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September 15, 2021

Lois S. Barbour, Chair
NORWELL BOARD OF APPEALS
lsbarbour@gmail.com

Re: Architectural Peer Review of Proposed 15 High Street 40B

Dear Lois:

I'm writing to provide you with comments related to the 40B development that is proposed for 15 High Street. To prepare this letter, I have reviewed a number of documents, including

- Architectural plan set dated January 29, 2021
- Civil engineering plan set dated April 30, 2021
- High Street/Norwell ZBA presentation dated July 7, 2021
- Design Review and Site Photos document prepared by Richard Fenuccio dated March 31, 2021
- MHP PEL dated April 21, 2021
- Traffic Impact Assessment prepared by John Morgan dated July 26, 2021
- Letter Assessment prepared by Chessia Consulting Services dated July 12, 2021

This letter will follow the format of my fee proposal letter to you dated July 26, 2021. My comments are as follow:

1. Review of the Applicant's plans for the proposed development entitled "15 High Street, Norwell, Massachusetts" for a mixed-income rental community consisting of 56 apartments in ten buildings.

Overall, this reviewer believes that the application materials are very well prepared, and sufficient for this level of review by the ZBA and the public (although, within this letter are several requests for additional information). And, mirroring comments made in the PEL and Fenuccio, the site is appropriate for this type of development. A well-designed development in this location will be a positive addition to a "transitional" neighborhood that has lost its "coherency" due to a number of nearby larger scale residential and commercial developments.

While the proposed new development is of a reasonably large scale (56 rental units with a total of 90 bedrooms), breaking it up into multiple, smaller structures with significant variation is a gesture that helps to create a strong connection with a housing type that fits well in Norwell. The four structures that will be demolished to make way for the development are "stragglers" at the northern end of High Street that now is wedged between a larger scale residential structure and a heavily used commercial development on Washington Street.

Given the location near to significant commercial development and access to highways, the density of the development makes sense. The proposed site plan does a good job of "placemaking" through its organization around large, shared green spaces. And while quite dense when compared to most of Norwell's residential areas, there is an understandable hierarchy of private areas for individual residences and appropriately scaled public spaces.

See sections below for some detailed comments for consideration by the ZBA in their assessment of the development.

2. Review "Independent Design Review for Project Eligibility Letter" prepared by Richard Fenuccio (ClearPath Advisors LLC) dated March 31, 2021, prepared for Massachusetts Housing Partnership.

This letter is both well-written and thorough, and I'm in agreement with virtually all of the points that are laid out within. A few reactions/comments to some of the specifics (although all 18 comments and questions at the end of the letter should be addressed by the applicant):

- Agreed that the development is "an excellent example of a fairly high-density residential development...(with) reasonable site features, residential amenities, and significant open space." My comment is that a more specificity of how the open spaces will be programmed would be helpful. For example, in a development with 90 bedrooms on a relatively isolated site (from a pedestrian perspective), one might expect to see a tot lot, defined passive recreation areas, etc. Discrepancies between the civil/landscape and architectural site plans should be clarified as the plans evolve.
- Regarding the letter's section on relationship to adjacent streets, while in agreement that a more consistent street edge created by the four facades facing High is a positive attribute of the site plan, this reviewer believes that given the intensity of vehicular use on High Street, the buildings are too close to the street. Elaboration of this point is below.
- Expanding on the question regarding the existing sidewalk on High Street, it is clear to this reviewer that the existing sidewalk is too narrow and the material (bituminous) inappropriate to adequately serve the new development, not to mention existing residences further south on High. But as important, the case can also be made that a planting strip should be introduced between the fast-moving vehicles on High Street and the pedestrian walkway. This concern is part of the reasoning for believing that the building distances from the street should be increased. Clearly, this kind of work in the public way would require cooperation with the Town.
- Regarding the south-side buffering, it now seems that the development team believes that given the depth of the sewer line in the easement, large-scale buffering is possible. It is likely that the applicant will be producing a revised landscape plan that includes this improvement. However, this reviewer believes that a few other modifications should be considered.

First, while there is some discrepancy between the civil and architectural plans, it appears that the southern entry drive curb cut could be moved further north on High Street in order to create a tapered buffer space, wider at the street end than at the western end. Similarly, the Village Green would be swung in the same direction, equalizing the depth of the front yards on Buildings G and H. This minor re-orientation could potentially create more buffering at the corner of High and the Washington Square entry drive.

