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August 3, 2021

Ara Yogurtian
TOWN OF BELMONT
Office of Community Development
ayogurtian@belmontma.gov

Re: 115 Mill Street Zoning Compliance Study

Dear Ara:

In anticipation of tonight's Planning Board hearing, I am providing you with a brief report reflecting my review to date of the proposed development of the Zone 3 parcels at 115 Mill Street. This letter is formatted to roughly follow the fee proposal that I submitted to you last month.

Thanks again for giving Davis Square Architects (DSA) the opportunity to work with you, and I hope you will get in touch with me with any questions you may have. As you know, I am unable to attend the hearing due to previous commitments, but I am available later in the week or next week (or can attend a future hearing) if you or any of the Planning Board members would like to talk in greater detail.

Review the developer's plans for the proposed development.

The documentation that I have reviewed has been very well prepared and appropriate for this stage of design of the buildings and site (which I would categorize as advanced Schematic Design). In particular, the drawings with accompanying text that directly relates to the Zoning ordinance is effective, and appears to be accurate. Also, of particular interest is the documentation that compares the proposed townhouses with the existing townhouse construction in Zone 2, as well as the comparison of the previous Freedom Commons proposal for the site.

While I do not want to represent that this letter is a legal analysis of the ordinance (which would be outside the range of my expertise) my initial conclusion is that with very few, minor "exceptions" subject to interpretation, the proposed project complies with all aspects of the ordinance. At a minimum, the Purposes and Design Guidelines of the statute are met, and I have found nothing of great substance to take issue with as far as compliance related to the dimensional requirements within the ordinance. Some additional detail and questions related to compliance are included in other sections of this letter.

To date, I have reviewed the following documents:

- Slide deck McLean Zone 3, The Residences at Bel Mont Planning Board Meeting #2 dated June 1, 2021.
- Slide deck McLean Zone 3, The Residences at Bel Mont Planning Board Meeting Townhouse Unit Heights, Living Area & Gross Floor Area dated June 22, 2021.
- Slide deck McLean Zone 3, The Residences at Bel Mont Planning Board Meeting Zone 2 & Zone 3 Townhouse Comparison & Subdistrict B Architecture dated July 6, 2021.
- Slide deck McLean Zone 3, The Residences at Bel Mont Planning Board Meeting dated July 20, 2021.
- Drawing set The Residences at Bel Mont Zone 3 – McLean District – Subdistrict B Application for Design & Site Plan Review prepared by TAT, dated April 16, 2021.
- Drawing set The Residences at Bel Mont Zone III McLean District consisting of 9 building sections prepared by TAT dated April 16, 2021 (revision date 7/20/2021).
- Drawing set The Residences at Bel Mont Zone III McLean District consisting of 9 building sections prepared by TAT dated April 16, 2021 (version 2, revision date 7/20/2021).

- Drawing set The Residences at Bel Mont Zone III McLean District consisting of 20 sheets of enlarged floor plans and square footages prepared by TAT dated April 16, 2021 (revision date 7/20/2021).
- The Residences at Bel Mont – Subdistrict A Floor Area Summary dated July 20, 2021.

Before more discussion on compliance, based on the documentation that I have reviewed, combined with a walkthrough of the site and existing developments on the campus, I would like to make some comments on the proposed building designs, starting with the Townhouses in Subdistrict A:

