



**DAVIS
SQUARE**
ARCHITECTS

240A Elm Street
Somerville, MA 02144
617.628.5700, tel
davissquarearchitects.com

Brooks A. Mostue, AIA
Clifford J. Boehmer, AIA
Ross A. Speer, AIA
Iric L. Rex, AIA

July 14, 2019

Tom Harrington & Christopher Heep
MIYARES AND HARRINGTON LLP
40 Grove Street
Wellesley, MA 02482

Re: Preliminary Architectural Peer Review
3 Burke Lane 40B Development

Dear Tom and Chris:

Thank you for asking me to review the proposed 40B development at 3 Burke Lane. In anticipation of the ZBA hearing for the proposed development scheduled for Thursday July 18, 2019, I am providing you with a preliminary review of the project based on documents that are retrievable from the Town's website, as well as my impressions from a site visit today, July 14.

As is the case with most developments at this point in the 40B process, the project's design is 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 (if necessary), 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 in my proposal dated June 26th, 2019, 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 other sections of this letter):

Project Application Materials/Comments from Town

- Letter to Katherine Miller (MassHousing) from Wellesley BOS dated January 28, 2019.
- Site Plans for 3 Burke Lane dated April 16, 2019 prepared by Guerriere & Halnon, Inc. (7 sheets, including Existing Conditions Plan, Site Development & Grading Plan, Site Plan Details (2 sheets), Landscape Plan, and Lighting Plan).
- Architectural plan set dated 7/11/19 prepared by Dixon Salo Architects (15 sheets).
- Development Narrative (undated) prepared by the developer.
- Email to John Federico (civil engineer) from Sarah Chisholm dated March 15, 2019 re: Hydrant Flow Information.
- Email to Dennis DiSchino from Dick Joyce dated April 11, 2019 re: Burke Lane electricity.
- 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.

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 July 14, 2019. 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:

The project site is part of a neighborhood of predominantly single family homes that is embedded in an approximately ½ mile square that lies immediately to the south of Worcester Road (Route 9) to the north, St. Mary's Cemetery to the south, and significant undeveloped wooded areas to the east and west. Route 95 is approximately .6 of a mile to the east.

The Joseph E. Fiske Elementary school is about a third of a mile away, walkable on either Worcester Street to Cedar Street (where there are sidewalks available), or to the south on Burke Lane (where there are no existing sidewalks), west on McLean Street (which has a sidewalk only on the south side), and then north on Cedar Street (sidewalks on both sides, with a signalized crosswalk that leads to the schoolyard). As noted, most residential development in the neighborhood appears to be single family. Streetscapes are "informal", with a variety of housing styles and inconsistent front yard setbacks and relationship of the homes to the street.

The development along Route 9 to the west of Burke Lane is commercial on both sides of the street. To the east, the first several homes on Willow Street directly front on Route 9. The three parallel street that feed the neighborhood off of Route 9 (Willow, Burke Lane, and Cedar Street) have been developed with homes immediately on the street, but also a second layer of development fed by long drives and cul-de-sacs leading into the middle of the large blocks defined by the streets. Topography is varied in the neighborhood, with some sites showing significant grade changes. Generally, there is generous tree cover that provides some screening between homes (which is important, as the grid of homes is closely spaced, with homes behind homes in many instances).

Residents of this section of Wellesley are dependent on cars, as the number of walkable amenities is very limited. It is well served by major roadways (Routes 9 and 95 are very close by), and the Riverside Green Line stop is a short bike ride or drive away (1.6 miles).

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. Said presentation shall include comments and preliminary recommendations on the following:

- a. ***Orientation of building in relation to parking areas, open space and on-site amenities:*** The project consists of the renovation and minor expansion of the original home at 3 Burke Lane, along with a 15-unit newly constructed building sited on the site's open space to the west, behind the existing home. While there is significant grade change between the sites to the south and west, the new structure will occupy a flat area that has likely been terraced at some point in the past (this has not been confirmed by looking at historic maps of the site). On-site parking is immediately to the south of the new structure, and consists of single loaded 90 degree spaces on the north side of the lot, and parallel spaces on the south side (along with the trash and re-cycling area). There are two additional parking spaces in the expanded garage attached to the existing home. Because the grade rises sharply to the south, a variable height retaining wall (ranging from 1 foot to 15 feet tall) is required in order to fit in the parking. The parking, as well as the eastern end of the new structure, is largely screened by the renovated existing home that stretches along about 60% of the Burke Lane frontage. The closest neighbor to the parking appears to be 15 Burke Lane, which is one of the homes that is set well away from the street. That home's first floor appears to be about 30 feet higher than the parking area for 3 Burke. 19 Burke Lane, which fronts of the street, may have a view of some of the parking, depending upon how effective the proposed landscape screening is.

