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TOWN OF ARLINGTON
MASSACHUSETTS 02476-4908

RE: Application for a comprehensive permit for "Thorndike Place"

Dear Members of the Zoning Board of Appeals:

As the Zoning Board of Appeals ("ZBA") continues its work in considering the "Thorndike Place" comprehensive permit application, we write to supplement our previous comments submitted to you in light of three developments: 1) Arlington Land Realty's (hereinafter "The Applicant") most recent revised proposals for a reconfigured project that is slightly smaller than its initial proposal; 2) information provided to this Board by the Arlington Land Trust; and 3) the observations and concerns of members of this Board who have been following the proceedings. In short, while the Applicant's revised proposals address some discrete concerns and presents a modest reduction in the overall scale of the project, this Board does not believe these measures go nearly far enough toward relieving the many fundamental concerns we hold about this development given obvious constraints of the site and its impact on the surrounding neighborhood. As such, we continue to urge the ZBA to continue to scrutinize this application with all available tools and to consider all conditions and qualifications under which any development of this parcel would be truly feasible within the bounds of the law.

Foremost, we note that the Applicant has twice updated its architectural and site plans, reducing the overall number of proposed units to 172 rental units, chiefly by eliminating their previously proposed twelve (12) Townhouse ownership units. To our understanding, the Applicant has also modestly reduced the overall size of the proposed apartment building and moved most of its parking spaces underground in order to re-site the building further away from the delineated wetlands. While this revised plan reduces the scope of the proposed project, the overall project remains far too large for this Board's comfort, principally due to continued concerns about the impacts of a 172-unit building with parking in a wetlands-sensitive neighborhood prone to flooding before adding the significant development of what is now open space.

It bears noting that the piece removed from earlier proposals – 12 townhouses – removes the only aspect of the project consistent with the character of the neighborhood, and removes a pathway to affordable ownership in Arlington, as opposed to affordable rental units. This change also raises serious doubt whether the project as currently revised would have received approval

from MassHousing if it was the subject of the initial project eligibility submission given the lack of any continuity with the neighborhood and the massing that is now proposed on Dorothy Road.

In its project eligibility letter dated December 4, 2015, MassHousing cited the presence of the townhouses extensively in support of its finding that the then proposed project design was “generally appropriate for the Site.”¹ Without the townhouses, no justification exists for any finding of compatibility with the surrounding neighborhood. Moreover, the proposed relocation of the apartment building with direct frontage on Dorothy Road only magnifies incompatibility.² Accordingly, the Select Board urges the ZBA to consider incorporating in its decision any revisions the Applicant made to the proposed project since initial submission that conflict with the project eligibility approval findings.

With respect to traffic, this Board recalls that in the project eligibility phase, the Applicants represented both to the Select Board and MassHousing, that their plans included off-ramp access on Route 2. However, at this juncture, it is clear that such a proposal is not now (and perhaps never was) feasible and remains absent from the application before you. Instead, nothing has been done to address the fact that every car accessing Thorndike Place will navigate two narrow residential streets – Littlejohn Street and Dorothy Road (the locus approximately 42 total two-family and single-family homes) in order to access Lake Street, one of Arlington’s busiest streets during commuting times. While the Applicant has stressed the proximity to Alewife as a means of reducing the additional vehicular traffic on these streets, the means by which such direct access will be made available without requiring the Town to accept and maintain undevelopable portions of the so-called Mugar woods remains unclear.³ As proposed at this juncture, common sense dictates that the increased level of traffic and the uncertainties over how residents of the proposed project will access to public transport persist as serious health and safety concerns for your deliberations.

With respect to this Board’s deep and persistent concerns about the impact of this project on the wetlands and therefore flooding conditions in East Arlington, we are encouraged by your refusal to waive many of the Wetlands Bylaw requirements, including flood water storage requirements. However, we remain highly skeptical of the Applicant’s claims that development will not negatively impact surrounding homes and natural resources. Significantly, we recall that the Applicants had previously claimed that remediation of a berm and other conditions in the wetlands would significantly improve conditions for both the project site and the neighborhood

¹ For example, at Page 8 of the Eligibility Letter, MassHousing found that “Buildings have been sited with the goal of minimizing impacts on the surrounding streetscape, with the townhouses located along Dorothy Road, closest to the Site entrance, and the larger building set back to minimize its observable bulk.” That is no longer the case following the recent revisions.

