

December 2, 2013

111 Franklin Street
Stoneham, MA 02180

MassHousing
Katherine Lacy and Gregory Watson
One Beacon Street, Boston, MA 02108

Re: 40B Eligibility Review, the Commons at Weiss Farms, 170 Franklin Street,
Stoneham, MA

Dear Ms. Lacy and Mr. Watson:

As part of your efforts to determine Chapter 40B project eligibility of the Commons at Weiss Farms, please accept the following testimony I presented at the November 12, 2013 public hearing on the project.

"Good evening,

My name is Rachel Meredith-Warren and I live at 111 Franklin Street in Stoneham. I am a homemaker and mother to two toddlers. In order to care for my young family, I paused a career in urban planning and housing development that most recently included managing a \$24 million portfolio of real estate projects.

I'd like to make the following recommendations regarding the proposed Commons at Weiss Farm development.

Summary¹ of Recommendations:

ZBA should retain an architect and landscape architect to review each iteration of plans with the town's responsibility to protect health, safety and welfare chiefly in mind. Paid for by developer as part of their review fee.

As a good neighbor, Corcoran should set up a public participation process beyond the typical set of required meetings. Corcoran's project manager should hold regular office hours at an accessible location in town. Also, project manager should be available by appointment in town. This should commence as soon as possible.

Selectmen, historic commission and/or some local board(s) should be represented at design development meetings with Corcoran and their

¹ In such an important and technically complicated matter as this project, I would typically consult with special counsel before acting on any of the recommendations contemplated in this letter.

design team. Design development is an iterative process. One meeting is not sufficient to fully understand or impact building plans.

Detailed Recommendations:

For the Town:

My hope is that the Zoning Board of Appeals (ZBA) and other local boards will assemble a strong team to fully vet this project.

During up to six months of its public hearing of the project, ZBA will no doubt retain professionals who will consider the health, safety, environmental design, and open space concerns of the project. Fees for these professional services, as we know, may be *paid by the developer* as part of their review fee (760 CMR 56.05 (5) Consultant Review).

Among these professionals, I recommend that ZBA retain an architect and a landscape architect (LA) whose scopes of work include review of drawings at each stage of design development. Both should provide written memoranda detailing any design modifications that would help the project serve the community. Any contract should specify that these professionals will be willing to participate in any affidavits arising from future litigation related to the project.

The architect and LA representing the ZBA have a different perspective than the design professionals working for the developer. The ZBA retained professionals work with the public's rights to health, safety and welfare over the decades of the project's lifespan chiefly in mind. By contrast, the architect serving the developer has a narrower focus in serving the property owner alone, and during the brief planning and construction period.

A qualified architect will analyze the overall design of the development, along with materials, finishes, and details. The architect will reconcile pertinent facts regarding the site and the neighborhood as communicated by various stakeholders with what is feasible for the design.

I have worked on a number of real estate development projects in which no landscape architect was hired, or their contribution was minimal.

A development team without a landscape architect will tend to produce a property that has an "engineered" feel to it. Parking will dominate the visual aspect, right angles will abound, abrupt landscaping beds will be lined with jarring materials. The buildings will be situated with no regard to solar orientation, pedestrian habits or use of outdoor common space. The property entry and signage will be glaring rather than adding a sense of graciousness or harmony with the outside world.

A qualified landscape architect can maximize the natural features of a site. They can embed a humanity into built environment. Their work will bear strongly and indelibly on users positive everyday experience on the site. Obviously, they also

do critical work with the engineering team in mitigating site issues such as wetlands management.

For the developer:

I recommend that a meaningful public participation process to engage residents of the Town in planning the development. This process would supplement the relatively few required meetings and appearance in front of local boards.

There has been much speculation in the community about the character and intentions of the developer. In order to defuse this and allow for meaningful exchange of ideas and concerns, the project management team could hold regular, predictable "office hours" at an accessible location in town. This would create a conduit of communication between the public and the project proponent. Assuming good faith by all parties, this would allow for the public to impact the course of the project and for the developer who proposes to become part of our community to show that they sincerely desire to be good neighbors.

The development of architectural and engineering plans for any development is an iterative process. I recommend that the developer, as part of their public participation process, be available to review and discuss plans with members of the community within the "office hour" setting described above."

Thank you for your time and effort.

Very truly yours,



Rachel Meredith-Warren

Cc: Town Administrator, Town of Stoneham
Board of Selectmen, Town of Stoneham