Second, if Building A were shortened by moving its eastern façade further from High Street (making it more in line with the abutter to the south), a more significant cluster of trees could be incorporated that would enhance buffering as well as create a more meaningful "tie-in" with the existing context.

- Bike racks for visitors to the site should be indicated, potentially covered secure parking for residents as well.
- Agreed that Board should be presented with information regarding sustainability aspects of the project.
- HC-accessible parking should be clarified. In particular, consideration should be given to placing accessible spaces on the same side of the drive as the Mail Pavilion.
- A lighting plan has now been submitted that does not show spillover into adjacent properties. There does not appear to be detail provided relative to height of support poles, or whether fixture types are dark sky compliant.

3. Visit the site and/or review the site and surrounding area using on-line methods.

Site visit occurred on September 15, 2021.

4. Consult with Applicant, the Design Team and Town officials, as appropriate.

TBD

5. *In the Architectural Review, provide comments that include, but not limited to the following elements of the proposed development:*
- a. **General review of the architectural detailing of the ten buildings.** Architectural detailing is well thought out and appropriate for this type and scale of structures. This reviewer recommends exploring more color variation within the development than what is represented on the 3-D birdseye views.
 - b. **Relationship of the buildings to 15 High Street (i.e., architectural detailing of the façade designs facing High Street).** As noted above, detailing is satisfactory. However, also as noted, given the high traffic volume on High Street, this reviewer believes that the buildings should be further set back from the street. This is less of an argument about streetwall than quality of life for the residents in the closest units, as well as enhancing the pedestrian experience for all for all of the neighbors on High Street to the south of the proposed project. It appears that the entire development could be shifted to the west to achieve this. It is also possible to change some of the unit types in the four buildings closest to High to “skinny up” the east to west footprint.
 - c. **Appropriateness of the proposed parking (number of parking spaces provided, size of parking spaces, number of visitor spaces provided, location and number of Handicap spaces, etc.).** Parking ratio seems adequate to this reviewer, including number of accessible spaces that are proposed. As noted previously, there may be issues relative to the location of some of the accessible spaces.
 - d. **Integration of development into existing nearby development patterns.** This is discussed above. While the development pattern within the project is not typical for Norwell, its view from the public realm is appropriate. As noted before, some tweaking of buffering on the south side, along with minor reorientation of the internal streets with High Street should be considered.
 - e. **Study southern property line including:**
 - i. **Comments on architectural elements/details of facades facing the adjacent single-family residence.** Proposed facades are appropriate, but landscape buffering, sufficient fencing, and control of building mounted lighting in that area are critical.
 - ii. **Recommendations on how a buffer could be created along this property line that will provide improved privacy for both the residents of the existing single-family house and the residents of the future apartments understanding that the Norwell DPW has requested no trees be planted within the 20-foot easement.** One thought is to require the Applicant to plant trees on the abutter’s parcel along the edge of the easement to enhance the buffer with more vertical plantings. Applicant has shown a willingness for this type of arrangement. This reviewer is looking forward to seeing a revised landscape plan, as well as consideration of increasing the depth of the buffering in the area directly across from the existing single family home neighbor.
 - f. **Open Space/Passive Recreation areas – provide design comments on both areas (i.e., how should these spaces be designed and used by the residents to best utilize these two amenities?).** As discussed above, more specificity in how the open spaces are furnished and programmed should be included in the revised landscape and civil plans.
 - g. **Provide guidance on any additional uses that might be appropriate for the freestanding Mail Pavilion structure shown adjacent to the rear Open Space/Passive Recreation area.** Generally, for a development of this size, some type of community space would be made available to the residents. Use of the space for birthday parties, receptions, movie nights, etc. would be scheduled through the management company. This development may be of a scale to include a rental office in the program for the building. This building could potentially be a place for children to wait for a school bus (if not provided elsewhere on the site).
 - h. **Review and comment on proposed Exterior Lighting Plan.** Comments are above.
6. *Provide a written memo that summarizes your findings and recommendations no later than September 15, 2021.*
To be circulated 9/15/21.
7. *Prepare for and be available to attend a virtual ZBA meeting to present your memo.*
Date TBD.

Thanks again for asking me to work with you on the analysis of this development. I look forward to discussing with you in greater detail at an upcoming ZBA hearing.

Sincerely,
DAVIS SQUARE ARCHITECTS, INC

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'C. Boehmer', with a stylized, flowing script.

Clifford Boehmer AIA
Principal