

Donna Cutone
8 Rivers Lane
Stoneham, MA 02180

November 20, 2013

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 totally inappropriate. I urge Members of the Board of Selectmen to tell MassHousing to reject the application.

Summary of Problems

The problems include inconsistency with local housing needs, increased traffic and congestion, safety of school children and potential water drainage problems.

Reasons for Project Rejection

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.)

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. This will undoubtedly increase traffic and congestion on surrounding Stoneham roadways including Spring Street near where I live. Commuters use Spring Street to escape the traffic on Franklin Street.

There is no way that narrow 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.

Water Drainage Problems

Much of the 26 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.

Accumulation of water on the property at Weiss Farm and resultant flooding of the surrounding area has been a problem of significant concern in the past for both Stoneham and Melrose. Weiss Farm was fined by MassDEP on 12/14/2010 and was required to address accumulated storm water and maintain a condition that does not allow flooding of a pump access road or further degrade wetland resource areas. (Docket #2011-001, File #ACO-NE-6W002-STP).

It is likely that flooding will only get worse as land which was pervious will become impervious because of the new construction. The massive size of the proposed project could cause continuous flooding problems for homes in nearby neighborhoods from constant runoff. Homes in adjacent areas have received water in the past and this massive project can only make conditions worse.

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

Sincerely,

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