- Given how close the proposed buildings are to each other, along with some potential concerns relative to fire truck access, consideration should be given to providing fire suppression systems in each structure (which is typically not required in two-family homes).
- Given increased residency on Dupee, a crosswalk across Dupee should be provided at the intersection with High Plain Street (this is a suggestion of the Police Department). Given the absence of sidewalks, other traffic calming measures should be considered.
- Locations of ground-mounted mechanical equipment have not been indicated on any plans. These should be included in the documentation, along with information about sound levels produced by the equipment.

n. Techniques to mitigate (and other) visual impact

- Generally, it is this reviewer's opinion that the site is too densely developed. It is this factor that creates privacy issues between the proposed buildings, visual and other impact issues with neighboring existing buildings, a lack of usable on-site open space, the necessity to clear-cut the site in order to develop it, as well as a potential shortage of parking spaces. Neighbors have also expressed concern about increase in traffic as a harmful impact (this determination is outside of the purview of this reviewer).
- The developer should consider re-orienting the buildings so that front doors face each other, separated by a shared driveway. This would improve privacy issues in the units, and would create additional areas for turn-around. It would also break up the "wall" of building that is currently indicated, that would be more consistent with the nearby development pattern. This scheme would diminish the number of units that fit on the site, given the requirement to adequately deal with stormwater).
- A different townhouse building type is a potential way to hold onto a higher unit count, but create more usable open space and ability to screen the development.
- Study possibilities for retaining some mature tree growth on the site (which would require decreasing the unit count).
- Consider the use of permeable paving for Dupee and driveways if it provides more flexibility for on-site stormwater management.

6. Participate in meeting(s) with municipal staff and the developer's team ("working sessions") to address the ZBA's charges to the developer. (TBD)

- 7. Provide a written report and oral presentation on the Applicant's final revised submission prior to the close of the public hearing that addresses, at a minimum, the aspects of the development identified in number 5 above. Said report and oral presentation shall also include recommendations relative to design-related conditions to be incorporated in a potential approval of the Comprehensive Permit, including but not limited to modifying specific aspects of the site and building design in order to improve the overall development and its relationship to its surroundings and to mitigate potential negative impacts (TBD)**

8. Be available for additional meeting(s) with the ZBA to discuss the project (TBD).

Thanks Ashley for the opportunity to work with you on the analysis of this project. I hope you will contact me with any questions or concerns about this preliminary report.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Clifford Boehmer', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Clifford Boehmer, AIA