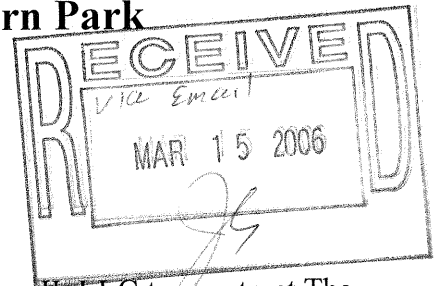


BELMONT POLICE DEPARTMENT

**Review of Petition of AP Cambridge Partners II, LLC to
Construct the Residences at Acorn Park**

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In considering the application by AP Cambridge Partners II, LLC to construct The Residences at Acorn Park, the Belmont Police Department recommends that the Zoning Board of Appeals consider the issues described below.

Geographic Isolation

The geographic isolation of the proposed site is significant. If the petitioner's plan is approved the 299 unit apartment complex will be isolated from the rest of the town by its position on the east side of Little Pond and the Little River and further geographically isolated from any emergency services (or evacuation routes) by its position in a narrow slice of land located between Route 2 to the north, the Little River and Boston and Maine rail bed to the south, and the Alewife T station to the east.

Even the most direct access to the site by vehicle from Belmont requires travel on a street controlled by another town: Lake Street, a public way in the Town of Arlington. The only other public access route to the site is to come off of Route 2 East onto the east end of Acorn Park Road in Cambridge then drive west to the development site.

If a hazardous materials incident occurred nearby on Route 2 and prevented egress from both ends of Acorn Park Road, truly extraordinary measures would be required to evacuate residents of the development across Little Pond or Little River and their associated wetlands.

The Zoning Board of Appeals may consider requiring the petitioner to provide an alternative access to the site for persons on foot. The board should consider the requirements of policing such a path because parts of it may also be isolated.

Response Times and Increased Calls for Service

Response Times

From the perspective of a police response to the Residences, the site's isolation should be understood in two stages. First, the route of a police response to a call for service at the proposed development would be driving east on Lake Street, then turning right to follow Frontage Road, then turning right to head south on Acorn Park Road.

From the intersection of Lake Street with Cross Street, the drive at typical patrol speeds to the proposed entrance of the complex is approximately 50 seconds.

In an emergency response this time would be shorter, yet an officer responding to a call would upon arriving be required to find the exact location of the incident among the five proposed four story structures and then get there by vehicle and foot. The 30 to 50 seconds of driving time therefore is significant in that it is (1) in addition, on average, to the response time to other addresses in town and (2) the location responded to provides additional challenges to the officer in getting to the precise location of the incident on foot.

If Frontage Road was unavailable, the alternative method of heading east on Route 2 and exiting at the east end of Acorn Park Road adds minutes of travel time. Should some hazard, road, or utility work close Frontage Road and the west end of Acorn Park Road it would mean a very long response time to the Residences.

There is no recommended standard for police response to incidents since the incidents vary between routine report and calls regarding an imminent risk of death or serious bodily harm. The police department can only provide a perspective for the Zoning Board of Appeals. The current average response time for calls on the police patrol route that covers the Upland site is 2 minutes and 2 seconds. This average is within 7 seconds of the average for the other two police routes into which the town is divided.

To significantly reduce what would be a longer than average response to the hundreds of residents who might live at the Uplands site would require the police department to add a fourth patrol route. (This route would not have to be dedicated to the Residences, but would also cover the Winnbrook section of Belmont.) To add another patrol route would require an increase in the minimum shift staffing from 3 patrol officers to 4. Whether accomplished through hiring or the use of overtime funds, such an increase would be a significant additional expense to the Town.

Second, the site's geographic isolation is increased further when considering the response of a second or "back up" officer to aid the first officer sent to an emergency call. Belmont is divided in a roughly 60/40 split by the Boston and Maine grade which provides only three crossings: Waverley Square, Belmont Center, and Hills Crossing. Because about 80 percent of the town's population resides on the 40 percent of the land south of the railroad grade, police patrol officers are assigned to patrol routes reflecting the call volume and, typically, 2/3rds of the patrol officers are south of the rail grade at any time.

