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November 18, 2018

Michael Zehner, Planning Director
TOWN OF WELLESLEY—PLANNING DEPARTMENT
525 Washington Street
Wellesley, MA 02482

Re: Preliminary Architectural Review
16 Stearns Road and 680 Worcester Street

Dear Michael:

In anticipation of the ZBA hearing for the proposed developments at 16 Stearns Road and 680 Worcester Street which is scheduled for Tuesday, November 20, I am providing you with a preliminary review of the projects based on documents that have been provided to me, documents retrievable from the Town's website, and my impressions from a site visit this morning, November 18, 2018.

As is the case with most developments at this point in the 40B process, the projects' designs are very schematic. Accordingly, my comments are limited in detail. My focus, pending further project development, is on broader issues, mainly looking at how the proposed project fits into the existing context, impact to immediate abutters, scale mitigation strategies, perception from the public realm, etc. Once the project "fundamentals" of massing, setbacks, step-backs, buffers, on-site amenities, etc. are settled on, it will make sense to look more closely at architectural language, materials, and so on.

The format of this review will follow the scope of services outline that was provided to the Town, as follows:

Review the developer's application, plans and drawings:
For this report, I have reviewed the following documents (comments on these exhibits follow in another section of this letter):

Project Application Materials, consultant reports, Town memos, etc. (16 Stearns Road)

- Plan of Land 16 Stearns Road dated January 12, 2018.
- Existing Conditions Plan of Land 16 Stearns Road dated January 12, 2018.
- Memo from William Bergeron to Charles DiGiandomenico dated January 19, 2018.
- Application for Chapter 40B Project Eligibility Letter from MassHousing dated May 22, 2018.
- Project Narrative (undated).
- Project Data Summary (undated).
- Project Data Sheet dated 7.6.18.
- Architectural drawing set "16 Stearns Road Wellesley, MA dated 7.6.18.
- Landscape Plan #16 Stearns Road revision date 7.6.18.
- Existing conditions Narrative dated July 19, 2018.
- Construction Management Plan dated October 2018.
- Context Map Stearns Road and Worcester Road dated October 10, 2018.
- Civil engineering drawing set "#16 Stearns Road" revision date October 19, 2018.
- Memo from William Bergeron to Zoning Board of Appeals dated October 19, 2018.
- Letter to ZBA from VHB (traffic impact peer reviewer) dated October 31, 2018.
- Supplemental Drainage Information 16 Stearns Road dated October 23, 2018.
- Design Phase Height Comparison images dated 11.12.18.
- 16 Stearns Road and 680 Worcester Street shadow study diagrams (undated).

- Memo to Michael from Natural Resources Commission dated 10/4/18.
- Letter to ZBA from Design Review Board dated November 2, 2018.

Correspondence from the public
- Email to Michael Zehner from Pete Buhler dated October 31, 2018.
- Letter to ZBA from Neighbors to 16 Stearns Road and 680 Worcester Street dated October 28, 2018.

Project Application Materials, consultant reports, Town memos, etc. (680 Worcester Street)
- Application for Chapter 40B Project Eligibility Letter from MassHousing dated May 23, 2018.
- Project Information sheet dated 6.29.18
- Civil engineering drawing set "#680 Worcester Street" revision date 6-29-18.
- Project Narrative (undated).
- Project Data Summary (undated).
- Architectural drawing set "680 Worcester Road, LLC" dated 6.29.18.
- Existing Conditions #680 Worcester Street narrative (undated).
- Construction Management Plan dated October 2018.
- Context Map Stearns Road and Worcester Road dated October 10, 2018.
- Design Phase Height Comparison images dated 11.12.18.
- 16 Stearns Road and 680 Worcester Street shadow study diagrams (undated).
- Memo to Michael Zehner from Natural Resources Commission dated 10/4/18.
- Letter to ZBA from Design Review Board dated October 24, 2018.
- Letter to ZBA from George Saraceno (Town Senior Civil Engineer) dated November 14, 2018.

Correspondence from the public
- Email to Michael Zehner from Pete Buhler dated October 31, 2018.
- Letter to ZBA from Neighbors to 16 Stearns Road and 680 Worcester Street dated October 28, 2018.

Participate in an initial meeting at the site with the developer's design team and a representative of the Town:
This reviewer visited the site on November 18, 2018. No town officials or development team members attended.

