

MassHousing Rules that Weiss Farm Developer Must Meet with the Town

Thanks to the efforts and persuasion of Senator Lewis, Town Administrator Ragucci, and Town Counsel Solomon, MassHousing, in a letter dated April 2, 2014, has taken the unusual step of suspending its review of John M. Corcoran's application for the "Commons at Weiss Farm" for a 30-day period.

During this 30-day period, Corcoran has been ordered to meet with the Town of Stoneham—the very meeting that the Town has asserted for months was never properly held—and discuss Corcoran's development plans for Weiss Farm.

We see MassHousing's principled action as affirmation that the Town of Stoneham was correct that the developer was required to meet with the Town (pursuant to MassHousing's own policies) before submitting its application for Project Eligibility approval to MassHousing. More importantly, the Town believes that this provides an opportunity for conceptualizing and shaping the proposed development of the property in a way that could serve the interests of all parties. The initial failure to follow this process contributed to a "cookie-cutter" proposal seriously lacking in almost every respect. MassHousing, by requiring the developer to engage the Town as required by its policy, and at a time when input is most needed and can be effectively acted upon and incorporated by the developer, provides an opportunity for planning that meets the needs of this unique location and site. It is an opportunity that the Town asks the developer to approach in an open, thoughtful and collaborative manner, with the understanding that good planning can benefit all parties.

Senator Lewis', David Ragucci's and Bill Solomon's efforts to invite MassHousing to meet and their ability to convince MassHousing to "do the right thing"—that is—insure that their own policies are respected, reflects an often lost commitment to public service and moral high ground. While MassHousing has not, at this point in time, rejected the developer's Project Eligibility letter as strongly recommended by the Board of Selectmen, MassHousing's requirement that the developer meet with the Town is a watershed moment in "Chapter 40B" history.

The Town is appreciative of MassHousing's decision and response on this important issue of process, which, as noted, should have a beneficial effect on the substance of the Corcoran development proposal.

The Board of Selectmen has reached out to counsel for the applicant to schedule the now required meeting with the Town and that date, once set, will be well published. A meeting by the Board of Selectmen (or a sub-committee thereof) with the developer would be subject to the Open Meeting Law and open to the public to attend.