The first officer responding to an emergency call at the proposed development would usually be the officer assigned to the patrol route that covers the area north of the railroad grade. The back-up officer would usually respond from south of the railroad grade through one of the crossings. The grade crossings therefore act as an additional filter, adding to the isolation of the proposed development from a full police response. (For example, an officer responding from the patrol route that covers the southeast corner

of town, driving at regular patrol speeds, upon reaching Hills Crossing on Brighton Street would still require two minutes and ten seconds more just to get to the proposed development entrance on Acorn Park Road.)

There is little flexibility the police department can work into its allocation of patrol officers given the need to deploy officers where the bulk of the police work is, south of the railroad grade. The next step in addressing the need to get two officers to the proposed development swiftly would necessarily be to increase the police department's minimum patrol staffing.

Increased Calls for Service

The police department sought out information from police departments whose communities host similarly-sized 40B housing developments in order to get an idea of the volume of police work such developments generate. Each of the communities listed below is classified by the state, like Belmont, as an economically developed suburb. The results were as follows:

Burlington Arboretum, Burlington
312 units/63 affordable

Year:	2001	2002	2003
Calls for service to the property:	212	229	194

Arbor Commons, Shrewsbury
302 units/76 affordable

Year:	2003
Calls for service to the property:	238

Avalon Ledges, Weymouth
304 units/61 affordable

Year:	2003
Calls for service to the property:	200

(Calls for service are the most general category and include all police services whether related to the investigation of crime or the provision of some other service, such as responding to medical aid calls or checking the well-being of a person.)

Based on these comparisons, the proposed Residences at Acorn Park, 299 units/60 affordable, would generate at least 200 calls for service directly on the property. This number would represent a 1.2% increase in the police department's calls for service above the 2005 level.

Residents do not require police services only at their homes, but also when they are about their business in town. Students are the victims of theft at the high school or a driver may be involved in a crash on a Cross Street or require a written warning on

Brighton Street. All of these would be police services provided because of the presence of these new residents in the community.

The Town does not yet have an accepted estimate for the development's likely population. The police department's rough estimate is 612 residents, arrived at as follows: one occupant for every bedroom of every unit (463 bedrooms) and one additional occupant for one-half of the 299 units.

The addition of 612 residents to Belmont's 2000 Census figure of 24,194 would be a 2.5% increase. Similarly, the increase by 300 housing units over Belmont's 2000 Census figure of 9,980 would be a 3% increase. In a town such as Belmont, with limited commercial and industrial development, the need for police services is sensitive to population and housing units. It is highly possible that the total increase in calls for service may rise to the 2.5 to 3.0 percent mark and thus be closer to 420 all together rather than just the 200 calls predicted at the development itself.

For purposes of perspective, the number of calls for service in 2005 divided by the number of officers on the department in 2005 equals 404. Again there is no easy standard available for how many calls for service should be handled by how many officers. The calls would be spread out over a 24 hour day and 7 day week so it is not as simple as hiring one officer who could handle all of the calls that the Residences development would generate on or off the property. But the board should understand that, if approved, the Residences would likely add to the police department's burden the equivalent of the workload of one police officer.

Bearing in mind the response time issues discussed above and considering also that the Residences would be added to over 100 town houses being built by Northland Development and over 450 senior housing units to be built by ARC, the ZBA should encourage the petitioner first, to provide additional funding for the increment of police services that the Residences will consume over what would be consumed by a development that complies with zoning, and second, to make every effort to reduce the opportunity for crime and disorder to occur at the Residences.

Traffic Flow and Safety

Without considering the number of vehicle trips to and from the proposed development, one traffic problem is obvious: access to the development from Route 2 East is awkward. Though a driver should exit Route 2 onto Acorn Park Road at its eastern end where the office park is and then drive west to the proposed development, it is likely some drivers seeking a quicker route or through mistake will leave Route 2 East at exit 60. (Drivers on Route 2 will be able to see the proposed development as they approach exit 60.) Since there is no direct link between the exit ramp and Acorn Park Road most of these drivers will then head west on Frontage Road before making a U-turn, either in the intersection of Lake Street at Frontage Road or across the low median strip on Frontage Road. Frontage Road is a highway approach without abutting buildings

that would give motorists a cue to slow down. A mistaken judgment on the part of a person making a U-turn would likely lead to a serious collision.

