

11/20/2013

Kristen Armano
9 Landers Rd
Stoneham, MA 02180

Members of the Board
Board of Selectmen
35 Central Street
Stoneham, MA 02180

Subject: The Commons at Weiss Farm; MassHousing Project #SA-13-006

Dear Members of the Board:

As a resident of Stoneham, I am very concerned about the application for Site Approval submitted by Weiss Farm, LLC currently under review at MassHousing. The proposed construction of 264 apartments and 456 parking spaces at the proposed location at 170 Franklin Street is inappropriate. I urge you to ask MassHousing to reject the application.

Summary of Problems

The problems include inconsistency with local housing needs, traffic on busy Franklin Street and safety of children, disregard for local zoning laws, construction not in keeping with surrounding residential neighborhoods, destruction of wetlands, possible water drainage and health issues, possible water and sewage problems and negative environmental impact.

Reasons for Project Rejection

1. Additional Housing is Not Needed in Stoneham

Construction of 264 apartments on Franklin Street is inconsistent with local housing needs based on the latest decennial U. S. Census for Stoneham and surrounding communities. For 2010, Stoneham had 9,458 rented and owned housing units of which 8,994 were occupied and 464 were vacant, a rental vacancy rate of 7.4% and a homeowner vacancy rate of .9%. Taking a broader view, Stoneham and seven bordering cities and towns (Malden, Medford, Melrose, Reading, Wakefield, Winchester, and Woburn) collectively had 114,828 rented and owned housing units of which 109,158 were occupied and 5,670 were vacant, a rental vacancy rate of 6.1% and a homeowner vacancy rate of 1%. This data shows that construction of 264 additional apartments in Stoneham is obviously not necessary. (Source: American Factfinder, U. S. Department of Commerce, U. S. Census Bureau).

Stoneham currently has a program that addresses the housing needs of low income people. Stoneham Housing Authority oversees 285 units of low income housing (of which 15 units were vacant due to remodeling as of 9/9/2013.) Tenants pay not more than 30% of their income toward the rent. (Source: Sharon Wilkins, Executive Director of Stoneham Housing Authority at board meeting held on 9/9/2013.)

2. Traffic on Busy Franklin Street and Safety of School Children

Construction of 264 apartments and 456 parking spaces will bring hundreds of additional automobiles entering and exiting Franklin Street on a daily basis. Given that Stoneham has no public transportation on Franklin Street, it is reasonable to expect that prospective tenants will travel by automobile.

There is no way that Franklin Street can handle additional traffic of any kind. Franklin Street is already burdened with excessive traffic because of commuters, schools, existing apartments and condominiums and places of business. The backup on Franklin Street is especially bad on school days.

Besides several places of business, there are single family homes, apartments and condominium buildings on Franklin Street including Brookmeadow and Villa Grande. An assisted living complex with 88 apartments is currently under construction on Franklin Street.

Commuters from Melrose and Stoneham regularly use Franklin Street because it provides an access way to three major highways, Routes 1, 93, 95.

Parents use Franklin Street to drive their kids to schools in Stoneham. There are 12 schools in Stoneham, six public and six private, accounting for a student population of 3,305. Nine of the 12 schools are within a half mile of Franklin Street including Stoneham High School, Colonial Park Elementary School, South Elementary School and Greater Boston Academy. Three of the 12 schools are right on Franklin Street including the high school which has a student population of 675. Two other schools on Franklin Street are private for preschool aged children.

The school committee in Stoneham recently used traffic data to determine that the Middle School could not be constructed on existing high school property because it would severely impact day to day traffic and safety on Franklin Street. How can the developer rationalize construction of a huge apartment project on Franklin Street when the Middle School could not be constructed there?

Given the high concentration of schools in the already busy Franklin Street area, the addition of 264 apartments and hundreds of automobiles on Franklin Street will create a serious safety issue for children. Additional police, traffic lights and traffic calming devices are not likely to make Franklin Street any safer for children.

Considering the increased traffic, congestion and safety concerns, to consider adding an apartment project anywhere on Franklin Street is ridiculous and obviously unacceptable.

3. Disregard for Local Zoning Law

Developer's plans for apartment buildings do not conform with local zoning laws or with surrounding residential neighborhoods. Zoning law requires lot area per dwelling unit of 10,000 square feet but plans are for only 4,236 square feet per dwelling unit. Zoning requires building height limit of 30 feet but plans are for 66 foot buildings, more than double the allowable height. The permitted use of the land is for single family homes but plans are for an apartment building. Zoning requires parking space for 2.1 cars per dwelling unit but plans are for 1.7 cars per dwelling unit. Maximum number of signs allowed are one but plans are for six monument signs and five directional. Maximum size of signs are one square foot but plans are for 650 square foot signs.

It is clear that the developer has no intention of conforming with Town zoning laws or construction that is in keeping with surrounding residential neighborhoods.

4. Encroachment on Wetlands

Much of the 25.7 acres of land on Weiss Farm is wetlands. There is a large wetland area on the west and north sides of the property and on the east side adjacent to Franklin Street. Wetlands need to be protected. The project will encroach upon a significant amount of the remaining wetlands in Stoneham.

5. Water Drainage and Potential Health Hazards

Accumulation of water on the property at Weiss Farm and flooding of the surrounding area has been a significant problem in the past for homes in both Stoneham and Melrose. It is likely that flooding will only get worse as land which was pervious will become impervious after the new construction. Homes in adjacent areas have received water in the past and this massive project can only make water runoff conditions worse even creating a health hazard from polluted water.

6. Water and Sewer Problems

In the project plans, it is reported that there is a 12 inch ductile iron water line in Franklin Street adjacent to the project site. A hydrant flow test reportedly was conducted on July 23, 2013, by the Stoneham Water Department. The test indicated a static pressure of 65 psi, a residual pressure of 62 psi and a flow of 865 gallons per day. How do we know that this is adequate pressure for the proposed development? If it is not adequate, who has to pay for the necessary modifications?

In the project plans, it is reported that there is a 10-inch sewer line in Franklin Street adjacent to the westerly portion of this site. The line flows in a westerly direction. It is anticipated that the proposed project will connect to this 10-inch line. How do we know that the existing 10-inch line will be adequate for this massive apartment project? Can the existing Town sewage disposal system handle this Project? Who would pay for the necessary modifications to get a failed sewage disposal system to function properly?

7. Negative Environmental Impact

Stoneham is unique because the Middlesex Fells Reservation comprises one third of the 6.6 square miles of land area in Stoneham. The Fells is enjoyed by Stoneham residents as well as residents from communities in the surrounding area. The Fells is readily accessible by bus lines, rapid transit and commuter rail and by automobile from Routes 28, I-93 and I-95. Construction of 264 apartments and 456 parking spaces on Franklin Street leading to an increase in traffic, congestion and pollution caused by hundreds of additional automobiles will further erode what remains of the unique bucolic environment of the Middlesex Fells area. (Sources: FY 2012 Town Annual Report and website of Friends of the Fells at <http://www.fells.org>.)

Thank you for reading my letter. As you can see, I have a number of concerns. The overwhelming number of residents of Stoneham believe that this apartment project is inappropriate for the Town of Stoneham especially at the proposed location on Franklin Street. The application should be rejected.

Sincerely,

