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October 13, 2019

Christopher Heep
Miyares Harrington LLP
40 Grove Street
Wellesley, MA 02482

Re: Preliminary Architectural Review
136-140 Worcester Street 40B Development

Dear Chris:

In anticipation of the ZBA hearing for the proposed developments at 136-140 Worcester Street which is scheduled for Tuesday, October 15, 2019, I am providing you with a preliminary review of the project based on documents that have been provided to me, documents retrievable from the Town's website, and my impressions from a site visit on October 8.

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.

- Comprehensive Permit Site Approval Application (May 2016).
- Project Eligibility Site Approval Letter to SEB Wellesley, LLC dated May 17, 2019.
- Project Narrative Proposed Development 136-140 Worcester Street dated May 1, 2018.
- Architectural drawing set "136-140 Worcester Street" (11 sheets) dated 5.1.18 produced by McKay Architects
- Letter to Greg Watson from Geoffrey Engler dated February 13th 2019.
- Landscape Plan (Sheet C1) dated April 1, 2019 produced by Hayes Engineering.
- Existing conditions Narrative dated April 27, 2019.
- Transportation Impact Assessment prepared by Vanasse & Associates, Inc. dated April 2019.
- Letter to ZBA from VHB (traffic peer reviewer) dated September 9, 2019.
- Letter to ZBA from Vanasse & Associates dated September 30, 2019 (response to peer reviewer).
- Architectural drawing set "140 Worcester Street, Comprehensive Permit Package, 30 May 2019" (14 Sheets) produced by Cube 3.
- Overall context and dimensioned site plan (undated) by Cube 3 (received directly by email from developer).
- Memo to Steven Mortarelli (Wellesley Fire Department) from William Bergeron (Hayes) dated July 22, 2019.
- Engineering Plans set "136 & 140 Worcester Street" (13 sheets) dated July 22, 2019 (revision date).
- Image Boards and Landscape Palette dated 8/13/2019 produced by M.J. MRVA (Landscape Architect).
- Memo to Dan Behrend from Scott Jordan (EcoTec) dated September 15, 2019.
- Memo to George Saraceno (Wellesley DPW) from William Bergeron dated September 26, 2019.
- Parking Narrative & Move-in Operations memo from SEB Wellesley dated September 29, 2019.

Correspondence from the public

- Letter to ZBA from Rose Mary Donahue dated October 10, 2019.

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 October 8, 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:

(See MassHousing Project Eligibility/Site Approval letter dated May 17, 2019, pages 7 and 8 for description of surrounding area) This reviewer walked the site, as well as the Route 9 frontage from Willow Street to Dearborn Street, within the large commercial development immediately to the east of Dearborn, along the length of Dearborn to McLean Street, Webb Avenue and Burnett Lane, and all along Route 9 to Willow Street.

Perhaps the most notable aspect of the site is its physical isolation from the neighboring areas. At the moment, it is only marginally possible to walk along Route 9 to get to either Willow Street or Dearborn Avenue (which are the two streets that give access to all of the walkable neighborhoods to the south of Route 9). If it were possible to walk (or bike) along Worcester Street, it is approximately .9 mile walk to the Fiske Elementary School by way of Dearborn, a little shorter if it were possible to walk towards the west on Route 9. While the developer has indicated a willingness to consider construction a sidewalk that extends from the project site to Dearborn, there may be some significant hurdles to achieving that given areas of limited space available along the roadway (see photograph at the end of this report that may show an existing encroachment on the Route 9 right of way).

On the other hand, the site is very approachable by car, and as plans are developed, consideration should be given to encouraging sustainable strategies that acknowledge the heavy dependence on cars that the future residents will have. Some strategies are outlined in the Transportation Demand Management discussions in the VHB and Vanesse & Associates reports. In addition to developing strategies for "sustainable commuting", consideration should be given to addressing health (and cleanliness) issues that are associated with building close to major roadways. Fresh air systems must be designed to deal with intake air heavy with particulates and other pollutants, windows will likely need triple glazing or acoustical storms, extra sheet rock layers at exterior walls for additional sound mitigation, windows that are easily washable (e.g., tilt-in with removable screens), non-staining exterior finishes that will hold up to regular cleaning, etc.

Consult with the Applicant's design team, as appropriate:

Communication with the applicant's team has been limited to a request for an aerial context, dimensioned diagram, as well as one phone call with the developer to discuss the reasons for submitting a 40-unit development instead of a 64-unit one.

