

TOWN OF WELLESLEY



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EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF GENERAL GOVERNMENT

January 18, 2019

Katherine Miller  
MassHousing  
One Beacon Street  
Boston, MA 02108

RE: 3 Burke Lane, Wellesley, MA Site Eligibility Response

Dear Ms. Miller:

On behalf of the Town of Wellesley (the "Town") Board of Selectmen and Planning Board, please find the following comments with respect to the *Comprehensive Permit Site Approval Application* recently submitted by Cedar Place, LLC for the construction of a mixed income development at 2 & 3 Burke Lane which would include 16 units of residential housing on approximately 41,307 square feet of land in Wellesley.

**Overview**

The Town finds that this site is appropriate for the development of affordable housing and that the proposed project, while not ideal for the neighborhood, is generally acceptable. However, the specific details of the proposed development raise some concerns given the context of its surroundings and the layout of the site. While the density is more appropriate than other recent housing projects, it will nonetheless represent a significant change to a neighborhood comprised of smaller single family homes. Burke Lane is a small neighborhood street which provides questionable access for a residential development of this scale, and the added housing units will strain circulation patterns in the vicinity. Burke Lane also lacks sidewalks and public transit is not easily accessible from this site, thus limiting access and accommodations for pedestrians. The developer has included 2 Burke Lane in their proposal; the Town suspects that the purpose is to achieve a slightly lower calculated density, as the additional parcel will serve no practical purpose otherwise. 2 Burke Lane is an undersized, triangular lot consisting of a mere 2,277 square feet and located across the street from the Project site. As such, the inclusion of 2 Burke Lane in the Application does not appear to contribute to the Project in any meaningful way and the Town requests that it be removed from the application. Other Town concerns related to stormwater management, landscaping, and constructability will require additional information from the applicant. Finally, we are not aware that the applicant has experience as a developer of similar housing projects and its ability to successfully complete such a project should be carefully considered.

### **Site Constraints**

The Town records indicate the Project parcels (2 and 3 Burke Lane) have a combined area of 41,307 square feet. As noted above, the Town sees no purpose for the inclusion of 2 Burke Lane in this proposal, as this parcel will not be utilized in any other way than to reduce the overall perceived density of the Project on paper. The proposed development has a building foot print of 7,545 square feet and will be 2.5 stories high.

The topography of the rear portion of the site transitions quickly from 112 feet to 142 feet, of which approximately 20 feet would need to be removed by cutting into the hill. The applicant will need to install a retaining wall but no details are provided on this critical structure. Trees in the vicinity that are indicated in the Application to be retained for screening may be impacted by this change. Information on stormwater management has not been provided, so the Town is unable to opine as to how stormwater runoff will be controlled. While the Application does indicate that the driveway will be constructed of pervious material, stormwater analysis will be required to determine how this will be handled.

### **Access Limitations**

Access to the site is served by Burke Lane which is a 22'-footwide neighborhood street. There is access from Burke Lane to Route 9 eastbound. Vehicles, however, must navigate an access route along Route 9 before they can safely merge onto Route 9. Access westbound requires either a U-turn once on Route 9, or an altogether different route through the neighborhood streets off Burke Lane. There are no sidewalks on Burke Lane which inhibits pedestrian access. In order to create sidewalks, a retaining wall on the property and/or within the right-of-way would have to be removed. The developer also proposes two curb cuts (less than 25 feet apart) which we believe will cause confusion and will increase the potential accidents.

### **Density and Proximity to Other Neighborhoods**

The property is zoned Single Residence District and 15,000 Square Foot Area Regulation District. The maximum density under the Zoning Bylaw for this District is 2.9 units per acre, and the surrounding neighborhood was developed consistent with this level of density. This project comprises 16.84 units per acre which is more than five times the density of the abutting and surrounding residential neighborhoods. Construction of this many units will have the effect of doubling the number of residential units on this small street. This poses a challenge to circulation and neighborhood character but the Town recognizes that the close proximity of Route 9 and a commercial district make this level of development more appropriate.

### **Wetlands**

There are no wetlands on this site nor in the immediate vicinity.