Conduct site visit and reconnaissance assessment of surrounding residential and nonresidential areas within 1/2 mile of the project site (Stearns Road and Worcester Street):
The project sites are embedded in a triangle defined by Route 9 (Worcester Street) to the north, Weston Road to the west, and the commuter railroad cutting diagonally from the northeast to southwest. Most development along Route 9 in this area is single family homes with variable setbacks from the busy highway. A large part of the land in the middle of the triangle is dedicated to educational use, including the Wellesley Middle School, and the Sprague Elementary school, with adjacent fields that include a play area for small children, tennis courts, baseball diamonds, and soccer fields. A large part of the triangle on its southern edge is parking for the commuter train, as well as commercial development along Linden Street. Virtually all of the rest of the triangle is made up of small scale roads lined with single family homes, with intermittent multi-family development.

The two project sites are virtually contiguous, stretching from Route 9 south to Stearns Road, and then continuing south to athletic fields owned by the Town. Immediately to the east of the Stearns Road site the is a small town-owned sliver of property that joins the athletic area to Stearns Road. Immediately to the west of 680 Worcester is a large parking field, minimally screened from view from Route 9, that serves Newton Wellesley Hospital. The west side of 680 looks out across the parking field, while the Stearns Road address wraps around to the south with views across parking and the extensive athletic fields. 16 Stearns Road is at a significantly higher grade than the athletic fields. 680 Worcester Street is only accessible from the eastbound side of Route 9; Stearns Road is also only accessible from the eastbound side of Route 9, after turning off at Francis Road. It appears that while Francis Road physically connects to the athletic fields to the south, access is blocked by a gate.

Consult with the Applicant's design team, as appropriate:
There has been no communication with the applicant's team.

Provide an oral presentation to the ZBA within approximately one month of the notice to proceed. Said presentation shall include comments and preliminary recommendations on the following (comments are in red italics):

a. Orientation of building in relation to parking areas, open space and on-site amenities. *The Stearns Road structure is at the end of the approximately 22-foot-wide street that currently is lined by 8 single-family homes with dedicated driveways (the project site was occupied by the 9th home, located at the end of the street on the south side). The proposed structure is L-shaped includes 24 condominium units, and wraps around the southwest corner of the site. As noted above, it is well elevated above the parking and athletic fields to the west and south. There are reasonable landscape-able buffers on all sides of the building. Most of the parking is located beneath the building. An additional 8 spaces are located in a drop off/delivery circle to the east of the garage entry. Outdoor amenities appear to be limited to a patio facing the southwest. Other open spaces of the site are proposed planting and stormwater management areas. The immediate access to the Town fields at this location are an amenity that diminishes the need for on-site usable outdoor space.*

   At 680 Worcester, which is a 20-unit rental structure, most of the parking is at grade, occupying all of the first floor except the entry lobby and some support space. Two additional spaces are open to the sky on the western end of the building, and three spaces are open air under an extension of the upper floors. Six other of the "garage" parking spaces are open to the underside of a proposed first residential floor outdoor patio area. This arrangement is a proposed method of maintaining access to a Town sewer easement. Programmable at-grade open space on the site appears to be limited to a patio on the south side, facing a neighbor's back yard, that is accessed from the parking garage. There is a "common terrace" indicated on the first residential level floor plan on the south side of the structure, also facing the Stearns Road neighbor's back yard.

   The building is positioned on the site closer to Route 9 than most of the nearby single family homes. There is a residential neighbor immediately to the east, as well as two back yard abutters to the south (homes that front on Stearns Road). While there is landscape buffering proposed to the east, the building as currently proposed, primarily because of its scale, feels uncomfortably close to its neighbor in that direction (more on this below).

b. Function, use and adequacy of open space and landscaped areas. *The project sites are a short walking distance to generous open publicly accessible open spaces, including Sprague Elementary School and a number of large athletic fields. While the Stearns Road site's usable open space is limited to a small patio, its immediate access to the children's playground and large athletic fields constitute an excellent amenity that is available to the building's residents. The building is placed on the site so as to allow adequate landscape buffering from its neighbor to the east. At the drop-off/delivery circle, the developer should consider placing a fence to block headlights, in addition to the proposed plantings.*