- The aesthetic of the new townhomes, while a bit more contemporary than the previous Zone 2 buildings, is compatible both with the existing townhomes across the street, but also the historic buildings on the site.
- While the site is topographically challenging, the designs are well integrated into the existing contours, respecting the nature of the site and fostering a variety of overall building forms and unit types.
- The site plan is well worked out with an appropriate density and with respect to pedestrian circulation within and around the proposed buildings.
- Overall massing and building footprints are well articulated, with building scale further broken down through the use of a variety of materials and colors.
- The scale and articulation of the streetfacing elevations successfully engages with the street, and contribute to the pedestrian-friendly atmosphere of the development.
- While I did not review the civil engineering drawings, the renderings appear to show public walkways that are quite narrow (they appear to be no more than 4 feet wide). If this is the case, I would encourage a minimum public walk minimum of 5 feet. Also, while a planting strip is indicated in renderings that separates the walks from the roadways, there does not appear to be a pattern of street trees indicated. My assumption is that there are landscape drawings that do include all plantings, and if this is the case, the renderings should be coordinated with the locations and types of all significant landscape materials.
- Generally, the new generation of townhouses are scaled back from the completed homes, both with respect to building heights and square footage.
- All of the proposed townhomes have a relatively high percentage of glazed areas in their facades, a larger percentage than the Zone 2 homes. This is an attractive feature in my opinion.
- Roofscapes are more active and less dominating than the previous generation of townhomes, articulated with nicely-scaled shed dormers. This reviewer believes that some of the dormers should have a higher percentage of glazing so that they look less boxy. Consideration should also be given to pulling some of the dormers back from the plane of the wall below and perhaps increasing the roof slope in order to decrease the streetfacing wall height of some of the dormers.
- Chapel adaptive reuse drawings were not included in the drawing set that I reviewed, although my understanding is that those two units are part of the townhome/home ownership phase.
- The Applicant should prepare a memo that describes compliance with the regulations of the Massachusetts Architectural Access Board, or if not fully compliant, describe any variances that may be sought.
- Is all proposed ground-mounted mechanical equipment indicated on site plans?

Following are preliminary design comments on the Subdistrict B, larger multi-family structures:

- Unit count and mix are appropriate, as well as vehicular parking count that appears to comply with the statute.
- Building massing is well articulated, and the mix of materials and their deployment on the building facades is effective in breaking down the scale of the buildings.
- Placement of the taller structure at the location more distant from the townhomes makes sense.
- The buildings effectively work with the natural grades, create visual interest, and make good use of subterranean space for parking.
- As is the case with the townhomes, the Applicant should prepare a memo that describes compliance with the regulations of the Massachusetts Architectural Access Board, or if not fully compliant, describe any variances that may be sought. Given the sloped site, and proposed pedestrian access points, this is of particular importance. This reviewer sees no potential issues with meeting Group 2 unit compliance requirements, although the location of these apartments should be designated as part of the compliance memo.
- There are potential privacy issues with the ground floor units that face the outdoor parking court. There is very limited space available for effective landscape buffering of the windows of those units. Consideration should be given to shrinking the width of the parking court by the elimination of at least two of the parking spaces shown in the double-loaded section of the parking area. This would allow the expansion of the plantable area that separates the cars facing the units from the building wall. Another option, which could be combined with increasing the landscape buffer, is to raise the grade of the first floor, at least in the sections of the building with units that face the parking. This can be achieved with either sloped exterior walkways or internal ramping up to the corridors feeding units.

- This reviewer did not have access to a photometric plan for the development.
- Applicant should ensure that there is adequate, permanently striped-off or otherwise fully dedicated delivery space at the entry points of the building, sized so that common types of drop-off vans do not obstruct flow of residential cars or emergency vehicles. Suitable move-in area should also be confirmed.
- Interior bicycle parking does not appear to comply with design requirements that state that there should be space for 56 bikes, 80% of which must be inside (45 spaces). If each space is 30 inches wide as required, this would total 112 lineal feet of bike parking. The room designated for bike parking does not appear to be sized for this.
- Is there bike parking at the building entries for visitors to the development?
- The applicant appears to have committed to 15 EV spaces. While this may be adequate in the very short term, provisions should be made in the building design for a significant increase in this number in the future (for example, conduit runs and adequate transformer sizing).
- Applicant should prepare a memo with specific responses and commitments to Environmental Design provisions of the statute.
- I have some concerns with the proposed building sections that indicate a deep well at the roof level designed to conceal mechanical equipment. There may be issues with snow drifting within that space that could cause problems with the mechanical equipment. There are also significant waterproofing challenges associated with a well of that scale. Finally, this design creates challenges for a meaningful introduction of PV panels, which are best placed on flat roofs with suitable solar orientation. My suggestion is to do sight-line studies to determine the minimum well depth that is required to conceal all rooftop equipment, including PV panels that would be minimally shaded by a low parapet wall (i.e., well depth).
- Given the small amount of garage ventilation panels indicated on the building elevations, my assumption is that the garage space will be mechanically ventilated. Applicant should confirm this, and only show minimum areas of louvers at the garage level.
- It is not clear from the building elevations what type of garage doors are proposed.
- Are emergency generator and transformer spaces indicated on the site plans provided by the civil engineer or other consultant?

