

RECEIVED

MAR 25 2024

STONEHAM  
ZONING APPEALS

To: Stoneham Zoning Board Members

March 23, 2024

You have heard our objections to the size and scope of the residences proposed. I hope you have listened to our concerns about protecting the Fells, our safety, our green space, our property and our quality of life. With all these things very much in our minds, we listened to the reviewers who spoke about traffic, project design in relationship to quality of life and engineering issues at the February meeting. From my perspective, there are some gaping holes in the analyses offered by these consultants.

With respect to the traffic survey – the comments made by the traffic consultant were concerning. The estimated increase in traffic of 150 cars per hour for people going to work during rush periods (given as 7 to 9 in the morning and 4 to 6 in the afternoon) seems light given the likelihood of 1.5 vehicles per household unit.

I was disturbed by the fact that there seemed to be no consideration given to the fact that many of the proposed units would consist of families with children who would either have to be driven to school or would have to be picked up by several school buses. If only one-half of the units had school age children, that would add an additional 189 car trips to school during the school period and a similar number at the end of the school day. These would likely be round trips which significantly increase (double) traffic in each direction by another 189 cars in each direction. In addition, because these trips would be centered around school starting times, the increase would be clustered around school times and not evenly distributed. Another consideration is the possibility that some of the students might travel to school by local school buses. There seems to have been no consideration to possible school bus traffic, school bus stops or the impact on traffic if school buses are involved. This additional traffic and its impact needs to be factored into the existing pattern especially since elementary, junior high and high school schedules differ and would cause additional elevated levels of traffic during those periods.

To better understand the traffic flow, I sat in the old Friendly's parking lot on Friday, March 22 and monitored the traffic during the evening rush hour. Even though I have traversed this intersection on multiple occasions on a daily basis for several years, what I observed and learned was illuminating. The light cycle at the corner of Woodland Road and Main Street (Route 28)

is just under a minute in each direction. The number of vehicles that pass through the light heading north varied substantially based upon the number of vehicles going straight (or taking a right turn) and the number of vehicles taking a left turn (with small vehicles allowing some vehicles to get around them and larger vehicles not allowing traffic to pass). On the few occasions when all vehicles were going straight or taking a right turn, the number going through the intersection exceeded 20 (usually in the 22-23 area). However, when vehicles were attempting to take a left turn (which occurred during most light cycles), the number of cars passing through the light was always below 20 (usually in the 17-18 area when one vehicle made the turn), with further decreases as the number of left-turning vehicles increased. When a bus or truck was involved (turning onto Woodland Road or from Woodland Road), the number of vehicles making it through the light was as low as 12 vehicles because of the size (length and width of the bus/truck).

During my observation period, the average number of vehicles per cycle was in the 17-18 area. This is very significant because while the consultant estimated 150 additional cars per hour in rush hour and minimized the impact of this number, the impact is dramatic. He estimated that 40% of the cars would head north and 60% would head south on Woodland Road. Using these numbers, approximately 60 additional cars per hour would head north and 90 additional cars per hour would be going south. Assuming that 17-18 vehicles pass through an intersection in a light cycle and that a light cycle is slightly less than 2 minutes (slightly under 1 in each direction), an additional 60 vehicles heading north will be the equivalence of over three light cycles per hour (or over 6 minutes in additional traffic delay per hour). I believe these numbers to be indisputable. With an additional 90 cars per hour going south, there would be even longer lines on Elm Street during rush hour. This is a substantial increase. To that, we now have to consider the additional number of vehicles (cars and buses) that would be added by student-required traffic, keeping in mind that all student-oriented traffic would turn right onto Woodland Road from our location where Stoneham schools are located (left takes you to Malden).

Next, we heard from Davis Square Architects. He introduced himself as a consultant hired to provide **quality of life** assessments regarding the project. After his positive review, I had the opportunity to discuss his review and asked several questions about his analysis. I first asked him about the plan to eliminate the green space in front of the Sterling Hill residences and

he agreed that this would be a “real” quality of life issue for those people living there and that he had not considered this elimination of green space in his evaluation.