² We note that MassHousing denied a request for project eligibility in 2017 for a similarly sized project to Thorndike Place on grounds that included the lack of continuity and compatibility with the surrounding neighborhood. (See attached Medfield Meadows denial letter dated January 31, 2017).

³ The Applicant has suggested that it is gifting property to the Town in the interests of conservation efforts, but as this Board has noted to the Applicants, such parcels are in very poor condition for pedestrian access or any of other purpose and, due to the presence of hazardous materials, in need of significant remediation, which would be absolutely necessary before the Town could entertain acceptance of such land in this Board’s view.

generally, but no mention of these remedial measures has been made within their revised proposal.

Furthermore, while it is our understanding that the ZBA cannot apply standards or regulations not in place at the time of the application's filing in 2016, the concerns expressed by the Arlington Land Trust, the Conservation Commission, and members of the public, particularly with respect to expected worsening flooding conditions due to climate change are shared by this Board.⁴ We therefore, continue to hope that you will strenuously apply all legally permitted tools to examine this revised proposal's impacts on the wetlands, habitats therein, and the surrounding area. We also believe that a site visit for members of your Board would be valuable to your examination and framing the issues presented by the stie.

Finally, the Select Board must continue to stress its support for enhancing access to affordable housing. Indeed, this Board recently provided a letter of support to MassHousing for a similarly-scaled c. 40B project located off of Massachusetts Avenue. However, in contrast with the revised proposal before you, the site locus of that project *decreases* the amount of impervious surface in the area, creates more green space, has ready access to Massachusetts Avenue (and public transportation), and incorporates, rather than circumvents, many of the Town's long-term planning documents.

As with our previous comments to the ZBA, we re-affirm our respect for the authority of the ZBA, its processes, and your service in light of the difficult tasks before you. As such we submit these additional comments as an expression of our collective opinion in the interests of informing your questions, contemplation of conditions, and development of the best decision possible. We trust that you will continue to avail yourselves of all the resources needed to support your process and your eventual decision, and continue to direct Town officials, through the Town Manager, to provide whatever you need in furtherance of same as appropriate.

In conclusion, we respectfully register our continued concern that the Applicant's original, revised, and further revised submissions fail to reassure this Board that a project of this scope on such a problematic site is feasible or appropriate for Arlington. We ask you continue your efforts to enforce all applicable rules and regulations to ensure that the laudable goal of increasing access to affordable housing is consistent with the health and safety needs of the Town.

Thank you for your consideration of the above comments and your continued service to the Town.



John V. Hurd, Select Board Chair

⁴ In addition to concerns over flooding of the LittleJohn and Dorothy neighborhood, the scale and locus of this proposal also raises regional environmental and traffic concerns about flooding on Rt. 2.



Massachusetts Housing Finance Agency
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January 31, 2017

VIA CERTIFIED MAIL

Medfield Meadows LLC
18 Forest Street
Dover, MA 02052
Attention: John Kelly, Principal

RE: Medfield Meadows
Medfield, MA (MH# 873)
Project Eligibility (Site Approval) Application

Dear Mr. Kelly:

This letter is in response to your application for a determination of Project Eligibility (“Site Approval”) pursuant to Massachusetts General Laws Chapter 40B (“Chapter 40B”), 760 CMR 56.00 and the Comprehensive Permit Guidelines issued by the Department of Housing and Community Development (“DHCD”) (the “Guidelines” and, collectively, the “Comprehensive Permit Rules”), under the following program (the “Program”):

- New England Fund (“NEF”) Program of the Federal Home Loan Bank of Boston.

The original application proposed to build two hundred (200) units of rental housing in two (2) buildings on individual parcels separated by North Meadow Road (Route 27) (the “Project”) at 39-41 Dale Street and 49 Dale Street (the “Site”) in Medfield, Massachusetts (the “Municipality”). Subsequent to an initial review of the Site and the proposed plans and comments from the Municipality regarding the site plan, MassHousing requested that the applicant reconsider the Project and its compatibility with adjacent uses and compliance with 760 CMR 56.04(4)(c), the applicable regulations that govern the design elements of a 40B proposal.

On January 5, 2017 the Applicant submitted a revised proposal to MassHousing that purported to respond to concerns regarding the original site plan, reduced the proposed height of the buildings and the number of units from two hundred (200) to one hundred eighty two (182) rental apartments units in three separate three and four-story buildings on a total of 6.24 acres of land, which only reduced the density from 32 units per acre to 29.17 units per acre on the Site.