### **Traffic**

The proposal includes direct access to and from the site via Burke Lane. While Burke Lane connects to Route 9, the intersection only allows for vehicles to enter Route 9 in the eastbound direction via an access route. Vehicles that want to travel westbound must travel eastbound on Route 9 until they can make a U-turn at the Dearborn Street intersection. Alternatively, such vehicles will travel through the neighborhood to the south (McLean Street and Cedar Street) to a westbound Route 9 ramp. The intersection of McLean Street and Cedar Street is also the intersection for Hastings Street and Hunnewell Street. Due to the proximity of Fiske School and the intersection's location relative to general traffic patterns, it is congested during the morning and evening commute and during morning and afternoon school pick-up and drop-off times. No traffic count information was provided with the Application. The increased traffic from the proposed development is of some concern to the Town and some changes to circulation patterns will likely be required to alleviate congestion and improve safety.

### **Utilities**

Existing water and sewer lines are present in Burke Lane in front of the property, and gas service is available on the street.

### **Proposed Parking**

The plan indicates that there are 25 parking spaces or 1.56 spaces per unit. A review of the plan only indicates 24 spaces, and three of those are not delineated in front of the existing building. All parking is

exterior, with the majority being to the left of the building. There is no on-street parking allowed on Burke Lane. The angled layout of the five spaces on the left side of the parking area would require a driver to execute a three-point-turn to exit the parking area, and could result in accidents between cars entering and exiting. While the Town finds that the currently proposed parking quantity is adequate, the location and arrangement of parking spaces is poorly designed and, once corrected, may reduce the quantity of parking.

### **Public Transportation**

The MetroWest Regional Transit Authority operates the Route 1 bus along Route 9 with a limited schedule Monday through Friday. Residents seeking to take the Route 1 bus must walk to the Cedar Street interchange to get the bus. As mentioned above, there are no sidewalks along this route. The other public transportation services noted in the applicant's submittal are all located in Newton. Access to those would require a safe route along Route 9 through the 128/95 interchange. There are currently no sidewalks from the property heading east bound until after Dearborn Street, but sidewalks have been improved through the Route 9/Route 128 interchange. There are no sidewalks heading west along the eastbound side of Route 9 from Burke Lane in order for pedestrians to reach Cedar Street for the Route #1 bus. Thus, public transit options in the vicinity of the proposed project are quite limited unless a resident has access to a vehicle to reach them.

### **Landscape**

There are no landscaping plans submitted in the Application. The proposed site plan does not specify how the removal of the rear grade will be addressed, including the number of trees to be removed and how screening for abutting properties will be affected. Additionally, tree removal may be required along Burke Lane and a number of those trees may be public shade trees.

### **Construction Management**

The Town has significant concerns with compact nature of this site and the applicant's ability to safely construct this Project given the need for parking for construction workers and storage of site equipment. We believe that the size of the site, narrow street, and lack of on-street parking will create challenges for both the developer and the neighborhood. Deliveries will need to be coordinated and off-site parking of workers may be required. The developer has not detailed in the Site Eligibility Application how construction would be staged and coordinated.

### **Wellesley's Progress on Affordable Housing**

As you are aware, the Town has recently been inundated with 40B Site Eligibility notices. While the Town has not yet reached 10% threshold of affordable housing inventory, the Town has been making steady progress over the last 15 years in increasing the Subsidized Housing Inventory, and anticipates meeting the 10% by 2019-2020. The Town has received approval of its Housing Production Plan to assist the Town in expanding its range of housing, including affordable, suitable for elder residents and those who wish to downsize and remain in Town, accessible to members of the local workforce, and to young families. The Town has also passed a number of zoning provisions to assist with affordable housing as redevelopment opportunities in Wellesley's commercial districts arise. As of January 7, 2019, the Town is at 6.77% of its 10% goal, with 11 units recently added to the Subsidized Housing Inventory with the issuance of a Comprehensive Permit for the project at 135 Great Plain Avenue. Below are the Town's actions that have supported development of affordable housing:

### **Major Recent Developments**

- Housing Production Plan: The Town's Housing Production Plan ("HPP") was approved by the Department of Housing and Community Development effective September 27 2018.
- **On June 4, 2018, John Hancock announced that it will be redeveloping the Wellesley Office Park site and would like to partner with the Town to construct 350 housing units; the Town is actively working with representatives of John Hancock on a 40R proposal for the site.**
- In March of 2018, the Board of Selectmen, with assistance from the Planning Board, released an RFP to develop the Tailby and Railroad Parking Lots for affordable housing and parking. From

the six proposals submitted to the Town in June, 2018 the Board of Selectmen selected Trinity Financial for this project. Negotiations with Trinity are underway which in part will determine how many units of affordable housing would be constructed, as well as an opportunity to diversity the Town's housing opportunities.