The increase in traffic that may be expected on Lake Street and at the intersection of Lake Street and Cross Street also presents the possibility of collisions where the intersection is currently controlled only by a stop sign for Cross Street traffic headed north.

Location of Site on Belmont/Cambridge Border

The proposed location of the development's southern vehicle entrance/exit places it adjacent to the border of Belmont and Cambridge. The board may wish to consider requiring the petitioner to pay the cost of permanently marking this border on both sides of Acorn Park Road so that Belmont and Cambridge police officers may properly allocate responsibility for investigation of vehicle crashes, traffic enforcement, and responses to calls for service that may occur in the adjoining open space.

Review for Application of Crime Prevention through Environmental Design

The design of the petitioner's project has been reviewed for incorporation of the three Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) strategies:

Natural Surveillance – Allowing or encouraging visual access to areas in which undesired conduct may occur so that: (1) people engaged in undesirable conduct may actually be observed, (2) people considering undesirable conduct will sense the risk of being observed, and (3) people engaged in appropriate conduct will feel safer because they are not isolated.

Natural Access Control – The environment, as built and before the addition of formal security systems, discourages or denies potential offenders access to locations in which they may engage in misconduct while allowing good citizens to take note of unusual conduct that may signal a potential offender's effort to gain entry into a location for the purpose of engaging in misconduct.

Territorial Reinforcement – The incorporation of physical features within the built environment that provide territorial cues aimed at influencing the behavior of users so that potential offenders are aware that they are trespassing upon someone else's "turf" while normal users not only feel safe, but are encouraged to have a sense of ownership that will cause them to take disapproving note of misconduct.

The overall goal of incorporating CPTED in the design is to allow for informal prevention of crime and disorder by a stable community that senses it has a stake in its semi-public areas.

Current Crimes at the Site

The proposed development will be isolated on the west and south by Little Pond and Little River, to the north by Frontage Road and Route 2, and to the east by wooded open space. Also to the east are office buildings, commercial properties, one abandoned building, and the Alewife MBTA station.

The police department does not have crime data or police activity data for the Belmont portion of the site and its surroundings because currently they consist of unoccupied open space. This does not mean that criminal activity has not been present, only that it has gone undetected if it has occurred. For example, on the south side of the Little River across from the development site, in Cambridge, there exists a campsite used from time to time by a homeless person or persons. It has come to the attention of police in the past because of larcenies committed by and noise complaints (reported by residents at neighboring Hill Estates) caused by the camp's occupants at different times. It is unknown whether similar activity is currently occurring on or near the site of the proposed development or whether, if built, the Residences would draw similar activity to establish itself nearby.

According to the Cambridge Police Department, Acorn Park, in Cambridge, has a low experience of reported crime.

The Residences will have a large parking lot full of cars in proximity to woodlands, for escape on foot, and a highway, for escape by vehicle. The potential exists for the location to be a target for automobile break-ins and theft. Nonetheless, nothing at this time indicates that the Residences will face an unusually high risk of criminal activity.

Natural Surveillance

The layout of the buildings and parking lots generally succeeds in providing natural surveillance. The outdoor activity of the development will take place mostly within sight of at least two buildings. The outdoor parking is partly within a semi-circle formed by buildings B and D. The parking is connected in small lots to the buildings rather than placed in large lots at the fringes of the development. This is ideal because residents will be able to look out of their windows and check on their cars, thus encouraging residents to observe activity generally in the parking lots. This territorial behavior will lead to a greater chance that misconduct in the lots will be detected.

The lighting plan, however, falls short of the guidelines recommended by the Illuminating Engineering Society of North America. Surface parking area illumination should be 3-5 footcandles, parking structure ramps 10 footcandles, pedestrian walkways 5 footcandles, and designated pedestrian crossings should be 8-10 footcandles. Appropriate lighting allows users to detect potential offenders and hazards, deters offenders who fear being observed, and, by making users feel safer, encourages appropriate outdoor activity that in itself can deter misconduct.

Natural Access Control

The petitioner's plan is to maintain the area surrounding the proposed development as open space for recreation. Both residents of the Residences and members of the public will be welcome in the open space.