I then asked him about the plan to locate the bus stop in front of the current Sterling Hill residences. The buses run from early in the morning until late at night and since the current hospital location is the terminal point for the “99” bus, the bus often spends a considerable amount of time parked with the engine running. This would result in a continual drone and constant fumes making the balconies less usable and enjoyable by current residents. He again said that this was a quality-of-life issue and that he had not considered this point.

Lastly, I asked him his thoughts about the likely number of dogs in the proposed project and how they would be accommodated. There are approximately 125 dogs in the Alta Clara’s 261 units for which they have created a dog park. They enforce proper dog ownership responsibility by DNA testing dogs and fining irresponsible owners. I asked him how he had evaluated the handling of pets since there is no current proposal to accommodate those pets and no pet park planned. His response was that he had not considered pets or handling of pets as part of his evaluation. He stated that his charter was to evaluate the project and the amenities that would be available as it related to new human residents of the project and how they would be impacted by items such as plantings, open space, etc.

Frankly, I am troubled by many aspects of this project and the town’s apparent reactions to it, not the least of which is the narrow focus which limits the view to the needs of the potential new occupants while ignoring the needs of the existing homeowners and abutters.

We then heard from the technical reviewer who provided a thorough and comprehensive review of the proposed project. The analysis was both broad and deep and amplified our concerns about the technical design and analytical shortfalls. As a degreed engineer, I was shocked by the number of deficiencies made evident during this presentation. We were dismayed to hear about undersized drainage pipes, eighteen-inch pipes leading into thirty-inch pipes, no designated trash or refuse areas, inconsistent hydrant allowances and more. This report did not inspire confidence in the developers of this project!

We engineers often get ridiculed for getting “lost in the weeds” but in reality, the devil is in the details and “failure to plan effectively is planning to fail.” In listening to her comments, it felt like the proposal (for the sake of expediency) included details for a similar project of a small scale without having been upsized for a project of this size or was just improperly planned. In either case, the deficiencies cause grave concern regarding the planning of this project.

This led me to consider any other gaping holes that might need to be addressed. Whenever a project of this type is proposed, there are usually renderings offered by the developer to show what the project could be – an optimistic view of an ideal situation that lacks sufficient detail to show the necessary unpleasanties that are required before project completion. The first major missing item that came to mind was the need for proper handling of trash and trash removal. This has been completely ignored in the current proposed plan. The Alta Clara residences, that were a prior Gutierrez project, have a sizeable trash area with a trash compactor (see Picture 1). That area has since been deemed insufficient by both size and location and an additional trash area (see Picture 2) has now been set aside at the other end of the complex. This ignoring of the trash issue is very troubling for a number of reasons. First, there appears to be an intentional attempt to minimize the actual amount of space needed to support a project of this size. But of major concern to me as a resident of Sterling Hill is that this project as proposed has been planned to put this project in the best possible position while sacrificing the needs of other stakeholders. A real concern for Sterling Hill residents and possibly Alta Clara residents as well is that the trash holding areas would be placed at a location where it would be a disadvantage to current residences. While common sense would suggest that trash would be best located at the former power station at the far end of the Medical Arts building, close to Woodland Road where pickup and removal would be easiest, recent history regarding the planned project causes concern that it would be placed in an area that would be deleterious to current residents, on our side of the building, where they have already proposed parking spaces and a bus stop. In any event, ignoring this issue is a gaping hole in the project.

In reviewing some of the materials regarding this project on the Stoneham website, I was drawn to the letter submitted letter by the New England Memorial Medical Condominium Association. It seems to clearly state that by legal agreement in 2007, the developer (Gutierrez) accepted

responsibility for the demolition of the hospital and along with several other items, and for making the building an independent structure. Prior statements made by developer's representatives and their lawyer have suggested that the project could only go forward if a project of the proposed size was allowed. It appears that the Developer already has a legal responsibility to demolish the building and that their arguments are orchestrated to justify the size of the proposed project. In addition, it also appears that the developer already has ownership of over 25% of the condominium space in order to have considerable control in that property.

