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Contact: Jeanette Rebecchi
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May 22, 2018

Lenore Mahoney, Executive Secretary
Wellesley Zoning Board of Appeals
525 Washington Street
Wellesley, Ma 02482

**RE: 135 Great Plain Avenue (Fieldstone Way) 40B
ZBA 2018-25**

Dear Ms. Mahoney,

On April 11, 2018 and May 23, 2018 the Design Review Board (“the Board”) reviewed the Comprehensive Permit Application submitted by Northland Residential (“the Applicant”) to the Zoning Board of Appeals for the property located at 135 Great Plain Avenue. On behalf of the Board, please find the following suggestions for improvement with respect to architectural, site, and landscape design. The Board appreciates the village concept, and considers the scale generally appropriate for a 40B project. However, the Board is of the opinion that the project is still overly dense, the site design too rigid, and there is a scarcity of active recreational space. Ultimately, this project would benefit functionally and contextually from a modest reduction in the number of units and/or a reduction in unit square footage.

Architecture

The Design Review Board considers the “Fieldstone Way” unit architecture to be too uniform, and more variability is needed throughout the site in general. Although the Applicant utilizes the natural slope of the topography, the roof height is too consistent. The design of the triplexes and duplexes would be improved by selectively reducing the height of some of the units within each tier.

Particular attention should be paid to the triplex units, which are highly visible from Great Plain Avenue. Given the suburban context of this site, some or all of the triplexes should be changed to duplexes, which will reduce the size and mass of each grouping. Additional strategies to reduce the scale of this building type include:

- Varying the building line to avoid one solid mass along the street edge;
- Breaking up the roofline;
- Employing a variety of cladding materials such as vertical siding.

With the exception of the Tier 2 Duplex Type, the Applicant has designed extremely prominent garages. The Applicant should reexamine the placement of the Tier 3 Duplex Type garages, which are currently the focal point of the front façade. The architecture should emphasize the doorway entry rather than the garage. In the case of the Tier 1 Triplex Types, the Applicant should bring some, if not all, of the protruding garages closer to the building. This would allow for more outdoor space, and create more variety of architectural forms.

Landscape & Site Design

The Design Review Board recommends the Applicant add surrounding features to the site renderings to better understand the project within the context of the neighborhood. Doing so would highlight how the location of the triplex units interrupts the pattern of single family homes along Great Plain Avenue. The Board questions the decision to line the densest units along the street edge only 14 feet from the front property line/right-of-way (ROW). At a minimum, these least expensive triplex units should be dispersed throughout the development to break up the obviously tiered site design and reduce the visibility of this dense project from the public way. Such close proximity to the ROW also does not take into account any future expansion or improvements to Great Plain Avenue.

The Board also has concerns regarding internal and external privacy conflicts. Externally, the Applicant should create a robust, landscaped buffer zone to screen the development from adjoining single-family properties and the ROW. Internally, the project would benefit from a site arrangement that allowed for additional public and private open space. For a development of this size, there are not enough community amenities, such as fire pits or play structures as examples. While there is a *Common Green*, it likely would receive limited use due to its location in the “front yard” of the Tier II Duplex units. The narrow alleyway between the sets of triplex buildings is also a missed opportunity to incorporate additional community gathering spaces and facilitate neighborly interactions. The Board is also concerned about the maneuverability of this alleyway, and again suggests reducing the number or square footage of units within Tier I.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,



Jeanette Rebecchi, Planner
On Behalf of the Design Review Board

cc: Planning Board
Northland Residential
Cliff Boehmer, Davis Square Architects