There is a very small outdoor amenity area at the western end of the parking lot (not much more than 1.5 parking spaces in area) that is rendered with two picnic tables (although the Project Narrative mentions a fire pit and a "doggie area").

- b. ***Function, use and adequacy of open space and landscaped areas:*** As noted above, usable open space on the site is minimal. This reviewer agrees with the Board of Selectmen that there should be more significant usable outdoor space included in the project (the project totals 32 bedrooms...not including the manager's unit...which may mean as many as 40 to 50 residents). As previously noted, the development is within walking distance to the local elementary school, which has very nice outdoor amenities.

The landscape plan shows significant proposed plantings, most appearing to be intended to create a pleasant streetscape on Burke (which includes a new sidewalk), as well as screening from commercial area to the north. Careful attention should be paid to preserving existing tree growth along the south and west borders of the site.

- c. ***Use and treatment of natural resources.*** The southwest area of the site must be significantly excavated in order to create space for the construction of the parking area. To the greatest degree possible, existing mature tree growth outside of the excavation area should be preserved (which may be challenging given the need to construct the retaining walls).

- d. *Building design, setbacks, massing and scale in relationship to the surrounding context and topography.* The project consists of both new construction and the expansion and renovation of the existing home at 3 Burke. Preservation of the existing home ensures that the scale of the development along the street is compatible with other structures. While the enlargement of the garage is the biggest change to the building, the proposed modifications make sense, particularly getting the garage entry off of the main façade. An improvement to the new larger garage would be to break up the large blank wall by adding two windows at the lower level facing the street (most likely aligned with the two windows above). Preservation of the existing structure also provides effective screening of the end elevation of the new 15-unit building constructed deeper into the site.

The new building is placed behind the renovated existing home, extending to about 40 feet from the rear lot line. Interestingly, as discussed above, developing deep within sites off of the street is typical in this neighborhood (including homes addressed 15, 17, and 23 Burke Lane to the south of 3 Burke Lane). So while the scale of the new building would be significantly larger than the surrounding context (with a footprint of approximately 140 feet X 64 feet), its siting strategy is similar. And because the proposed structure is located to the north of its neighbors...and at a much lower elevation....it has minimal negative solar impact on neighboring homes. It will cast shadows on the commercial building and its parking immediately to the north. While there is already vegetative screening that masks the view 15 Burke Lane has of the rear of the commercial structure on Route 9, it may be the case that the proposed new building would provide year-round screening.

While the new building is placed logically on the site, and possibly “of residential scale and character similar to small multi-family developments in residential districts”, it is difficult to argue that “this new proposed building....will be in keeping with the aesthetics of other residential properties on Burke Lane” (quotes are from the Development Narrative). While the design is intended to express a sense of organic growth through “multiple additions or expansions to an original structure”, its overall scale and rigid symmetry work against that reading. In the end, its massing comes across as very boxy and monumental. This reviewer believes that the same efficient “modular” organizational strategy could still be employed, while scale mitigation is achieved through more movement in the building’s footprint, combined with abandonment of the perfectly symmetrical treatment of volumes and fenestration.

Opportunities for alternative massing are best studied with a three dimensional model, ideally with enough neighboring topography and buildings to make judgements about fit in the existing context. Because the building is relatively isolated (i.e., it is a fair distance from the nearest neighbor), instead of 3-D modelling the close by neighbors, its impact could likely be studied with site sections that reach to the immediate neighbor to the south, as well as the commercial building to the north. It would also be useful to use site section(s) to determine the degree to which the new structure is screened by the renovated existing home.

Note that the primary views from the units on the north side of the 15-unit building will be the rear of the commercial uses on Route 9 and head-on parking (if that lot is constructed). It would very important to ensure that the setback is adequate to support effective screening (which might include a solid fence to block headlights). This situation can be studied using the site sections suggested above.

- e. *Viewsheds of the project visible from the public street, public areas and from the vantage point of nearby residential neighborhoods.* The neighbors at 15 and 19 Burke will have the greatest potential views of the development (potential, because it isn’t possible to judge from the submitted materials). If the landscape plan were expanded to include the neighboring structures, combined with site sections that take into account the topography, analysis would be possible. It is likely that in addition to potential impact on the residential neighbors, the development will be visible from the adjacent commercial properties (which as noted above, may be more of a concern for the future residents at 3 Burke than the owners and users of the commercial use).

Site sections (which may include proposed and existing vegetation) will be effective in determining the view of structures and parking from Burke Lane.

