

# WABAN AREA COUNCIL

[www.wabanareacouncil.com](http://www.wabanareacouncil.com)

wabanareacouncil@newtonma.gov

May 14, 2015

Ms. Alexandra Ananth  
Chief Planner for Current Planning  
Newton City Hall  
1000 Commonwealth Ave.  
Newton, MA 02459

## ***Re: Proposed Development at 1521 Beacon Street in Waban***

Dear Ms. Ananth:

We are writing to comment on the Project Eligibility 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 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.

We are familiar with the findings that Mass Housing must make in order to grant the Project Eligibility Letter, and our comments here are directed at the following requirement:

*that the conceptual project design is generally appropriate for the site on which it is located, taking into consideration factors that may include proposed use, conceptual site plan and building massing, topography, environmental resources, and integration into existing development patterns (such finding, with supporting reasoning, to be set forth in reasonable detail); 760 CMR 56.04(4)(c).*

While we believe that a rental development with affordable housing may be an appropriate use of this site, we are concerned that the current design of the Project falls short of the "generally appropriate" requirement because of: (1) the massing and scale of the buildings relative to surrounding structures, (2) the lack of green or open space in the design, and (3) the introduction of such a large number of cars into the neighborhood and the attendant traffic and safety issues.

## **Massing and Scale**

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 believe that the Applicant proposes to introduce buildings that are so large relative to surrounding structures that they may not be “generally appropriate” for this site.

The 12 proposed townhomes along Karen Rd. are 3 ½ stories high, with roof peaks at 47 feet. The towering clusters are lined close together along the street. Immediately across the street the existing homes are all one- and two-story homes. Similarly, the four- to five-story apartment building along Short St. presents a massive structure taking up most of the property’s frontage on Short St. and dwarfing neighboring homes.

Notably absent among the drawings we have seen are any street-scape or aerial renderings that illustrate the size of the proposed buildings relative to surrounding homes. A review of Mass Housing’s own “Handbook: Approach to Chapter 40B Design Reviews” makes clear that such contextual illustrations would provide MassHousing with valuable information in assessing whether the current design is appropriate for the site. In addition, the 40B regulations require that the Project Eligibility application include “a locus map identifying the site within a plan of the neighborhood, accompanied by photographs of the surrounding buildings and features that provide an understanding of the physical context of the site” 760 CMR 56.04(2)(c). We have not seen any such photographs in the copy of the application that the City of Newton has made available online.

We believe such drawings and photographs are critical to assess whether this design is appropriate for the site and relates properly to neighboring homes.

## **Lack of Green and Open Space**

The current design is dominated by buildings and pavement. There is no meaningful green space. Similarly, the design does not allow for any open space to be viewed from the street. We have heard concerns from immediate abutters that the height of the townhomes would keep them in perpetual shade, especially during winter months. Renderings of the Project that show the design relative to the surrounding area may reveal a stark contrast between the Project and surrounding area in terms of green and open space.

## **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. While we are aware that traffic details are typically worked out further along in the 40B process, and know that the Applicant has expressed willingness to work on traffic solutions, in this case the traffic problems surrounding the site should be taken into account in determining whether a 48-unit development is sustainable at the site. We urge you to ask representatives from Mass Housing to examine traffic issues during the site visit. We add that we hope this Project can be better designed as a transit-oriented development.

### **Conclusion**

The foregoing expresses concerns that we have heard from the community regarding the proposal. We hope that the Planning Department will incorporate into their comment letter these concerns regarding massing and scale, the lack of green and open space, and the traffic challenges posed by the site. In addition, we ask that you point out the lack of contextual illustrations in the Applicant's submission. While detailed design elements of the Project can be addressed during later phases of the 40B process, we think that the problems outlined herein are so serious as to require resolution prior to the grant of Project Eligibility.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

**Waban Area Council**

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Sallee Lipshutz".

**By:** Sallee Lipshutz, President

**cc:** Hon. Mayor Setti Warren  
Ms. Katharine Lacy, MassHousing  
Ald. Deb Crossley  
Ald. John Rice  
Ald. Bryan Yates