- April 2018: Town Meeting approved the transfer of \$200,000 to the Wellesley Housing Authority from the Community Preservation Committee, with support of the Board of Selectmen, to prepare surveys and other studies to ready the Authority's Barton Road property for potential redevelopment, including the improvement of existing housing and the creation of additional housing opportunities.

#### Legal Changes to Promote Affordable Housing

- The Town adopted the Inclusionary Zoning Bylaw ("IZB") in 2004 which requires residential projects in commercial districts to provide 20% affordable housing, and commercial projects over 10,000 square feet to provide 2% affordable housing (1 unit for every 50,000 square feet constructed).
- 2005: The Town modified the IZB to require subdivisions having more than five lots to comply with the Bylaw at 20% threshold. 2007: The Town modified the definition of Floor Area Ratio in the Zoning Bylaw to exclude affordable units developed under the IZB from being included in the FAR to increase density and increase opportunities for affordable housing units in commercial districts.
- New units and affordable unit funding resulting from IZB changes:
  - 2007: The Linden Square project was completed, wherein seven affordable housing units were created under the IZB (these units have recently been found to be missing from the Town's SHI, but are being added now).
  - 2007/2008: permitting began for projects at 978 Washington Street and the former Wellesley Inn site at 576 Washington Street in Wellesley Square; these projects were delayed due to the recession, but both have now been completed, resulting in seven SHI-eligible units at 978 Worcester and 5 SHI-eligible units at 576 Washington Street. Both projects were developed under the Town's Zoning and subject to the IZB; 978 Worcester St. also resulted in payment in-lieu funds for 1 unit.
  - 2009: the permitting of a CVS resulted in the payment of in-lieu funds under the IZB.
- 2013: The Town amended the Wellesley Square Zoning District to create a special permit to increase density; this benefited and allowed the previously stalled Wellesley Inn project to proceed.

#### Additional New Units

- 2004: The Town's Community Preservation Committee funded \$65,000 in addition to HUD funds to create a DMR house at 4 Marshall Road (SHI).
- 2012: A project was permitted at 27 Washington Street, resulting in the development of 82 SHI-eligible units, as well as seven assisted living units not SHI-eligible but permanently deed restricted to be affordable.
- 2012: The Wellesley Housing Development Corporation purchased a two-family dwelling at Peck Ave and a single-family dwelling at 6 Mellon Road, renovating the homes and creating three affordable units; at this time the Town also purchased 9 Highland Road, although it is not on SHI, but it is affordable due to deed restriction not complying with DHCD requirements (Must wait to add on resale per DHCD).
- 2013/2014: a 40B project was approved at 139 Linden Street and added two SHI units in October 2017.
- 2018: a 40B project was approved at 135 Great Plain Avenue, adding 11 SHI units in December 2018.

Planning Actions to Promote Affordable Housing

- The 2007-2017 Comprehensive Plan recommended actions for affordable housing including exploring the feasibility of using Town-owned parcels for affordable housing and modifying the zoning bylaws to encourage housing diversity, both of which the Town has and continues to implement and explore.
- 2016 to present: The Town has developed the first Unified Plan in the Commonwealth that brings together the Town's strategic plan and comprehensive plan. The complete draft is available on [www.wellesleyunifiedplan.com](http://www.wellesleyunifiedplan.com). The Selectmen and Planning Board will adopt the final plan this month that includes a housing strategy that employs a variety of mechanisms to increase housing type and affordability.
- March 2018: Town Meeting appropriated to the Planning Board funds to develop a sub-area study and plan, with additional funds to be provided from the Community Preservation Committee, with a focus on development/redevelopment opportunities in a defined area to support the development of additional affordable housing.

For reference, 40B projects currently in Comprehensive Permit Review are:

1. Delanson Circle (90 Units) - MHP
2. 148 Weston Road (55 Units) - Masshousing
3. 16 Stearns Road (24 Units) - MassHousing
4. 680 Worcester Street (Previous proposed 20 Units) - MassHousing

Based on all of the reasons articulated above, the Town believes that the proposed site and development are acceptable given the surrounding uses and densities, but maintains substantial concerns related to site access and neighborhood circulation, pedestrian accommodations and public transit, parking on site, screening, and constructability. Given these challenges and the Applicant's inexperience, the Town has some concerns with this Applicant's ability to safely execute the proposed development.

Sincerely,

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Jack Morgan, Chair

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Marjorie R. Freiman, Vice Chair

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Ellen F. Gibbs, Secretary

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Thomas H. Ulfelder

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Elizabeth Sullivan Woods