- 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.* Currently, there are no sidewalks on Burke Lane, and the driving area is used as the walkway for residents. The occupancy of the street will significantly change with the introduction of 16 additional units. The proposal includes the provision of a sidewalk that runs to the north to connect with the parking area for the commercial

development. Beyond that is a walkway along Worcester Street. As discussed above, the increased street occupancy may increase pedestrian use, most likely limited to joggers and children/parents walking to the nearby elementary school. Similarly, auto and bicycle traffic on Burke Lane and nearby streets will also increase. Other peer reviewer(s) are better equipped to discuss any issues associated with these change in the neighborhood.

While parking is also outside of this reviewer's areas of expertise, it appears to be provided at a ratio of 1.5 spaces/unit which seems adequate for this location and unit mix. There is an indication that one parking space will be designated for electric vehicles. Given that it is likely that most of the building residents will be driving to work and for access to other basic amenities, one EV space does not seem adequate. It is not clear from the plans if any bicycle parking is included in the proposal.

- g. *Integration of building and site, including but not limited to preservation of existing tree cover, if any.* As noted above, the new building is set deep within the site, similar to other structures in the neighborhood. And given that with the exception of part of the parking area, most of the development is occurring on an already-relatively-flat section of the site. Site sections with neighboring structures indicated will give the best sense of how well "integrated" the development is. As noted, preservation of existing mature tree growth will be very important as far as keeping a similar level of vegetation and screening that is common in the area (considerably greater detail is required related to preservation of existing trees, e.g., a tree preservation plan).
- h. *Exterior materials.* It appears that at least on the new structure, the developer is proposing vinyl siding and PVC trim. This reviewer takes no issue with the choice of PVC for trim, but vinyl siding on a building of this scale will not be a good fit for the neighborhood. It is also a material that lacks long-term durability, which will lead to future maintenance and repair issues.
- 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.* A lighting plan, including an image of the head of a proposed pole mounted fixture and fixture schedule was submitted with the civil engineering drawings. No issues at this point.
- 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 at this point with the plans beyond potential screening/setback issues noted above.
- l. *Feasibility of incorporating environmental and energy performance standards in the design, construction and operation of the buildings.* See paragraph "i" above. The Design Narrative states that LED lighting is planned, Energy Star lighting and appliances are anticipated, as well as high efficiency DHW and space heating boilers are included in the scope.
- m. *Any other design-related considerations identified by the consultant (as of this date, there have been no working sessions and this reviewer has not attended a ZBA hearing for this project). However, design-related issues/considerations include:*
 - While the Design Narrative states that ground floor units will be visitable, there appear to be site stairs in the path to some of the units.
 - Similarly, while the architectural plans indicate that all of the ground floor units are either AAB Group 1 or 2 Units, an at-grade entry would be required to make that possible. Note that all ground floor units are required to be Group 1 in an un-elevated building).
 - The trash and recycling area is located close to the property line to the neighbor to the south. It is not possible to analyze the potential impact of this without seeing the neighboring building in the site plan, and having access to a site section that will describe the relationship of the dumpster to the neighbor's home.
 - The proposed four affordable units are indicated on the project plans. Three of the four are on the north side of the building (see comments above about views of the rear of the commercial building). The fourth affordable unit is a through unit, with all bedrooms on the north side. Has this intention been approved by the subsidizing agency?

- One of the four affordable units is designated as an AAB Group 2A unit. It is not clear that the layout of the unit meets the applicable dimensional requirements (note that a development of this scale may not be required to include any Group 2 units).
- All amenities provided within the new structure....including cage storage...likely need to be accessible (as do all site amenities, dumpster, etc.).
- How will mail delivery be handled on the site?
- Method for construction of retaining walls, particularly when near property lines, should be specified.
- Location of condensing units does not appear to be indicated on the site plans.
- Where do visitors arriving on bicycles park?
- Transformer does not appear to be indicated on the site plan.
- More detailed construction management/staging plans should be submitted.
- The site plan does not appear to provide a van accessible space, which may be required by code.
- The proposed management office is located on the second floor with no elevator access. Is this permissible?
- Sprinkler room is shown in two locations.
- The Design Narrative states that a fire sprinkler system is proposed for the new building. It is likely that the renovated building will have to be sprinklered as well.
- The proposed new floor plan in the renovated building shows a bedroom and kitchen in the former in-law space. Is this what is actually proposed? Would this make the proposed development 17 units?
- Letter from BOS states that the fire department has "has significant concerns regarding appropriate access for fire apparatus." Is this actually the case?
- There appears to be no fall protection indicated at the top of the retaining walls.

n. *Techniques to mitigate visual impact.* See sections above.

I hope that you will contact me with any questions you may have about my observations and/or analysis. Looking forward to discussing this project with you and the ZBA on the 18th!

Sincerely,
DAVIS SQUARE ARCHITECTS, INC



Clifford Boehmer AIA
President + Principal