



Town of Brookline

Massachusetts

PLANNING BOARD

Town Hall, 3rd Floor
333 Washington Street
Brookline, MA 02445-6899
(617) 730-2130 Fax (617) 730-2442
TTY (617) 730-2327

Mark J. Zarrillo, Chairman
Linda K. Hamlin, Clerk
Robert Cook
Steven A. Heikin
Steven R. Kanis
Sergio Modigliani
Jonathan Simpson

February 6, 2014

Re: Comprehensive Permit proposal at Hancock Village

Dear Chairman Geller:

The Planning Board would like to thank you for this opportunity to comment on the Comprehensive Permit proposal by Chestnut Hill Realty for 192 additional units at Hancock Village. The Board is hopeful that during the review process the applicant will make revisions to the site and architectural design, and at that time, the Planning Board would like to submit further comments.

The Planning Board does not support the proposal as submitted and, in its opinion, believes that it would be possible to have a much better lay-out and design of the buildings and still achieve the same number of units. Additionally, the natural topography of the site, characterized by slow rolling hillocks, natural outcroppings and a large swath of open green space with many mature trees, has not been respected.

The proposed plan causes significant changes to the property's topography. The siting of the smaller buildings makes it necessary to alter the natural grades by 6' and more, resulting in hundreds of yards of retaining walls. The parking lots require extensive cut and fill operations to allow vehicle movements and drainage, and the higher apartment building obliterates the signature stone outcropping, both removing major portions rendering it invisible and altering its natural contour where left exposed.

Additionally, the developer has located the buildings in the site's most environmentally sensitive areas. The townhouse-style buildings and garages have been placed on the green swath of land that was originally intended, and is still serving, as a buffer zone between the existing garden style development and the abutting single-family homes. Not only will this beautiful green open space be eliminated, but the many large specimen trees in it will have to be cut down for the new buildings. Similarly, the apartment building has not been appropriately located and will be on a pudding stone outcropping and wooded area on the highest point of the property. The underground parking will necessitate blasting out much of the ledge under the apartment building, which will be expensive, and this money could be better spent elsewhere on the site.

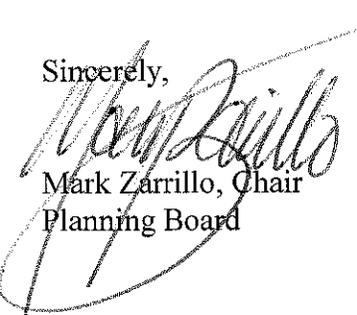
Furthermore, the orientation of several of the townhouse-style buildings is awkward. As a specific example, the A, B, D cluster at Asheville Road creates shading of the A and B buildings by the D building, and the ground plane spaces do not relate well to these buildings. The type B building, adjacent to the Baker School, is turned sideways as if responding to a street; in fact, it faces a service alley and parking for the Baker School out front and its own parking lot to the rear.

The Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development design guidelines for 40B projects recommend preserving the natural features of a property, and this project has not achieved this in any way. In fact, the proposed project will negatively impact not only the renters who live on the property, but also the owners of the abutting single-family homes, by eliminating valuable green space and many mature trees, and significantly changing the grades.

The Planning Board has supported many affordable housing projects in the Town, including the St. Aidan's redevelopment, Olmsted Hill, and a BHA project on Dummer Street, but it cannot support this proposal as designed. There is nothing keeping the applicant from altering the project to utilize existing space within the existing Hancock Village development, in particular with respect to the apartment building. The Planning Board is not convinced by the applicant's assertion that revisiting all aspects of the project, in particular the siting of the buildings, would present insurmountable legal or technical issues. Moreover, a revamped layout that emphasizes the use of space on the southwest side of the property could lead to a more financially viable project, because the applicant would not have to utilize such extreme measures to blast out the underground parking structure for the apartment building.

If the applicant were willing, the Planning Board believes that a project benefitting both the town and the developer is achievable. The Planning Board has worked with many developers on design changes, and developers often state that the end project is a better one due to the collaborative process. The Planning Board hopes that the applicant will consider this and work with the Planning Board to rethink the building placement, land use, circulation, open space and amenities.

Sincerely,



Mark Zarrillo, Chair
Planning Board

Cc: Alison Steinfeld, Director of Planning and Community Development
Daniel Bennett, Building Commissioner
Mel Kleckner, Town Administrator