



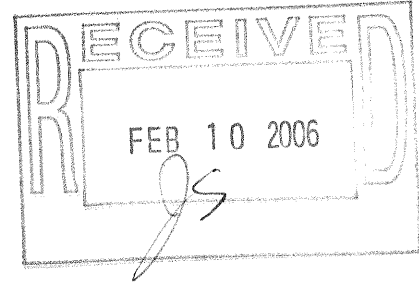
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February 10, 2006

Jay Szklut  
Planning & Economic Development Manager  
Office of Community Development  
19 Moore St.  
Belmont, MA 02478



Dear Mr. Szklut:

The Belmont Planning Board has reviewed the Belmont Uplands 40B application for the construction of the Residences at Acorn Park. Based on the site plan proposed and supporting documentation, the Board offers the following comments.

Site Design/Layout

The plan shows three entry/exit ways onto Acorn Park Drive. The curb cuts are close together, with short paved areas that connect to the three large at-grade parking lots. *The project should submit an analysis of morning and afternoon queuing and the safety of egress from the parking lots during peak hours.*

The plan shows five-foot sidewalks along the center parking lot, but no walks along either side of the north and south parking lots to the entrances to the residential buildings. The absence of walking areas separate from the parking lots presents a serious safety deficiency.

The plan shows a sidewalk on the west side of Acorn Park Drive that runs along the front of the proposed development only. *The sidewalk should be extended to provide pedestrian or bicycle connections to Frontage Road, the Little Pond neighborhood of Belmont and/or the Alewife T-station.*

The site as shown is completely covered by asphalt and buildings, with no green space internal to the site at all aside from storm water management ditches. *There should be some tradeoff of density, building height, and/or surface parking so that the buildings can be pulled in and reconfigured to include some open space within the development.* Will there be space other than the pool for outdoor recreation and activities for the residents? Play structures for children? Access to the pond? *Outdoor activities for the development's residents should be able to be accommodated without overtaxing what will be the adjacent conservation land.*

Understanding that these are not final designs, what is included so far of the building design shows no attempt to relate and incorporate these buildings into the rest of Belmont or reflect the "small-town community" feel of the town. *Design of the buildings should serve as a model of how dense housing can be aesthetically part of our community.*

Exception has been requested from sections 5.3.2(b), plantings rate and location, and 5.3.3(c) requirements for parking area. *Requiring landscaping to match what we expect to see in the rest of the town is reasonable.*

Setbacks at the rear of the building are within 25 ft. of the Alewife reservation. The front setback is close to Acorn Park Drive and presents the edge of the building to those driving by on the street. *The Planning Board recommends careful consideration of redesigning the project to address these concerns and other raised above.* The Zoning Board of Appeals may wish to consider increasing height as a trade off for a smaller footprint.

### Affordability

Belmont needs affordable housing. This is the most important feature of this project in considering what kind of asset it can be to the town. *We should try to maximize to the extent possible both the number of affordable units and the duration of the affordability restriction.*

### Transportation

The application notes that a shuttle service will be operated to the Alewife T-station. *Details of this service including frequency and long term maintenance of the service should be provided. Additionally, the Planning Board recommends that a permanent, safe, barrier free pedestrian/bicycle path to the Alewife T station be provided and maintained.*

Access to public bus service is noted as an indication of the appropriateness of the site for housing. *The project should provide attractive waiting areas and work with public transit authorities to insure bus service is convenient to the site.*

A complete review of Traffic Impacts and Assessment should be conducted to insure that proposed mitigations are adequate for the increased traffic resulting from this development.

Accessibility to the site, both from Belmont and in general, for the residents of the proposed complex is a major concern. Given the site's isolation and the large affordable component, it is likely that many residents will be transit-dependent. *A map should be prepared showing the site within its transit context – distance to all stops and the quality of walkways connecting them to the site, pedestrian access around Little Pond and to Lake Street.*

### Open Space/Recreation

With respect to the town's approved Open Space Plan of 2001, 760 CMR 31.07(3)(c) §3 states that "The inclusion of the proposed site in said open space or outdoor recreation plan shall create a presumption that the site is needed to preserve open spaces unless the applicant produces evidence to the contrary." The current zoning for the site as a research and development facility include the following: a minimum of 65% of the site is to be open space, with a maximum lot coverage of 20%, maximum impervious surface 35%, and maximum gross floor area 245,000. *The plan for housing should include justification for exceeding these limits, or should reconfigure the development to meet these approved limits.*

How will responsibility for management/maintenance of the open space be assigned under the planned conservation restriction? *The developer should provide an Open Space maintenance plan for the land placed under a conservation restriction.*

The site plan shows no provision for paths or walkways linking the development with the abutting Alewife reservation. *The proponent should work with Massachusetts Division of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) to develop a plan approved by DCR that provides reasonable connections to the Reservation.*

#### Stormwater/Wastewater

The Uplands area is an environmentally sensitive area due to the proximity of the river, pond and wetlands. Both adding to the overloading of the hydrology and drainage system in the area and pollution from sewage and storm water runoff are real concerns at this site. Information provided through a MEPA review provides assurances that the proposed mitigation measures will in fact be able to avoid harm. The developer should be required to provide this information whether or not there is a MEPA filing.

#### Environment/Sustainability

Large numbers of trees will be cut down for this project. Will there be any replanting on the site or elsewhere? Does the entire site have to be clear cut? Can some trees be identified to be saved? *A tree cutting plan should be developed with special emphasis on saving as many trees as possible.*

*To the extent possible, building construction and design should conform with LEED standards and should promote green building design principles.*

#### Miscellaneous

Location and number of handicapped parking spaces should be reviewed. *Spaces closer to building elevators would be preferable.*

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

Sincerely,

Planning Board, Town of Belmont  
Karl Haglund  
Andrew McClurg  
Sami Baghdady  
Jennifer Fallon