This ownership position is concerning because of the recent history of development on the BRMC parcel of land. The Sterling Hill property was originally proposed as a four-level structure that was limited to three levels by the Zoning Board due to height restrictions. The developer achieved permissions to build larger structures by agreeing that there would be no more residential development in this parcel of land in the future. Once the Alta Clara residences were completed and occupied, the developer proposed a research facility for the hospital location (at a time when it was widely known that there was limited desire for such space outside of the Cambridge and Brighton-Alston area). Upon not quickly finding a partner, the developer quickly pivoted to a proposal for an oversized 40B project with a 25% affordable income component to sell the oversized project. Upon completion of whatever project is approved, should we now expect the developer to come forward again with a proposal that would replace the Medical Arts building that they now control with another housing complex that would no longer require any affordable housing component since the current proposed project would satisfy state 40B requirements. Are there any assurances about future development on this parcel of land?

In addition, in the original proposal the question is asked whether any of the parties in the project are involved in outstanding legal action and the response was "No." It appears that one of the current development partners is being sued for design and construction defects which have caused severe structural problems on a completed project.

As members of the planning board, you have been chartered with the task of evaluating project proposals in the formative stage that includes glaring holes and a severe lack of attention to details. On one hand, you have a developer interested in the quickest way to recoup costs and maximize profits (a standard business practice). Developers are a hit and run

business – build a project and then leave it in the rear-view window when you leave. On the other hand are the stakeholders who have a long-term investment in the area and who will be left behind to deal with the results of the project. These stakeholders include residents, abutters, environmentalists and in effect, all parties who seek to preserve the quality of this parcel of land and the quality of life for its flora, fauna, and human residents. Decisions are not always easy, but the right decision is usually obvious.

There are numerous other issues that have not been discussed or evaluated such as: establishing an acceptable place for Fells visitors to park and enter the walking trails, and the monitoring of parking to ensure that the private parking is not being consumed by non-residents. Currently, students and other visitors regularly treat private parking areas as public space, parking to walk animals, walk trails and often, disrespectfully, leaving trash and droppings behind.

We recognize that a housing crisis exists in our state. We also recognize that Stoneham must do its part in finding more appropriate sites. Locating such a massive project on the insular acreage of the former BRMC is not appropriate. These apartments will be too remote from all those amenities that enrich people's lives and getting to the most basic needs will create traffic nightmares as well as negatively impacting the natural environment. At the same time, such a large project will undermine the quality of life for all current and future residents.

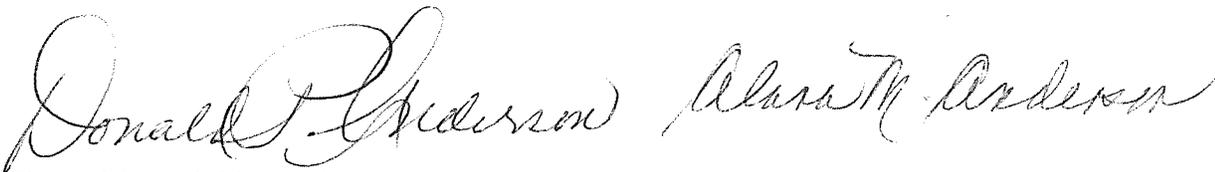
As Stoneham's leaders and leaders of the Commonwealth, you are charged with being the guardians of land, space, and the quality of life of all the citizens you represent. That is the job we hope and expect you to do. Please consider what is truly in the town's best interest and limit the scope of this project.

Despite the disappointment caused by broken promises and feeling betrayed, we recognize the need for housing. A development of one-half to two-thirds the scale of that proposed would be much more likely to be well received, and with a few accommodations even welcomed! We believe that our green space should be preserved, that the bus stop should be located either in the lower parking lot or at the far north end of the parking lot, and that a reasonable number of units should be allowed.

We understand that the developer has wanted to wait until all concerns were heard before responding to the issues raised but we are hopeful that there will be an opportunity to share our concerns with any proposed adjustments that the developer makes as a result of the issues raised in these meetings.

Everyone agrees that it is in the best interests of all parties to eliminate the BRMC facility as it is an eyesore and a health hazard. The goal should be to replace this facility with one which does not that negatively affect existing stakeholders - residents, wildlife, visitors, and all other parties who greatly value this parcel of land.

Co-opting a term from the medical community's Hippocratic oath "First do no harm" should be the primary focus of any decision making on this project.

Handwritten signatures of Donald and Alana Anderson in cursive script.

Donald and Alana Anderson  
7 Executive Drive Unit 232  
Stoneham MA 02180  
(781)777-5058

Picture 1



Picture 2