   At 680 Worcester Street, as noted above, usable open space is limited to an at-grade patio and a shared common deck. The utility of the elevated deck is questionable, as most of its length is outside of a two-bedroom unit. The deck could be downsized to stay clear of the apartment windows, but it could potentially create issues related to access to the easement. While the at-grade patio is potentially more useful, its access appears to be limited to passage through two stacked car structures at the parking level. The neighbors to the south would also experience some impact from use of the patio (although the scale and placement of the building will likely help to block traffic noise from Route 9). Ground floor space on the north side of the building fronting Route 9 is of limited depth, and given the heavy traffic, would only be developable with significant fencing (or masonry wall building) to mitigate sound. Having said that, this area, particularly if the setback can be increased, may be a better location to site a common patio. As is the case with 16 Stearns Road, significant usable outdoor space is close by at Sprague School, etc. There is adequate ground area to the east of the building for landscape buffering, but the height of the building will have significant afternoon shadow impact on its neighbor. This could be mitigated through changes to the building's massing at that end.

c. Use and treatment of natural resources. *Extensive removal of ledge appears to be necessary in order to build the Stearns Road structure, and could potentially impact the ability to effectively manage stormwater on site. The presence of ledge may also limit to type and scale of landscaping that is possible on the south and west sides of the slope. As far as the building itself, a radon mitigation system should be considered. The Natural Resources Commission has reviewed the plans, and notes that a public shade tree hearing is required to remove trees within the right of way (along with comments addressed at the long-term viability of the proposed plantings).*

The site at 680 is already under development (that is, it is largely cleared and partially graded). The Natural Resources Commission's comments were limited to recommended plant species, plant diversity, and spacing of planting (same comments that were made re: 16 Stearns Road).

d. Building design, setbacks, massing and scale in relationship to the surrounding context and topography. *This reviewer concurs with most of the comments re: 16 Stearns made by the Design Review Board relative to building massing and fit with the existing context. While further development of the south and west elevations will improve the visual interest of the structure, and are strongly recommended, the elevations that face neighbors on Stearns Road are well articulated and of an appropriate scale. As noted above, this reviewer does not believe that more usable open space is required for this development. However, the developer should consider the building entry improvements and plantings within the drop off area comments of the Design Review Board. The massing at 680 is more problematic, particularly at the east end of the building. The shadow studies indicate significant impact of the neighbor, and the articulation of the structure does little to tie into the existing context. This is not the case at the western end of the building that faces the parking lot of the neighboring medical facility.*

Opportunities for alternative shaping its massing are best studied with a three dimensional model that includes enough neighboring topography and buildings to make judgements about fit in the existing context. This should be provided to the ZBA for their review. In the meantime, a few suggestions are possible from the materials that have been made available to date:

- *As noted above, cutting back the height of the structure at the eastern end of the building would diminish the impact on the neighbor, and provide a scale reference to the existing residential context. It is likely that only the front half of the top floor would need to be cut back, perhaps providing an alternative location for a shared deck that would not impact the neighbors (or any of the units within the building).*
- *This reviewer believes that the height of the building could increase on the western end of the building, if necessary, to make up for lost space on the east. In addition to putting the massing of the structure in the least impactful part of the structure, it would also be an opportunity to strengthen the reading of the building entry (which is a concern of the Design Review Board). Note that the Design Review Board recommends removing a floor from the entire structure in order to more closely match the height of the nearby medical building, an opinion that this reviewer doesn't share.*
- *The impact on the neighbor to the east would further be mitigated if the setback on that sider were increased.*
- *Other design suggestions were put forward by the Design Review Board that should also be considered, including step back of the top floor, creation of an entry canopy, footprint articulation, etc. rd.*

e. Viewsheds of the project visible from the public street, public areas and from the vantage point of nearby residential neighborhoods. *Both proposed structures will have a significant visual presence in the public realm. At Stearns Road, while the view from Stearns is relatively benign in scale and language, the views from the playing fields and Sprague School are much more imposing given the elevation change. As noted above, care should be taken in the design of those elevations to ensure the same level of articulation and visual interest that has been achieved on the entry side of the building.*

