

WABAN AREA COUNCIL

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January 21, 2016

Zoning Board of Appeals, City of Newton
1000 Commonwealth Ave.
Newton, MA 02459

Re: Proposed Development at 1521 Beacon Street in Waban

Dear Members of the Zoning Board of Appeals:

We are writing to comment on the comprehensive permit application recently submitted by Waban AMA Realty Ventures LLC (the “Applicant”) for a proposed development at 1521 Beacon St. in Waban (the “Project”). As you may know, the Waban Area Council is an elected local council that hears, responds to, and represents concerns of the village of Waban. All nine members of the Council agree on the contents of this letter. In addition, Ward 5 Councilors John Rice and Brian Yates join as signatories to this letter.

We believe that a rental development with affordable housing is, as a general matter, an appropriate use of this site. At this early stage of the hearing process, however, we point out that the existing design raises three broad areas of concern (all of which may constitute issues of “Local Concern” within the meaning of the Ch. 40B Regulations) that should be addressed if the development is to integrate reasonably with the surrounding neighborhood. These areas of concern are: (1) the massing, scale and setbacks of the proposed buildings relative to surrounding structures, (2) the lack of green or open space in the current design, and (3) the introduction of such a large number of cars into the neighborhood and the attendant traffic and safety issues. Our concerns are reflective of the vast majority of resident comments submitted to the Planning Dept. during the pendency of the Applicant’s Project Eligibility petition with MassHousing.¹

Massing and Scale; Setbacks

We recognize that a 40B development will by its nature introduce buildings into the neighborhood that differ from surrounding buildings in terms of massing and scale. In this case however, we are concerned that the Applicant proposes to

¹ Of the 202 letters submitted, 16 letters expressed support for the proposal, and 186 letters expressed opposition or concerns with the proposal (though many of those expressed some general support for rental and/or affordable housing at the site).

introduce buildings that are so large relative to surrounding structures that they will not reasonably integrate with the surrounding neighborhood.

The 3.5- to 4.5-story apartment building along Short St. (which rises 17 feet higher than the existing church) presents a massive structure taking up most of the property's frontage on Short St. and dwarfing neighboring homes. Similarly, we are concerned that the closely placed townhome clusters along Karen Rd. may not integrate with the surrounding neighborhood. We note that since introducing original plans to the community, the Applicant has revised the plans to lower the height of the proposed townhomes from 47 feet (3.5 stories) to 32.5 feet (2.5 stories), a positive change that lessens the towering effect of the townhomes over the street. However, the impact of the size of the townhomes on the surrounding neighborhood remains exacerbated by the proposed 9.8-foot front setbacks and 10-foot side setbacks. The required front setbacks on Karen Rd. are 30 feet and the required side setbacks are 15 feet.

We urge the ZBA to closely examine the issue of the relation of the massing of these buildings relative to the setting.

Lack of Green and Open Space

The current design is dominated by buildings and pavement. There is no meaningful green space (either to be viewed from the street or to be enjoyed by residents of the development). Similarly, the design does not allow for any open space to be viewed from the street. We recognize that the Applicant's site plans show that the aggregate footprint area of the proposed buildings and drive and parking areas will be roughly the same as the aggregate footprint area of the existing church and drive and parking areas. However, we are concerned about the loss of a significant section of green space along Short St. and point out that the existing setting allows for open space viewing from both Short St. and Karen Rd., while the proposed design largely blocks such views.

Traffic Problems Posed by the Project

The Project would add 48 units and 106 parking spaces to the site. All traffic would exit out onto Karen Rd., a street with 11 homes. The Applicant intends to route traffic from Karen Rd. onto Montclair Rd. and then out onto Beacon St. at an intersection that many neighbors avoid because of the difficulties posed there. The other alternative for cars exiting the site would be to travel out to Chestnut St. via Oakvale Rd. (a private road) at another difficult intersection, or to wind through the neighborhood to the north before exiting onto Chestnut St.

We recognize that the Applicant has submitted a traffic study. We urge the ZBA to consider the particular challenges posed by the Montclair/Beacon and

Oakvale/Chestnut intersections and ask that you take them into account in determining whether a 48-unit development is sustainable at the site.

We also note that to be credibly positioned as a transit-oriented development, the number of parking spaces should be reduced from 106 and their rent unbundled from the living units. Otherwise, driving will be the norm and traffic will be exacerbated. We hope that the ZBA hearing process will focus on additional modifications to the design that would further the goals of a transit-oriented development and encourage active transportation.

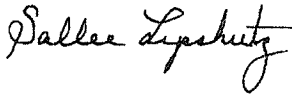
Conclusion

The foregoing expresses concerns that we have heard from the community regarding the proposal. We hope that the ZBA will consider these as key issues to be addressed early in the hearing process. We note that the Planning Dept. raised these same issues in their comment letter to MassHousing and we share the Planning Dept.'s concern that the proposed project exceeds a reasonable amount of development for the site.

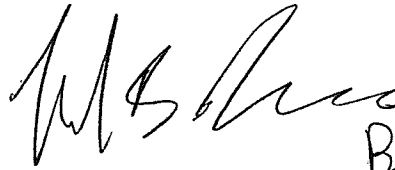
We look forward to the hearing and appreciate your consideration of the issues raised in this letter.

Sincerely,

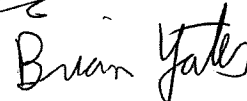
Waban Area Council



By: Sallee Lipshutz, President



Councilor John Rice



Councilor Brian Yates

cc: Hon. Mayor Setti Warren
Ms. Alexandra Ananth, Chief Planner for Current Planning
Mr. Stephen Buchbinder, Attorney for Applicant