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TOWN OF WALPOLE
COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS



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November 5, 2019

Michael Busby
40B Specialist
Massachusetts Housing Finance Agency
One Beacon Street
Boston, MA 02108-3110

Re: Cedar Edge Condominiums and Apartments Proposed Project

Dear Mr. Busby,

On behalf of the Town of Walpole and the Walpole Select Board, thank you for affording this office with the opportunity to comment on the site applications submitted by Omni Development LLC (the "Applicant"). This proposed 300-unit housing project consisting of 240 rental units and 60 for-sale units (the "Project") off of Summer Street in Walpole, MA (the "Property") will, without question, have substantial impacts upon our Community, the South Walpole neighborhoods that are in and around this development, our infrastructure, and our municipal and school operations. The Town of Walpole is respectfully requesting that MassHousing consider the following items as the Town of Walpole's initial concerns that need to be addressed as the process moves forward.

The Select Board requested comments from municipal departments. However, due to the size of the project and information supplied, there was insufficient time for a comprehensive review and additional information is still needed before the review can be completed. If a Project Eligibility Letter ("PEL") is issued and the Applicant applies to the Zoning Board of Appeals, a more intensive evaluation will be conducted during the Comprehensive Permit process. Additionally, the Board of Appeals may also seek peer review on some of these issues.

While the Town understands that these comments are for the project eligibility phase of the 40B process, the Select Board is submitting the following preliminary general comments on the proposal and attached to this letter are individual department comments.

Application Completeness

It should be noted that there are inconsistencies in the application materials provided to MassHousing. In addition, required materials have not been provided or are incomplete. For example, neither the existing conditions plan, nor the supplemental preliminary site plans submitted are stamped by the appropriate professionals, per Mass Housing's application requirements. Pertinent information has been omitted such as building setbacks from the property lines. A waiver list in tabular form showing required and proposed conditions was not initially included. At staff's request, the Applicant provided a zoning analysis on a preliminary site plan dated 10/1/2019; however, the zoning table provided is still incomplete to MassHousing's application standards. For example, frontage, height (for all buildings), number of stories, maximum floor area ratio, units per acre, units per buildable acre; number of parking spaces per unit/square foot and total number of parking spaces (proposed and required) are not included in the tabular zoning analysis. Considering the density of the Project and the large scale of the buildings, this missing information is pertinent to determine impacts on the surrounding area. All information listed should be provided referencing applicable Zoning by-law sections in a single standalone document.

The supplemental site plans show 60 single-family homes on the owner side and a mix of apartment buildings and townhomes for the rental component. The application, project narrative and renderings have not been updated to be consistent with the supplemental site plans for either application. The building heights provided are also inconsistent throughout the application. Renderings show seven-story high buildings (Image 1) while the site plan indicates the apartment buildings will be four stories. Such a large discrepancy should be corrected, even at this preliminary stage.



Image 1: Rendering of Multifamily Building

The Town understands that changes to the site plans are related to the recent purchase of another lot added to the scope of the project. The Town would like some assurance before a PEL is issued that site control for both properties is properly secured. **The Select Board therefore respectfully requests that MassHousing acquire and subsequently review an accurate and complete proposal that correctly conveys in text, plans and renderings the existing conditions as well as the details of the application.**

Neighborhood Context

The project as proposed is not in keeping with the character of the neighborhood. The Select Board recognizes that, as expressed in the State's Design Guidelines, 40B housing projects typically introduce greater density into a neighborhood than what currently exists or is allowed by zoning. However, the Select Board also supports the assertion in the Guidelines that "it is important to mitigate the height and scape of the buildings to the adjoining site...it is particularly important to consider the predominate buildings types, setbacks and roof lines of the existing context."¹ And while the DHCD 40B guidelines state that there is no "rule of thumb"² for appropriate density, the rental unit portion is approximately 338% more dense than the average density in the surrounding neighborhood. The potential impact of the proposed Project, and increased density and close clustering of homes is highlighted from a rendering provided in the ProjectEligibility application (Image 2). Based on an analysis looking at abutters within 500', the average mean is 2.66 dwelling units per acre. The siting of the buildings on the Property, roof lines, and architectural style must be readdressed to more thoughtfully fit into the surrounding context.

Environmental Concerns

The Select Board would also like to take this opportunity to emphasize how environmentally sensitive of a site this is to develop on. The Conservation Commission has not approved the delineation of wetlands for the entire site under review and the Project will require a filing with the Conservation Commission to review under the MA



Image 2 Rendering from P.E. Application at 55 Summer Street

¹ The Cecil Group, Inc. (2011, January). *Handbook: Approach to Chapter 40b Design Reviews* Retrieved from <https://www.mass.gov/files/documents/2017/10/16/handbook-approachtoch40b-designreviewa.pdf>

² DHCD. *Department of Housing and Community Development Guidelines, updated December 2014. G.L.C.40B Comprehensive Permit Projects*. Retrieved from <https://www.mass.gov/files/documents/2017/10/10/guidecomprehensivepermit.pdf>. IV-3.

Wetlands Protection Act and Regulations at 310 CMR 10.00. The Commission is concerned with the amount of wetlands resource areas proposed to be altered, with multiple wetlands crossings and wetland fills proposed. The DHCD guidelines states that, "Insofar as reasonable, proposals should seek to minimize loss of environmental quality and resources that might result from the proposed development."³ Further comments provided by the Conservation Agent are attached.

