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Mr. Mark Parent, Chair
c/o Brandon Toponce, Senior Planner
Amherst Zoning Board of Appeals
Town of Amherst Town Hall
4 Boltwood Avenue
Amherst MA 01002

To the Chairman and the Members of the Zoning Board of Appeals:

I urge the Zoning Board of Appeals to approve the proposed "North Square" project within the North Amherst Village Center.

In the late 1970s, Amherst adopted a Master Plan to guide future growth. One of the principal tenets of that plan was to designate several Village Centers, distinct from the historic Town Center, where investment in multipurpose housing, as well as commercial, professional, and even technology enterprises could be concentrated.

In the intervening years since the 1970 Master Plan was adopted, major investments have occurred in all of the designated Village Centers with that conspicuous exception of the North Amherst Village Center. The Core of the North Amherst Village Center, the triangle bounded by Montague Rd. (Route 63), Sunderland Rd., and Cows Rd., has only in the last two years seen substantial investment in the Atkins Farms Market and the one building across Cows Road from the market which houses Bread & Butter and The Lift Salon.

The Zoning Board of Appeals has before you the proposed "North Square" project to build 130 units of mixed-use housing, all one, two, and three bedroom apartments, including 26 affordable units, and with general commercial services occupying the first floor of each of the buildings in the complex. Carefully planned and landscaped open space and plenty of parking are included. All of this on a roughly 5-acre plot in the northwest corner of the North Amherst Village Center that was once a thriving lumber mill now abandoned.

The total investment involved is more than \$40 million. The site is the nearest thing to blight which cannot be found in any of the other Village Centers in Amherst.

The developer, *Beacon Communities*, is based in Boston. They have a stellar reputation for development and management of rental housing. They own and manage more than 12,000 units, more than 80% of which are in some 50 projects in Massachusetts communities. *Beacon Communities* plans carefully, listens carefully to input from communities they choose to serve, incorporates much of those inputs into the final plans, and, most importantly, they produce what they have agreed to do.

As nearby examples, in Greenfield, *Beacon Communities* has done a beautiful 100+ unit, adaptive-reuse, renovation of an old manufacturing mill on Wells Street. In Easthampton, *Beacon Communities* developed the Tree House project which is a community of single-family homes designed for the needs of elders and for families who provide a home for or adopt children in the states' foster care program. This is an exemplary, innovative project.


And right here in Amherst, *Beacon Communities*, 3 years ago, bought Rolling Green with its over 200 mixed-income apartments and assured the continuance of those units designated as affordable in perpetuity. This was so important for Amherst that Amherst committed \$1,250,000 from the Community Preservation Act account for the purchase and preservation of the affordable units. Since the purchase, *Beacon Communities* has invested approximately \$4.5 million (\$22,000/unit) to complete extensive renovations.

I urge the Zoning Board of Appeals to approve the "North Square" project. Both the housing and the commercial development is needed, especially in the North Amherst Village Center.

I believe the "North Square" will serve as a catalyst for additional investments in North Amherst Village Center.

I am confident that, when completed, Amherst will have good reason to be proud of the product.

Sincerely yours,


John W. Olver

Cc: Chair, Town of Amherst Select Board