



TOWN OF STOUGHTON
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PLANNING BOARD


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PLANNING BOARD
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MEMORANDUM

Date: May 1, 2009

To: Zoning Board of Appeals

From: Joseph Laydon, Town Planner 

Re: Planning Board Review of proposed 40B consisting of 208 apartments on 27.81 acres by Woodbridge Crossing L.L.C., Applicant.

The Applicant submitted an application dated May 26, 2008 to the Zoning Board of Appeals (ZBA) seeking approval of a 208 unit residential development under the Comprehensive Permit Statute, Chapter 40B of the Massachusetts General Law. The Planning Board met on March 26, 2009; April 9, 2009 and April 23, 2009 to review the 40B site plan. The following represent comments from the Board and Staff on the proposed project.

GENERAL COMMENTS

Building Density and Massing:

The Applicant proposes the construction of 208 rental units on land that accesses Central Street, Island Street, and Mill Street. While the acreage of the property is 25.97 acres, a significant portion of the property is classified as wetlands and contains a perennial stream. This results in a density of roughly 11 units per acre when the 7.05 acres of wetland areas are excluded from the calculation of density. This is in excess of the 8 units per acre stated within the application materials. The calculated density will increase as a result of the most recent wetland delineation that has not been certified by the Conservation Commission and if the riverfront area is included into the calculation.

The proposed buildings are large and in close proximity to each other. The development is divided into two nodes of development areas. The Board is concerned how the proposed 208 units necessitate the crowding of the development within the limited buildable upland areas of the site. The close proximity of wetlands causes the placement of detention basins and drainage structures close to the proposed buildings thus minimizing available open space that could be

used for lawn and landscaping within the development. The end result is a highly concentrated development that is out of character with the town and more suited for a more urban community.

Municipal Services

Planning Board is concerned that the Town's ability to provide municipal services is slowly being undermined by the recent approvals of large 40-B project, and specifically rental projects. In a time when the Town is being forced to contemplate reductions in its police, firefighters, and educators, projects the size of Woodbridge apply more demand for limited municipal resources. The Town's ability to provide municipal water and handling wastewater should be scrutinized since it is those limited recourses that allow for a project of this size, whereas it would not have been possible if water and wastewater were to be provided onsite.

SPECIFIC COMMENTS

Access Drive/ Internal Circulation:

1. The plan shows the access for the site opposite West Street. As the drive enters the site, it traverses the "channelized" stream. Given the stream traverses under a parking lot and the mill building, Staff questions whether the culvert is structurally sound and capable of with bearing the weight of construction activities and vehicles. It is recommended that the Applicant examine the structural integrity of the culvert.
2. It is the Planning Board's opinion that the layout of the buildings does not allow for adequate access for emergency vehicles in and among the buildings.

Demolition:

1. The Applicant proposes the demolition of the existing mill building, which is over the "channeled" stream. The Applicant should submit a demolition plan that addresses how the building will be demolished while preventing damage to the stream.
2. The Plans show the retention of trees in close proximity to the building that is going to be demolished. A demolition plan should identify how those trees will be preserved through the demolition process.

Safety

1. The Applicant should examine whether the section of stream as it exits the building that is channeled should be fenced or other safety measures instituted to prevent falls into the channel.
2. In the Applicant's response to comments document dated September 12, 2008, it is stated that a fire flow test will be conducted at the time of the submission of building permit applications. It is recommended that the fire flow tests be done in advance of the ZBA's decision since lack of adequate water pressure will not allow for adequate fire protection for the project. This information should be known in the review process so that should there not be adequate pressure, mitigation can be identified or the project can be redesigned to address the deficiency.
3. The documentation pertaining to the application indicated that school age children are anticipated to walk to school for all grade levels. The September 12, 2008 document provided a copy of a map showing the anticipated route to the middle school and high school. Given the expectation that children are to walk along Central Street, significant upgrades are required to sidewalks along Central Street between the project access point and the schools. Specifically, sidewalks are either deficient or not provided between Island Street and Tosca Drive. In addition, the intersections of both streets are heavily utilized and provide no safety zoning for pedestrians. The Planning Board recommends that the Applicant commit to improve pedestrian safety accommodations along Central Street.

Drainage and Groundwater

1. The Planning Board is concerned over the placement of several large detention basins in close proximity to the proposed buildings and wetland areas. Should water remain in the structures for extended periods of time, they may present a safety hazard for occupants of the development.
2. The Planning Board recommends that the Applicant and resultant owner of the complex commit to a long-term monitoring plan for the plume under the property in order to determine whether there is movement towards the wells of adjacent properties and developments. A bond should be required to protect the Town against any incurred cost for contamination remediation.

Lighting

1. The Board recommends that exterior lighting fixtures utilize energy efficient bulbs which produce a natural white light and should be the minimum wattage necessary. The Board recommends against the use of mercury vapor and low/high pressure sodium lighting fixtures.
2. The Board recommends that security lights be shielded so that the source of light is not visible to adjacent properties or the travel way.

Resident Amenities

1. The Applicant states within the September 12, 2008 document entitled "Peer Review Comment Responses, Supplemental Information Package" that they have provided 50,000 square feet of outdoor recreation within the development. The Board recommends the ZBA require a plan showing the areas designated as being available for recreation so that they may be properly evaluated.
2. The Planning Board does not believe are adequate amenities for residents of the development. While the plan indicates a pool and a "tot lot," the Planning Board does not believe that there is adequate space within the plan for additional recreation activities. The concentration of the site has precluded the availability of field space. And where there is lawn, the proximity of drainage structures and drainage basins presents a potential hazard. The Board recommends the Applicant consider the identification of designated field space for active and passive recreation purposes on the site.
3. The Planning Board recommends that the internal sidewalk system be reconsidered. Pedestrian accommodations are provided directly adjacent to parking areas and travel ways. Pedestrians must cross large breaks, such as parking fields and driveways in order to continue on the sidewalk system. In some areas, sidewalks are not provided that would provide for the natural movement of pedestrians, thereby creating potential conflict between pedestrians and vehicles.

CONCLUSION

It is the Planning Board's opinion that the above noted comments and concerns are driven by the density and scale of the project and that the number of units should be reduced. In support of this conclusion, the Planning Board points to the Applicant's list of requested exemptions from ordinances, regulations, and bylaws of the Town of Stoughton. The Application states numerous requests for exceptions from dimensional requirements pertaining to parking, building setbacks, vegetated buffer strips, distance to wetlands, and grading. The Planning Board requests the ZBA and the Applicant to revise the project to reduce the total number of units and minimize the need for the litany of requested exceptions so that a plan can be presented to the Town that can be supported. The Planning Board also believes that the Town has fulfilled the public need for

rental housing and that since the Applicant has an approval for a previous project, that the ZBA not approve the project and require that previous ownership proposal be constructed.

The Planning Board thanks the Zoning Board of Appeals for providing this opportunity to comment on the subject application.