



November 13, 2021

Mr. Robert Hummel  
Senior Planner  
Town of Belmont  
19 Moore Street  
Belmont, MA 02478

RE: Response to Davis Square Architects' Peer Review  
McLean Zone 3 Residential Development

Dear Mr. Hummel:

We have reviewed the August 3, 2021, Zoning Compliance Study prepared by Davis Square Associates in reference to their review of 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.

We offer the following response:

**Subdistrict A, Comment 1** - *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.*

**Response:** Comment noted, no response required.

**Subdistrict A, Comment 2** - *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.*

**Response:** Comment noted, no response required.

**Subdistrict A, Comment 3** - *The site plan is well worked out with an appropriate density and with respect to pedestrian circulation within and around the proposed buildings.*

**Response:** Comment noted, no response required.

**Subdistrict A, Comment 4** - *Overall massing and building footprints are well articulated, with building scale further broken down through the use of a variety of materials and colors.*

**Response:** Comment noted, no response required.

**Subdistrict A, Comment 5** - *The scale and articulation of the street-facing elevations successfully engages with the street and contribute to the pedestrian-friendly atmosphere of the development.*

**Response:** Comment noted, no response required.

**Subdistrict A, Comment 6** - *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.*

**Response:** With few exceptions, the proposed minimum sidewalk width is 5 feet. Please refer to the civil drawings, dated April 16, 2021, for all proposed sidewalk widths. The landscape drawings, dated April 16, 2021, do show proposed plantings, including street trees. The site and building computer modeling used for the renderings is an illustration tool and does not, in every way, reflect the more detailed application record document submission package. Where feasible we have updated the illustrative models to incorporate significant/important landscape detail.

**Subdistrict A, Comment 7** - *Generally, the new generation of townhouses are scaled back from the completed homes, both with respect to building heights and square footage.*

**Response:** Comment noted, no response required.

**Subdistrict A, Comment 8** - *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.*

**Response:** Comment noted, no response required.

**Subdistrict A, Comment 9** - *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 street-facing wall height of some of the dormers.*

**Response:** As outlined in our August 3<sup>rd</sup> Planning Board Presentation, we have proposed some revision to the townhome dormers at Building 7 to reduce the perceived wall height facing Olmsted Drive. We do not believe this adjustment is necessary or appropriate at townhomes internal to the site where fronting on non-public facing wooded areas or internal roadways.

**Subdistrict A, Comment 10** - *Chapel adaptive re-use 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.*

**Response:** Correct – two for-sale units are proposed as part of the Chapel Building adaptive re-use.

**Subdistrict A, Comment 11** - *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.*

**Response:** An email message, dated June 23, 2021, describing compliance with the regulations of the Massachusetts Architectural Access Board was provided to the Planning Board and is posted to the “Planning Board” section of the Town’s website. As outlined in the email, the project design is in full compliance with the Massachusetts Architectural Access Board regulations. No variances are being sought.

**Subdistrict A, Comment 12** - *Is all proposed ground-mounted mechanical equipment indicated on site plans?*

**Response:** A preliminary layout of proposed ground-mounted mechanical equipment is indicated in the landscape drawings, dated April 16, 2021. See sheets L-1.2 through L-1.5 and L-2.1 through L-2.5.

---

**Subdistrict B, Comment 1** - *Unit count and mix are appropriate, as well as vehicular parking count that appears to comply with the statute.*

**Response:** Comment noted, no response required.

**Subdistrict B, Comment 2** - *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.*

**Response:** Comment noted, no response required.

**Subdistrict B, Comment 3** - *Placement of the taller structure at the location more distant from the townhomes makes sense.*

**Response:** Comment noted, no response required.

**Subdistrict B, Comment 4** - *The buildings effectively work with the natural grades, create visual interest, and make good use of subterranean space for parking.*

**Response:** Comment noted, no response required.

**Subdistrict B, Comment 5** - *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.*

**Response:** An email message, dated June 23, 2021, describing compliance with the regulations of the Massachusetts Architectural Access Board was provided to the Planning Board and is posted to the “Planning Board” section of the Town’s website. As outlined in the email, the

project design is in full compliance with the Massachusetts Architectural Access Board regulations. No variances are being sought.

**Subdistrict B, Comment 6** - *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 plant-able 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.*

**Response:** As indicated in the landscape drawings, dated April 16, 2021, the ground floor units facing the outdoor parking court are set back from the edge of the parking lot by approximately 18 feet for majority of the units, providing a generous landscape buffer to mitigate any potential privacy issues.

**Subdistrict B, Comment 7** - *This reviewer did not have access to a photometric plan for the development.*

**Response:** A photometric plan for the development is provided in the landscape drawings, Sheets L-3.1, L-1.2, L-1.3 & L-1.4, dated April 16, 2021.

