



Town of Winchester

Town Manager's Office
71 Mt. Vernon Street
Winchester, MA 01890
Phone: 781-721-7133
Fax: 781-756-0505
townmanager@winchester.us

Board of Selectmen Meeting
Monday, January 25, 2016

BUSINESS

Docket Item **G-3**: 416 Cambridge Street – Winchester North 40B Proposal

Supporting Documents:

- Housing Partnership Board Comments re: project

Action Required:

Mawn, Patti

From: John H. Suhrbier <jnsuhr@verizon.net>
Sent: Saturday, January 16, 2016 1:37 PM
To: Grenzeback Lance; Howard, Richard
Cc: Mawn, Patti
Subject: 416 Cambridge Street Proposed Housing
Attachments: ZBA_ WHPB 1292015 Speaker Notes.pdf; ATT00002.htm

For consideration in the Board of Selectmen's January 25 discussion of the 416 Cambridge Street housing proposal, attached are the remarks i presented on behalf of the Housing Partnership Board at the December 9 hearing on this proposal conducted by the Zoning Board of Appeals.

I would be pleased to answer any questions you may have either before the scheduled January 25 discussion or as part of the meeting itself.

WHPB Comments for ZBA's 416 Cambridge Street Hearing

John Suhrbier - Chair, Winchester Housing Partnership Board (WHPB)

Introduction of myself and the WHPB - Town Meeting created; Advisory; Membership composition

Members are familiar with the provisions and underlying objectives of the Chapter 40B legislation, and specifically how 40B procedures differ from those that otherwise would apply.

Our overall conclusion is that the need for the mix of housing being proposed outweighs any of the potential problems that have been identified to date, many of which are pre-existing.

Members of the WHPB met with the developer last April, attended the presentations made to the Board of Selectmen, have met with neighbors, have attended this series of hearings conducted by the ZBA, and have studied the information submitted in association with this project. The written comments submitted both to this Board and to MassHousing reflect our findings.

In my remarks this evening, I will briefly comment on five characteristics of the proposed housing, and conclude with a comment on the relevance of the June 2015 U.S. Supreme Court's "Disparate Impacts" ruling.

1. The proposed project meets important Winchester housing needs, especially in terms of providing rental rather than home ownership. At a time when we are experiencing an increase in demand for rental housing, including housing that would serve down sizing seniors, Bureau of the Census data indicate that Winchester's rental housing has declined by 21% in recent years, in large part as a result of the conversion of rental housing to condominium units. It is important that the town replenish the supply of rental housing.

This project is consistent with Winchester housing policy in that it provides a mix of studios and 1, 2, and 3 BR units with five of the units handicapped accessible, and is priced to serve households over a range of incomes.

One quarter of the units will be rented by households having an annual income that corresponds to 80% of the Boston area median, or roughly \$65,000 for a family of three, with a preference given to people either living or working in Winchester. These are moderate income households and may include seniors living on a limited income, young adults, a single mother or woman, town employees, or an auto mechanic working in a local garage.

The suggestion we would make, though, is that the period of housing affordability be in perpetuity rather than just the initial 30 years specified in the Application. Winchester's 1.9% affordability is roughly half that of surrounding and similar communities, and so low that this should not be what is referred to as an expiring use project.

2. One of the first things we did when we learned of this proposal was to improve our familiarity with the site, the residential areas further up Wainwright Road, and to closely examine the Cambridge Street corridor adjoining this site.
Our conclusion is the same as MassHousing's, the location is appropriate for the development as proposed. The location is served by the MBTA's 350 bus line and has convenient access to a variety of services.

While the area located further uphill on Wainwright Road is single family residential, this portion of the Cambridge Street corridor really has become primarily a combination of commercial and multi-family housing. In addition to the Mahoney's and Bonnell Ford complexes, this includes the Horn Pond Shopping Plaza, two large gas stations and a third that recently has been converted to a vehicle repair center, the Elks Club, an office building, and four larger multi-unit housing developments varying in size from 107 to 132 units. The proposed development is very consistent with this existing corridor.

3. One of the questions that has been raised is whether the height of the proposed development can be lowered. We note that there are four other buildings along the Cambridge Street corridor that vary in height from four to seven stories, three of which are residential. Consequently, we feel the proposed height is acceptable.
4. Questions also have been raised concerning the proposed density of this development. We feel the Floor Area Ratio, or FAR, of 0.75 as proposed is very reasonable.

With respect to a density expressed in terms of the number of units per acre, along with most planners and architects we don't particularly like this measure since it does not take into consideration the actual size of the building. But still using this measure, we examined 16 other multi-family housing developments existing in Winchester and found the proposed 33.4 housing units per acre to be in the mid-range of these other existing developments, with six buildings having units per acre density figures ranging from 39 to 120.

5. Regarding the site layout and the architectural design, the building is designed so as to fit onto the land and minimize visual impacts from neighboring locations. The majority of the parking is provided within the structure rather than in visible and impervious surface lots outside the building. Members of the WHPB are very impressed by the quality of the design.

I want to conclude by referencing the June 25 "Disparate Impact" Fair Housing Act decision by the U.S. Supreme Court for the case between the Texas Department of Housing and Community Affairs and The Inclusive Communities Project; and also the July *Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing* rule issued by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD).

Both of these are being interpreted as a "Both/And" in that they require communities to provide "access to opportunity", which is more than simply not directly discriminating.

The applicability to Winchester and other suburban communities is that town zoning and decisions that do not enable the construction of multi-family housing is viewed as exclusionary with respect to reducing existing disparities in meeting housing needs and providing increased access to opportunity.

December 9, 2015

This proposal for 416 Cambridge Street helps Winchester achieve the housing objectives defined by the Supreme Court and HUD in that it is a multi-family rental development that will be marketed over a range of incomes and five handicapped accessible units will be included.

Thank you. I look forward to a continuation of this discussion as part of the next hearing, and would be pleased to answer any questions the Board may have.