MassHousing must take into consideration that a portion of the area was a contaminated area under the Massachusetts Contingency Plan (Tracking number RTN 4-3024222 Baker Hughes property). Site contaminants included arsenic, chlorinated VOCs, and DCB. The report generated indicated no significant risk for all areas of the site except groundwater, where some monitoring well concentrations exceed drinking water criteria. The Applicant must engage an LSP to make certain that these new activities would not have a negative impact on the Town's water supply and future residents of the proposed Project.

School Considerations

The largest cost in any community on an annual basis is the cost of providing public education to the youth of the Town. As this project development is considered, it is critical to identify that Walpole's taxpayers approved a substantial local property tax increase in recent years to allow for essential services to continue to be maintained in our public schools. The introduction of 300 units of housing at one time could deliver a significant number of new students to our public schools thereby further taxing the system and in essence nullifying the sacrifices our taxpayers made earlier this decade. We trust that the Applicant and MassHousing will respect the financial commitments made by today's Walpole residents and work with the Community on fair and appropriate allocations of future costs.

Traffic and Public Safety

The Town is concerned about the location of the driveway into the Property abutting the MBTA tracks. With the number of units and number of young children in the complex and playing in the area, the complex would need significant safeguards to protect children and provide barriers between the Project and trains. The impact on traffic due to a MBTA Foxboro Train pilot program (at grade crossing) recently started and is likely to be permanent. This is a high-speed train crossing with functioning street gates, which will cause traffic to stop and back up at the gates well past the entrance/exit and likely cause a confusing and hazardous traffic condition.

Additionally, the Applicant states that the proposal is pedestrian friendly and walkable to the train as well as nearby commercial areas. While there may be some limited commercial opportunities within a close proximity, the on-the-ground conditions are not pedestrian friendly. Many areas lack adequate sidewalks and are not connected with the larger sidewalk

³ Ibid. V-2.

network in Walpole. The applicant should be prepared to address these concerns within the context of their proposal.

Many of the Applicant's previous projects have included pedestrian amenities, such as a brook walk in Chelmsford – "a pedestrian walk connecting the Center Village with the Bruce Freeman Rail trail by a pervious walk along the brook, and paved pedestrian amenities connecting the Trail to the apartments and Center Village businesses and amenities, including a pocket park located in the heart of the Center."

The Town takes pedestrian safety as a high priority and is a complete streets community and expects this proposal to meet this same level of standard as this process moves forward.

Conclusion

The Select Board recommends that, in order to facilitate and expedite the Town's review of a Comprehensive Permit application if a PEL is issued, the Applicant be formally directed to address the above issues, as well as those issues identified by other departments, and submit prior to as or as part of an application to the Town's Board of Appeals the following information, including but not limited to:

- A 3D model showing the proposed, abutting and nearby buildings, including materials.
- A site plan showing abutting buildings with setbacks indicated of the proposed building to its property lines and to abutting buildings and all easements.
- Site sections through the buildings.
- All floor plans including underground parking proposed with parking studies and verification that the spaces can be safely accessed.
- A comprehensive traffic, parking and circulation study, including: the impacts that this project will have on circulation within the site and the impact to the surrounding streets. The traffic study must take into consideration the local context of the new train crossing and Gillette Stadium.
- An analysis of the site circulation and pedestrian access to the nearby amenities.
- All documentation relative to the environmental status of the property particular in light of the fact that it is zoned light industrial and there are concerns of site contamination.
- A narrative regarding trash/recycling pick-up.
- A waiver list in tabular form on a standalone document indicating the section of the by-law, the requirement and what is proposed for all local board and commissions.

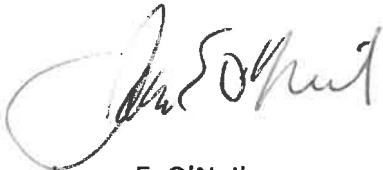
The Select Board urges that MassHousing direct the Applicant to provide an accurate and complete application and direct the Applicant to work with the Town to achieve a project that can be better integrated into the neighborhood context. The Select Board would also encourage the developer to find creative design solutions that respect the underlying wetlands and more intentionally consider the surrounding neighborhood. Given the large scale and impact of this project, anything less would be a loss of an important opportunity to integrate the proposed Project into the Town and create a vibrant community.

We fully anticipate that the ZBA will require additional information including but not limited to information relative to identifying and mitigating health and noise impacts during construction. All materials provided, including those identified above, should provide accurate representations of existing and proposed conditions.

In addition to the comments contained herein, the Select Board would like to share a question and answer sheet (attached) that was developed by Walpole Town Administrator Jim Johnson in response to a series of questions that were submitted to the Town from interested residents along with all of the feedback and comments the Town has received from Walpole residents.

The Town of Walpole is appreciative of your consideration of our comments, and we look forward to working with you and your staff as this site approval process advances. Clearly additional items and/or concerns may arise in the coming days and weeks, and we will do our best to relay those to you for your review. If you should have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "James E. O'Neil", is written over a light blue circular stamp.

James E. O'Neil
Chair

Attachments:

Department Comments
Select Board Q & A
Letters from Residents