**Subdistrict B, Comment 8** - *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.*

**Response:** As indicated in the landscape and civil drawings, dated April 16, 2021, a dedicated area for FEDEX, UPS, DOOR DASH, UBER et al deliveries and move-ins, measuring approximately 18 ft. x 80 ft., is provided in the parking court near entry points to the buildings.

**Subdistrict B, Comment 9** - *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.*

**Response:** An interior bike room is provided accommodating 56 bikes. Note that a two-tier bicycle rack system is proposed for more space-efficient storage of bikes. The room is sized sufficiently to accommodate 56 bikes when utilizing the proposed bike rack system.

**Subdistrict B, Comment 10** - *Is there bike parking at the building entries for visitors to the development?*

**Response:** Outdoor bike parking is not provided at building entries in the current design, but design revisions are currently being prepared to provide for this. Please note that this recommendation was discussed between our traffic consultant and the Town's traffic peer reviewer.

**Subdistrict B, Comment 11** - *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).*

**Response:** Consistent with McLean District Zone 3 Overlay Zoning, Section 6B.5.3.f.6.ii, fifteen (15) parking spaces (10% of all of the common garage parking spaces) are provided with EV charging stations. The project team has committed to increase this to 20% and explore the feasibility of providing the required infrastructure to allow for EV charging stations expansion.

**Subdistrict B, Comment 12** - *Applicant should prepare a memo with specific responses and commitments to Environmental Design provisions of the statute.*

**Response:** A memo has been prepared and submitted to the Planning Board which outlines specific responses and commitments to the Environmental Design provisions of the statute. See Project Team Responses to Energy Committee Comments dated 11.1.21

**Subdistrict B, Comment 13** - *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).*

**Response:** A sight-line study as well as a shading study will be completed during the preparation of construction documents to determine the ideal depth of the equipment well.

**Subdistrict B, Comment 14** - *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.*

**Response:** This assumption is correct – the garage will be mechanically ventilated. Proposed louvers are indicated on the exterior elevation drawings, dated April 16, 2021. The design of the garage ventilation system will be finalized during the preparation of construction documents and a goal of the design will be to minimize the area of louvers.

**Subdistrict B, Comment 15** - *It is not clear from the building elevations what type of garage doors are proposed.*

**Response:** Insulated steel roll-up doors are proposed.

**Subdistrict B, Comment 16** - *Are emergency generator and transformer spaces indicated on the site plans provided by the civil engineer or other consultant?*

**Response:** We do not expect an emergency generator will be provided, although further review of this will occur during the preparation of construction documents. Final locations for transformers will be determined during the preparation of construction documents with review and approval by the electric utility company.

---

**General, Comment 1** - ***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.

**Response:** In addition to the documents noted in the comment above, a Zoning Summary Chart is provided on Drawing C3.00 (Layout & Materials Plan by VHB), dated April 16, 2021. Further, a Zoning Summary Chart for Subdistrict A is provided on Drawing T0.02 (Drawing Index, Project Information & Key Plan by TAT), dated April 16, 2021. Finally, a Zoning Summary Chart for Subdistrict B is provided on Drawing T0.02 (Drawing Index, Project Information & Key Plan by TAT), dated April 16, 2021.

**General, Comment 2 - 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.

**Response:** Comment noted, no response required.

**General, Comment 3 - 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.

**Response:** Comment noted, no response required.

**General, Comment 4 - Review Town zoning ordinance that applies to development on the site.** 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.

**Response:** Comment noted, no response required.

**General, Comment 5 - Review Town zoning ordinance that applies to development on the site.** 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.

**Response:** Comment noted, no response required.

**General, Comment 6 - Review Town zoning ordinance that applies to development on the site.** 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.

**Response:** See the civil drawings, dated April 16, 2021, for proposed retaining wall heights.

**General, Comment 7 - Review Town zoning ordinance that applies to development on the site.** 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 “develop-ability” 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.

**Response:** Comment noted, no response required.

**General, Comment 8 - Review Town zoning ordinance that applies to development on the site.** 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.

**Response:** Agreed.

**General, Comment 9 - Review Town zoning ordinance that applies to development on the site.** 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.

**Response:** See the civil and landscape drawings, dated April 16, 2021, for site furniture, trash receptacles, buffer areas, etc.

**General, Comment 10 - Review Town zoning ordinance that applies to development on the site.** 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.

**Response:** Comment noted, no response required.

**General, Comment 11 - 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.**

**Response:** Comment noted, no response required.

Please contact me with any questions at 617-889-4402 or by email at ebradford@architecturalteam.com.

Very truly yours,  
**THE ARCHITECTURAL TEAM, INC.**



Edward R. Bradford, AIA LEED AP  
Principal

CC: John C. Dawley, President & CEO, Northland Residential Corporation