The view of the entry end of 680, as one travels eastbound on Route 9, will have a powerful impact. This is really the defining impression most will have of the building. Impact on the neighbors to south will be mitigated largely through landscape buffering, but some modifications to the building massing should also be considered (see comments above). Eliminating the ground level patio and minimizing the common deck (relocating to the top floor, street side) will also diminish the building's impact on neighbors.

f. Pedestrian and vehicular access and circulation; adequacy of accessibility provisions. Of particular interest are the implications of access and egress in terms of pedestrians, bicyclists and motorists. Adequacy of parking facilities. *While the massing and language of the building at 16 Stearns does an adequate job of visually fitting in, the nature of Stearns Road…which is the only access to the development…will significantly change. Currently, there are no sidewalks on the road, and the driving area is used as the walkway for residents and for others passing through to access the walking path at the end of the street. The occupancy of the street will*

change from 8 families to 32 families. In essence, Stearns will become the driveway for the new development. It is this reviewer's opinion that the developer should meet with the Town and Stearns Road residents to contemplate potential off-site improvements that the project should incorporate into its plans (sidewalk(s), lighting, traffic calming, etc.). The developer must ensure that all accessibility issues are met with regard to access to the public way and all amenities.

At 680, comments related to vehicular access, from this reviewer's perspective, primarily relate to emergency and delivery vehicles and the need to turn around to re-enter Route 9. As is the case at 16 Stearns Road, there does not seem to be any accommodation made for bike riders.

g. Integration of building and site, including but not limited to preservation of existing tree cover, if any. *The developer has submitted very schematic construction management plans for both sites. Considerably greater detail is required related to preservation of existing trees, both on and off-site.*

h. Exterior materials. *There are no material callouts included on building elevations. Unable to comment at this point.*

i. Energy efficiency. *This reviewer did not review any materials related to energy efficiency. Wellesley has adopted the Stretch Code, so the project will be subject to a high level of energy efficiency. There are many more options available to the developer to create buildings that exceed the Stretch Code that are available with relatively insignificant increase in construction cost (but with big impact on minimizing ongoing operating expenses).*

j. Exterior lighting. *Not yet reviewable.*

k. Proposed landscape elements, planting materials, and planting design. *Landscape plans and schedules are included in the latest set of drawings. This reviewer takes no issue with the plans, although noting that a greater attempt could be made to "layer" the perimeter plantings (as opposed to making a "wall"). Comments of the Natural Resources Commission should be integrated into the plant selection.*

l. Feasibility of incorporating environmental and energy performance standards in the design, construction and operation of the buildings. *See paragraph "i" above.*

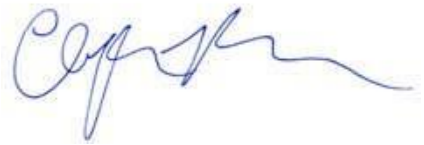
m. Any other design-related considerations identified by the consultant, other peer reviewers, MHP, ZBA, staff, working group, neighbors, or consultants to neighbors. *As of this date, there have been no working sessions. However, design-related issues/considerations include:*

- *Universal Design and/or visitability should be considered by the applicant, as these features are very easy to incorporate and do not represent significant increases in cost.*
- *More information about how trash and recycling will be handled.*
- *Which units are proposed to be affordable, and which are Group 2 accessible?*
- *All required exterior accessible routes should be indicated on site plan.*
- *Method for construction of retaining walls, particularly when near property lines, should be specified.*
- *Roof plans should be provided that note all mechanical units. Visibility of the units should be studied in 3-D ground level perspective drawings.*
- *Has a school bus waiting areas been provided?*
- *Where do visitors arriving on bicycles park?*
- *More detailed construction management/staging plans should be submitted to confirm basic construction feasibility.*
- *A lighting plan should be submitted for review of potential impact on neighbors.*
- *Perspective views from public ways should be provided.*
- *Is there noise information available related to the operation of the proposed parking system?*
- *Are the garages designed as passively ventilated (are there areas of grills or other open façade materials that need to be designated on the building elevations)?*
- *Is a radon mitigation system anticipated in the new structures?*
- *Confirm that all required van-accessible spaces have been provided.*

n. Techniques to mitigate visual impact. *See paragraph "d" above.*

I hope that you will contact me with any questions you may have about my observations and/or analysis. Looking forward to discussing these two projects with you and the ZBA on the 20th!

Sincerely,
DAVIS SQUARE ARCHITECTS, INC



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