

What's Next?

A Visionary Look Ahead to a Best Possible Future For the people of North Square/Mill District/ North Amherst, Massachusetts

from your friendly professional mediator

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I. Executive Summary

As a 15-year resident of Mill Hollow Apartments (by the waterfall at Puffer's Pond)—and a friend and acquaintance of many people in the neighborhood—including the owner and realty-representative of Cows Building Supply, I am pleased to see Cows' developer, Beacon Communities, nearly complete the permitting process (a comprehensive permit available through the Amherst Zoning Board of Appeals under MGL 40B, for developers who will build 20% "affordable units") to construct and manage 130 apartments in two buildings (for approx. 225 residents) on 5.3 acres of unused land known as "North Square" at 92 and 134 Montague Rd., North Amherst.

I am saddened by the fact that Beacon has included, among the indoor "amenities" at North Square, plans for only **small groups** in their fitness center, "club lounge" with WiFi, mail room, snack bar, "common room," etc.—nothing like (e.g., the 75' x 30' meeting-space which Bea-

con built for Tree House Foundation in Easthampton (with a "meeting room" big enough to gather the community, to eat together periodically, celebrate together, mingle with visitors from their larger neighborhood, and solve problems that come up.

Residents of the North Amherst area are understandably put-off by the influx of hundreds of new neighbors, without opportunity to meet them, and some of these citizens have organized to stop (or change) the Beacon plan, criticizing it as "too big, too dense, and too tall" (maximum four stories). They have retained a lawyer to spearhead their efforts

I am saddened by this, but I do not despair of hoping that North Square will contribute to the "friendly ambience" of North Amherst, in view of the following future possibility, about which I have maintained some discussion through shuttle-diplomacy between the parties.

II. Needs Assessment

1. For the residents of North Amherst to come to know and appreciate the proposed new residents of North Square—and for the residents of North Square itself to get to know and relate helpfully to each other—we need an indoor meeting-space of a size which can hold a gathering of the North Square residents, allowing a minimum of 12 sq.ft. per adult (theater seating).

2. For this situation, such a meeting space needs to be a multi-purpose room, commingled with attractive amenities and vendors nearby such that the building of which the room is a part can garner rent for its spaces sufficient to pay for the cost of building it (or rebuilding it from an existing unused structure, as proposed below).

Informal estimate of rebuilding costs: \$2 million.

III. Goals

1. To engage the owner-builder of North Square in providing a sizable meeting-space (with kitchen) for residents **and** neighbors in a fully reno-

vated structure known as the "old barn," or "**antique barn**,"* located between the present Atkins Farm Market and the Cows office building
*70' x 55' ft

III. Goals (continued)

2. To design the renovation of all spaces in this building to maximize their capacity to attract income of a rental nature, to serve the expressed needs of North Square residents and the neighbors, and to beautifully echo architecturally the many uses to which the land it stands on has been put.

3a. To wait until the first stage of North Square is completed and paying tenants are attracted, before expecting to invest in the costs of renovating the "old barn" and (3b.) to include the preferences of actual residents in the selection of amenities to be included in the "amenities build-

ing." (See footnote for amenities popular in apartment developments elsewhere*)

4. To promote activities which will both ease the state and mobilize the talents of the low and moderate income tenants of North Square, integrating them in creating the blessings of mixed-income/mixed-use living.

* Additional popular amenities include: computer room; library; manager's office (staffed during the day); large TV; room for child-care; bike racks; space for pet-washing/grooming/walking; opportunities for massage, classes in cooking, yoga, a community garden; a fountain or sculpture; small-shop sales-spaces for arts, crafts, and antiques; space for light indoor sports (e.g. ping pong, cards, pool, foos-ball/air-hockey, dancing, music performance, rehearsal space, etc.

IV. The Plan (TBA)

V. Funding (TBA)

VI. Staffing (TBA)

VII. Compromise & Conflict-Resolution (TBA)

VIII. Annual Independent Evaluation (TBA)

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