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 (oral presentation is scheduled for Tuesday, October 15):

- a. **Orientation of building in relation to parking areas, open space and on-site amenities.** The building stretches along most of the northern site frontage along Route 9. Parking is split between outdoor surface spaces, and spaces that occupy the podium level of the proposed 5-story structure. Between the building and the highway, a wide parking and drop-off lane is provided, with a two-way entry point on the west end, and a one-way exit curb cut on the eastern end. An at-grade tot lot and resident patio space is proposed on the south side of the building. While the usable open space is very limited, the site is adjacent to a large town-owned undeveloped parcel, which reportedly may have had trails within that are no longer maintained.

In addition to the tot lot and patio, a bus-stop is proposed to the immediate west of the building, close to Route 9, connected to the parking/delivery lane by a concrete walkway. This location is likely subject to approval by the school department. A safer location may be from the front building entry (assuming that the school bus can enter private property for student pick-up and drop-off).

- b. **Function, use and adequacy of open space and landscaped areas.** As noted above, there are limited on-site open spaces. These could potentially be enhanced by creating connections to the town-owned parcels, perhaps including some budget for improving trails within the forested area. Also, consideration should be given to enlarging the tot lot by eliminating the three parking spaces that are immediately adjacent to the play area (this loss of three spaces would still keep the parking ratio within a very reasonable level). If it is possible to provide a walkway/bikeway along Route 9 to connect with Dearborn, the future residents of the development will gain significant access to public, usable outdoor space.

A preliminary, rendered landscape plan was provided that is generally well reasoned and cognizant of issues that must be addressed. While the rendered perspectives include indications of new trees planted along Route 9, these are not shown on the site plan. A more detailed landscape plan would facilitate a more thorough review.

Given the modest amount of usable open space, consideration should be given to the creation of common outdoor space on the roof of the four story section of the south wing. This is currently noted as potential private decks for individual units. Perhaps the community space on the second floor could be located on the fifth level instead, with direct access to a shared roof deck. The high roof could potentially be developed for open space.

- c. **Use and treatment of natural resources.** See EcoTec report that speaks to adjacency to wetlands and riverfront. Some on-site tree loss will occur in order to develop the site, as well as some loss of vegetation within the Route 9 right of way necessary to provide adequate sight lines at the proposed curb cuts. Replacement of some trees is proposed, but needs to be described in greater detail.
- d. **Building design, setbacks, massing and scale in relationship to the surrounding context and topography.** As can be seen on the aerial-photograph-generated, dimensioned context plan, it is arguable that the site is relatively free from contextual constraints. Existing residential development is small scale, and typically makes efforts to screen the impact of the road from the home through high fencing and landscaping. This will be the first residential development in this area that will engage Route 9 (rather than "wishing" it weren't there). Taking that relationship to Route 9 as the primary public-realm "obligation" the building has, the design of the parking and delivery drive that separates the building from the road is paramount. Screening a building of this scale is not possible, nor is it desirable in the way that it is for single family homes. On the other hand, introducing roadside landscaping that can provide pleasant foreground elements, while screening the parked cars in front, would be a successful strategy. Some design intent in this direction is indicated in the rendered eye-level perspectives, but greater detail is required.

On the south, east, and west sides of the proposed structure, existing tree growth is significant. The closest home is 115 feet to the east, and it may be the only structure that will experience discernable impact from the new development. That end of the building is where loading and trash operations are concentrated, with no indication (seen by this reviewer) of what screening strategy would be incorporated into the design. The

preliminary landscape plan indicates new plantings along that eastern edge, but the civil plans call out that setback area as snow storage.

This reviewer suggests that moving the building towards the west should be studied. This would move some of the overflow-visitor parking nearer to the building entry, and create more buffering space between the structure and the nearest neighbor. In addition, it appears that relocating the building further to the west would move it further outside of the environmental setbacks. In any case, even if the building is not moved, more detail is required relative to proposed mitigation efforts at that end of the building.

The only nearby buildings that are close to the same scale as the proposed building are within the commercial complexes on both sides of Worcester Street to the east (and it doesn't appear that any of those are five stories). Significantly further away towards the west is MassBay Community College (which is screened from Route 9 with tree growth). Unlike most of the larger scale developments in the area, 136-140 is closer to the street, and does not feature a large, open parking field along its primary elevation. While it is closer to the street, given the width of Route 9, the height of the building does not seem excessive. With a well-developed landscaping plan for the parking/drop off lane, this project could potentially establish a new type of development for the typically harsh, haphazard pattern that has prevailed over many years.