Review compliance memo prepared by the project architect.

The architect for the project did not produce a "compliance memo", however, as noted above, the submitted materials included drawings with direct references to language in the ordinance. In addition, a matrix of floor areas was produced for the Subdistrict A units. Other information related to the zoning ordinance is included in the slide decks prepared for the Planning Board presentations. This reviewer is satisfied with the level of compliance-related documentation that has been provided.

Visit the site to review previous similar developments and assess proposed site plan.

I walked the site and surrounding areas with the applicant and the architectural team on Tuesday, July 27th.

Consult with the applicant, their design team, and Town officials, as appropriate.

In addition to the site walkthrough on the 27th of July, I have had several email and phone exchanges with the Applicant to ensure that I was in possession of all current architectural submissions, as well as presentations to the Planning Board.

Review Town zoning ordinance that applies to development on the site.

To facilitate the study of documents produced by the Applicant, I have reviewed the Warrant Article for the 2020 Special Town Meeting – September 2020, the Amendment to the McLean Zoning District dated August 26, 2020. Some comments and questions are:

- My assumption (and hope, as I think the aesthetic is appropriate) is that the shed roofs on the dormers are acceptable under the ordinance, as they are "building elements" that are under one story in height. The language of the statute is somewhat ambiguous, as it could be read that because the building itself is greater than one story, shed roofs are not acceptable.
- There does not appear to be any language in the Subdistrict B Performance and Design Standards that refers to rooms that are not "living rooms, home office/den, etc." that appears to be intended to disallow these potential auxiliary rooms from being used as bedrooms (this language does appear in the Subdistrict A Standards). Therefore, my conclusion is that the dens that are shown in the larger, multifamily buildings are acceptable.
- I did not have access to the civil engineering drawings, but they should be reviewed in detail to confirm that retaining wall heights conform with dimensional limitations (a drawing section in the architectural set depicts a wall height that appears to be very close to 10 feet high). Also, in renderings and sections, any intended railing systems or parapets on the retaining walls should be shown.

- It appears that if some of the unfinished basement spaces were counted in the townhouses, the GSF limitations could be exceeded. In my opinion, given that the spaces in question are fully subterranean, their "developability" is severely limited, and could not be used in any way that could legally increase the occupancy of the units (which presumably is one of the primary intents of the design restrictions in the statute). If it is of importance to the Board, restrictions on the use of these spaces could be included within the deeds and condominium documents. Note that the statute does exclude "unfinished garages" and "unfinished attic space", both of which are arguably more potentially "developable" than subterranean basement space.
- My assumption is that the "appearance" of a sloped roof on the larger multi-family buildings, as visible from all angles, is compliant under the statute (as opposed to an "actual", full width sloped roof with a ridge). I believe that this is a critical (and desirable) element in order to accommodate the dimensions of a double-loaded corridor building without having to resort to a very low pitch "actual" sloped roof in order to comply with height restrictions.
- I have not had access to civil and landscape materials to confirm conformance with various design guidelines and requirements relative to site furniture, trash receptacles, buffer areas, etc.
- Other documentation (which may be part of the record) that I have not reviewed include a Construction Management Plan (which would include Tree Protection), Construction Schedule, Traffic circulation.

Provide an initial written memo that summarizes findings of activities noted above.

In addition to this memo, this reviewer will remain available to the Board for a hearing appearance or to respond to any questions that may arise relative to the proposed development.

Be available to attend a Planning or Zoning Board to present the memo.

As noted above, I am unavailable for the August 3 hearing, but can be available if required in the future.

In briefest summary, my belief is that the proposed development, both the townhouse and larger multi-family areas, will be a positive addition to the McLean complex. It is clear that the changes in the zoning that have made this development possible were well thought out and have led to a positive outcome.

Again, thanks for asking me to propose on this project. I hope you will let me know if you have any questions about my initial thoughts as laid out in this brief letter.

Sincerely,
DAVIS SQUARE ARCHITECTS, INC

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'C. Boehmer', with a stylized, flowing script.

Clifford Boehmer AIA, Principal