MassHousing staff has performed an on-site inspection of the Site, which local boards and officials were invited to attend, then revised the Site in connection with the revised application, and has reviewed the pertinent information from both the original and the revised applications for the Project submitted by the Applicant, and comments submitted by the Municipality and others in accordance with the Comprehensive Permit Rules.

As a result of MassHousing's evaluation of the information that was presented, and the Agency's evaluation of the Site, MassHousing is unable to approve your application for a determination of Project Eligibility. While it is expected that a Project proposal submitted in accordance with the zoning and regulatory relief available under Chapter 40B will differ from the surrounding context in many fundamental ways, the Subsidizing Agency must also address matters regarding the Project's relationship to existing development patterns in the surrounding area. This Site appears to be generally appropriate for residential development and while municipal actions to date have not yet resulted in the production of housing required, "to meet the municipality's need for affordable housing as measured by the Statutory Minima"; nevertheless MassHousing has determined that the conceptual project design for the proposed development is not appropriate for this Site.

The reasons for MassHousing's denial of your applications are as follows:

MassHousing considers the design of the building and the proposed site layout to be inconsistent with the design requirements outlined in 760 CMR 56.04(4)(c) and the related Guidelines dated May, 2013. Specifically:

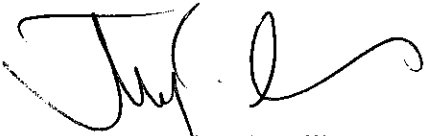
- The proposed apartment structure is inconsistent with nearby existing residential building typology. This is particularly true for the rear portion of the north parcel and the proposed building's relationship to the existing neighborhoods closest to the Site along Joseph Pace Road, John Crowder Road and Dale Street. The applicant's revised site plans do not adequately mitigate the impact of the proposed building's connection to the existing neighborhood from the initial proposal; the Project still fails to make a reasonable transition to this well established residential neighborhood.
- The proposed three to four-story apartment structures are not compatible with nearby structures in terms of height, mass and scale. Building elevations indicate that the proposed buildings (the three proposed buildings range in height from 60' to 77.5' tall depending on the topography of the Site) are at least triple the height of most surrounding 1-2 story structures. The building massing in the original submission was entirely inappropriate for both the Site and its relationship to the adjacent residential neighborhood. While the revised site plan, particularly that of the north parcel, has addressed some of the most glaring impacts to its closest abutters, the overall perception of the massing has not been adequately reduced to make the findings required under the regulations. The proposed massing on the south parcel is not significantly improved by the revised site plans and the presence of wetlands on that portion of the overall development Site is a constraint to a more logical relationship to the Grove Street neighborhood.

- Appropriate density of residential development depends on a number of different factors, and must be reviewed on a case by case basis. In this case, however, it appears that the Project is simply too dense for the lot on which it is located; nearly the entire Site is occupied by the proposed building program and the limited areas for open space are not sufficient to mitigate the project's effective density. While there are no maximum density thresholds, it is advisable to develop at a density that takes some cues from the existing community context. The nearest rental development is the Parc at Medfield which has a considerably lower density of approximately 10 units/acre as compared to the almost 30 units/acre proposed for this Project.
- The site plan does not provide a satisfactory design treatment of the edge between the Site and the surrounding streetscape and does little to enhance the visual quality of the streetscape. The northern and southern building facades face Route 27, which is the principal access to downtown Medfield, and create a poor visual relationship to this adjacent roadway.

In MassHousing's review of any application for Site Approval under Chapter 40B, the Agency does not consider any one factor in isolation. Rather, the site as a whole is considered as well as whether the development proposal is consistent with applicable Regulations and Guidelines. After a thorough review of your application, MassHousing does not find that your proposal is able to meet all of the required findings. Therefore, your application is denied.

If you have any questions concerning this matter, please contact Greg Watson, Manager of Comprehensive Permit Programs, at 617-854-1880.

Sincerely,



Timothy C. Sullivan
Executive Director

cc: Chrystal Kornegay, Undersecretary, Department of Housing and Community Development
The Honorable James Timilty
The Honorable Denise C. Garlick
The Honorable Shawn Dooley ✓
Mark L. Fisher, Chairman, Medfield Board of Selectmen
Michael J. Sullivan, Medfield Town Administrator
Sarah Raposa, Medfield Town Planner