

July 10, 2017

Dear Members of the Zoning Board of Appeals,

Town Meeting members from Precincts 2 & 8 recently had a productive meeting with Sam Slater, who has indicated that he wants to build a building that we can support and that fits with the neighborhood. He has told the abutters he would like to submit new architectural plans at the next ZBA hearing, but in response to the ZBA process outlined by Maria Morelli in her June 8 e-mail, he will wait for instructions from the ZBA before making any revisions. We are perplexed by the Town's desire to conduct Town staff, boards and commissions, and peer review on a project the applicant has said he does not like or want to build. We feel it would be more efficient to allow the applicant to submit his revised plans prior to such extensive review. However, if the Town must continue to evaluate the original plans, we'd like to share with you our thoughts on that proposal in hopes that you will incorporate them into your charges to the developer.

We would like to see a front setback that is closer to the those of the building's abutters, which are consistently setback 20 ft. or more from the street, so as not to disrupt the surrounding streetscape. We are concerned about losing so many trees on and around the project. Revised setbacks on all sides will minimize the number of trees, many of them mature and healthy, that will need to be removed. These trees will provide privacy and screening to both abutters and the project's residents. Many of these trees are visible from blocks away and their loss will leave a stark gap in the neighborhood's landscape. Increased setbacks would also limit mortal damage to roots of the abutters' trees, many of which are also visible well beyond the site. Moving the garage entrance from its current location would prevent the loss of the Town's beautiful mature oak tree in the planting strip on Babcock St.

We would like to see a building mass (FAR) and overall height that is much closer to the neighboring properties so the building will better blend into the neighborhood. The large multi-family building to the South of the proposed project, 120 Babcock St. has an FAR of 1.86. We believe a project with an FAR of 1.8 would be a much better fit for this site. Such a reduction in FAR would mean a reduction of two floors at a minimum. Limited height and overall size will also reduce the shadows that the building will cast on homes in the neighborhood, sidewalks and the public park across Babcock St. Architectural changes to the currently block-shaped building to reduce the visual impact of the building's large mass would be welcome.

The project's two curb cuts, and the current loading zone, which requires vehicles to back out into a busy street and which is close to the two intersections of Freeman & Babcock Streets, would be dangerous to pedestrians, bicyclists and drivers. We hope that the garage entrance could be moved to the sides or rear of the building to leave a more welcoming front facade facing the street and that the loading zone will be closely examined regarding safety concerns.

We understand that changes to some of these items may preclude mitigation of some other concerns, but we wanted to share all of them with you in hopes that many of them can be addressed. We look forward to following the remainder of the ZBA process and hope that we can welcome a smaller, better-designed building to our neighborhood.

Sincerely,

Lauren Bernard TMM8
Abigail Cox TMM8
Gina Crandell TMM8
John Harris TMM8
Anita Johnson TMM8
Hadassah Margolis TMM8
Bob Miller TMM8
Linda Olson Pehlke TMM2
Lisa Sears TMM8
John Shreffler TMM2
Diana Spiegel TMM2
Stanley Spiegel TMM2
Maura Toomey TMM8
Don Weitzman TMM8

Cc: Planning Board