



# TOWN OF BROOKLINE

## Massachusetts

### PLANNING BOARD

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October 2, 2014

Mr. Jesse Geller, Chairman  
Zoning Board of Appeals

Re: Residences of South Brookline Comprehensive Permit Application

Dear Chairman Geller and Board Members:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide further comment on the revised plan submitted by Chestnut Hill Realty for the expansion of Hancock Village under Chapter 40B. The Board has reviewed the plan and, while we acknowledge that improvements have been made since our last review, we remain acutely concerned about the layout and design of the proposed buildings and the excessive number of parking spaces.

The Planning Board reiterates its position conveyed to you on February 6, 2014, that the buildings have been located in the site's most environmentally sensitive areas. This is not good development. It destroys green space, necessitates the blasting and removal of puddingstone, undermines the historic Garden Village model, and introduces a massive building that irrevocably interferes with views from the abutting neighborhood.

Most egregious is the location of the massive apartment building. The proposed use is incongruous with the existing context of multi-family townhouses and single-family homes. At 500 feet long on its South façade and with shallow setbacks inadequately proportioned to its overwhelming massing, the building is out of scale with the surrounding two-story housing. The degree of puddingstone excavation required at one of the highest elevations of the site underscores how inappropriate this location is for the development.

Siting the apartment building on another location on the Hancock Village property, with direct access to primary roadways, or creating two or more moderate scale buildings rather than one massive one, would produce a better plan. One such alternative location, in the southwest corner of the site in Brookline, with better vehicular access, could certainly accommodate a multifamily building of reasonable size.

However, we acknowledge the constraints imposed by Chapter 40B and, within that context, are providing the following comments:

- A. The Applicant should submit the following materials to the ZBA before the next hearing on October 20, 2014:
  1. Provide site sections for this iteration of the plan that show the degree of excavation and re-grading at the apartment building; show sections at the widest depth of each of the building's three segments and

in relation to existing Hancock Village housing. Provide site sections at the East elevation in relation to Asheville Road-Russett Road properties.

2. Provide the relative size of tree calipers on the tree survey on the landscape plans to indicate how many existing mature trees will be preserved.
- B. Prior to the issuance of a building permit, the following conditions are recommended:
1. Considering the proximity of the site to abutters and the amount of blasting expected, the Town should consult with a blasting expert, at the expense of the Applicant, to review the plans when they are final to minimize damage to abutting properties and vulnerable gas lines.
  2. Provide more developed plans that show how the exhaust system for the underground garage will work.
  3. Manage parking assignments in the apartment building's underground garage to reduce the amount of traffic that would be generated by drivers exiting and re-entering the garage to find parking. At a ratio of below 1.0, the number of parking spaces serving the mid-rise building is inadequate. Combined with the cumbersome design of the garage access—vehicles on the lower garage level cannot access the upper level without exiting at the South façade and re-entering the garage at the East façade—unnecessary traffic will be generated on the Asheville access way without assigned parking for occupants.
  4. Access to the VFW Parkway will significantly reduce the traffic impact on the Asheville-Russett Road neighborhood. The proponent should apply to the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation for a curb cut on the Parkway within a timely manner agreed upon with the Town of Brookline. If this access is created, the adjacent new townhouse building should be rotated 90 degrees, with the turnaround eliminated. This will allow additional parking along the extended driveway, but the overall number of spaces should be reduced and interspersed with landscaping as noted in item 5 below.
  5. Although the overall parking ratio for the project is 2.0 spaces per unit, the parking ratios for all the surface-lots in the greenbelt are excessive. To increase open space, reduce parking in the greenbelt so that the number of parking spaces is in proportion to the housing units these lots serve, and intersperse the remaining parking spaces with additional landscaping, particularly in places where additional existing trees can be preserved. The excess parking proposed for the greenbelt area should not be used to provide additional parking for existing units.
  6. Reduce the massing of the apartment building to mitigate some of the overwhelming impact on the surrounding community:
    - a. Reduce the footprint of the 500-foot long building by one-fourth to substantially increase the setback from the East elevation to the Asheville-Russett Road abutters.
    - b. Eliminate several entire floors, or tier the building starting at the third floor to vary the monotonous roofline, which currently emphasizes the monolithic quality and horizontal massing of the mid-rise structure.
    - c. Examine alternative, space-saving construction methods, such as steel construction, that could possibly reduce the height of the building.

7. No further increase in the footprint, height, and massing of the infill buildings proposed for the greenbelt that runs along Beverly and Russett Road property lines; nor an increase in the number of units (44), and the number of structures (9) currently proposed for the greenbelt.
8. A restriction on further development in the greenbelt.

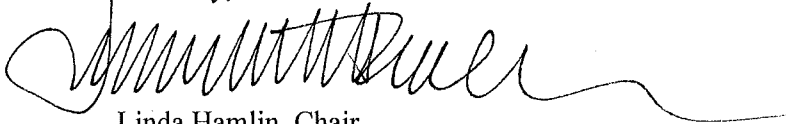
As an alternative, and as noted above, developing two (or more) moderate size apartment buildings rather than one massive one might allow the total number of housing units created to remain roughly the same, significantly reduce neighborhood impacts, distribute vehicular access impacts and parking demand, and avoid the premium cost of 5-story fireproofed wood frame or steel construction.

We strongly and emphatically recommend that the Board of Appeals address the above issues, which are the highest priority.

The Planning Board is prepared to provide additional and more detailed advice if so requested in order to facilitate your work and improve the project.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Linda Hamlin", with a long, sweeping underline that extends to the right.

Linda Hamlin, Chair  
Planning Board

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