There is also no nearby structure that is of a similar architectural language to the proposed building. Having said that, the building is clearly residential in nature given the apparent choice of materials, window sizes, and incorporation of the mansard roof element. While there are many façade decisions that are successful at breaking up the apparent scale of the structure, it still comes across as looking rather boxy. This is most apparent in the views from the west depicted in the eye-level renderings. It seems that the end elevations will both be prominent, and as currently proposed, the east is more successful than the west. Some more significant articulation of the footprint may be a good strategy, perhaps deeper bays and shadow-boxing of windows, etc. could help further break down the massing. More depth added to the base of the building could help, for example, addition of pilasters to define the ventilated areas would create deeper shadow lines. Increasing the size of the horizontal banding above the parking level would strengthen the reading of the base of the building. A more significant awning structure over the primary entry is worthy of study. As currently designed, the use of overall asymmetry in the façade is successful in decreasing the monumentality of the building.

It does not appear that there are material call outs on the building elevations. These must be provided in order to further assess the design of the building as seen from the public realm. As noted previously in this report, façade materials must be able to stand up to the rigors of adjacency to a heavily travelled highway.

Finally, views of mechanical equipment must be taken into consideration. It is possible that the building may need to incorporate a parapet structure (that would increase the height of the mansard roof). More localized screening of rooftop equipment may be necessary. While during daytime hours Route 9 provides sound masking, the acoustics of any rooftop equipment must be established to confirm compliance with local standards.

- e. **Viewsheds of the project visible from the public street, public areas and from the vantage point of nearby residential neighborhoods.** This has been discussed above, mainly citing the importance of mitigating the boxiness of the structure and using the front setback space to tie the building into the Route 9 corridor.
- 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.** As noted in previous paragraphs, this development is unabashedly dependent on access by automobile. To the degree that this aspect can be accommodated responsibly, the isolated nature of the site can be viewed as a positive factor, at least with respect to minimizing impact on existing neighbors. And in the case of this particular site, good immediate access to a currently underutilized public green space is a positive attribute. Most importantly, there is good, quick (albeit, vehicular) access to MBTA Green Line stops.

So in addition to the forward-looking provision of a walkway/bikeway that connects the site to Dearborn, other design features to consider that will enhance connectedness and compensate for vehicle dependence include:

- Encouraging/facilitation car-pooling to MBTA stops.
- Subsidize T-passes (at least temporarily).

- Increasing the number of electric vehicle spaces, perhaps decreasing the rental charges to encourage use of zero-emissions vehicles.
 - Consider zero-emission strategies for all building systems (i.e., no use of natural gas).
 - Super-insulate the structure to minimize utility costs.
 - Provide rooftop PV systems, at least for common space loads.
 - Provide more secure bike parking spaces within garage area.
- g. **Integration of building and site, including but not limited to preservation of existing tree cover, if any.** Discussed in paragraphs above. The developer has not yet submitted construction management plans. Considerably greater detail is required related to preservation of existing trees, as well as provision of new.
- 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). And as noted above, given the high dependence on cars at this development, enhanced energy efficiency helps to compensate for that project limitation.
- j. **Exterior lighting.** A preliminary photometric plan was provided. No problems noted at this point.
- k. **Proposed landscape elements, planting materials, and planting design.** Discussed in above paragraphs. More detailed plan required for adequate evaluation.
- 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 (including outdoor trash area screening).
 - Which units are proposed to be Group 2 accessible?
 - All required exterior accessible routes should be indicated on site plan.
 - Has the school bus waiting areas been approved? Can bus pick up kids in front parking/delivery area?
 - A detailed construction management/staging plans should be submitted to confirm basic construction feasibility.
 - Areas of grills or other open façade materials need to be designated on the building elevations.
 - Is a radon mitigation system anticipated in the new structures?
 - At western most outdoor parking spaces, screen headlight intrusion onto Route 9.
 - Should elevator lobby at parking level be enclosed?
 - Second floor amenity space may need two egress doors (see comments above about relocating amenity space to top floor, along with outdoor deck on south wing of building).
 - If bathrooms indicated on second floor are public, two may be required.
 - Are "potential outdoor balconies" indicated on plans shared by two units?
 - Is rooftop another possible place for usable outdoor space for all residents?
 - Electrical room may need second means of egress.
 - Is proposed transformer location suitable for access by utility company?

- Tot lot should be protected with bollards.
- Civil plans do not show walkways and patio space at rear of building.

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 this project with you and the ZBA on the 15th!

Sincerely,
DAVIS SQUARE ARCHITECTS, INC



Clifford Boehmer AIA
President + Principal



View towards Dearborn Street to east of project site.