In a multi-family development it is important that regular routes of access be established and irregular routes prohibited. This is because established routes of access allow residents to take note of people as they enter. This increases the potential for detection of an offender and also leads to a potential offender sensing the scrutiny. If all points around the perimeter of the development are permitted as access routes, scrutiny will be decreased as residents grow to accept that a person may enter the development from anywhere. Also, decisions to commit crimes are sensitive to how easy the location of the target is to enter and exit. The longer either entry or exit appears to take, the less likely the decision to commit the crime.

For vehicular access, three entrances and exits are planned. While this is useful for the high volume of traffic during commuting times, it is less than ideal for access control. Though not strictly a CPTED strategy, the board may wish to establish hours during which the middle entrance will be gated. Or the board may wish to establish a condition that two of the three vehicular access points be gated and require a pass card for entry. The third will remain open for visitors and other members of the public.

Pedestrian access to the site should be had only through clearly established access points. Access points may be established primarily through the use of barrier landscaping, which has thorns, needles, or a dense structure. Barrier landscaping will deny or slow a person seeking to enter the site and call attention to a person seeking to move through the barrier. Walls or fences may supplement landscaping, especially between buildings B and D which offer entry from the open space directly to the pool area. Planned access points should be established through paving, guide walls, and signs.

Barrier landscaping could also be useful on the remote sides of buildings B and D to keep people away from the base of those buildings where young residents or others might find they may congregate below the window line and therefore out of sight.

Territorial Reinforcement

The clear marking of entrances to the site, both pedestrian and vehicular, should be encouraged as visitors should know they are leaving public space and entering semi-public space.

The ideas expressed above regarding access control double to encourage territorial behavior – the realization of visitors that they are on someone else's turf and the encouragement of residents to take an interest in what is happening on their development's property. Increased attention to outdoor activity leads to decreased crime and disorder.

Inside the apartment buildings, territorial concern for interior common areas may be fostered by allocating to each apartment some of the wall space in the hallway (consistent with fire regulations) adjacent to its door for display. Some similar arrangement may be possible in the building lobbies.

Additional recommendations

Parking lots serve one function: parking. People in a hurry move to their vehicles, climb in them, and go. On return they park and hurry to their buildings.

The more pedestrian traffic in a location, the safer the location is likely to feel and be. People on foot become observers whose presence deters criminal activity. The proposed development could benefit through an increase in day and night time pedestrian traffic. Though the pool and exercise facility will provide incentives for residents to walk through the development, more should be done.

Though it is not consistent with the town's zoning by-law, the police department recommends the board consider requiring the developer to place one or more retail uses in building C. The retail uses should be oriented towards the development and would serve as a reason for residents to walk through their development. The police department recommends a small convenience store, a sit-down coffee shop, and a dry cleaner's kiosk as possibilities.

A convenience store, aside from increasing pedestrian traffic, will have the benefit of reducing vehicular traffic between the site and the nearest convenience stores (on Massachusetts Avenue in Arlington or Brighton Avenue in Belmont). A coffee shop will increase the pedestrian traffic, reduce vehicular traffic, and also provide a meeting and gathering place that may assist residents in forming relationships that lead to a community capable of resolving problems informally. A drycleaner's kiosk would decrease vehicle trips.

All three uses would have the additional benefit to the community of providing, through the employees in the businesses, additional sets of eyes watching what is going on. At night, the businesses become lighted beacons of activity that can decrease apprehension in those who are using the parking lot. Further still, jobs would be created that likely would go to development residents. Care and will have to be taken, through the appropriate design of this retail components and their hours of operation, that these uses do not themselves become nuisances to the residents.

If the Zoning Board of Appeals decides to include retail uses, it must be made clear to the petitioner that the uses are a condition to reduce the project's impact, not an opportunity for profit. The retail uses, because of their small customer base, cannot be expected to pay market rent.

Adding this small retail component to the petitioner's project addresses the Commonwealth's sustainable design guidelines by providing transportation choice (increasing pedestrian access) and increasing job opportunities.

For a reference on CPTED, please see attached circular created by the Los Angeles Police Department. For more detail, see Crowe, Timothy D., Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design, 2nd. ed., Boston: Butterworth-Heinemann, 2000.