

February 2, 2017

Dear ZBA members,

Thank you for your time and consideration in this permitting process. You do not have an easy job. One challenging aspect is trying to balance multiple social goals—economic development, affordable housing, and the protection and well-being of residents and abutters among others. Attempts to balance goals often create winners and losers—which solidifies or worsens divisions within a community and perpetuates mistrust, anger, and alienation. The Beacon proposal represents a unique opportunity for every stakeholder to win. A residential neighborhood rarely welcomes commercial development or affordable housing, yet abutters and neighbors in N. Amherst want to redevelop the proposed site and welcome affordable housing.

To that end, I have tried to offer helpful information and practical suggestions over the years and during this public hearing. Other abutters and residents have spent countless hours and considerable mental energy in trying to find a solution that works for everyone. Despite efforts, the current version of the proposal (even with all the conditions) does not address the substantive heart of the concerns—it is too big for the lot. So tonight, instead, I want to express my frustration and disappointment and hurt with the process and what appears to be the likely outcome, though I hope I am wrong. The disparity in time allotment for comments, the lack of dialogue and true collaboration with all stakeholders together at the table, the lack of substantial changes or conditions to address abutters' concerns all suggest to me that, in the balancing of social goals, my well-being does not carry a lot of weight. I won't repeat my concerns now, as I've written extensively and with great detail. The current conditions (all 120+ of them) attached to the grant are insufficient to protect me and my neighbors from nuisances, substantial inconveniences, and hazards.

If you grant this permit, you are choosing to sacrifice the well-being of those residents most invested in this neighborhood. Residents who have invested in their homes to maintain the unique historical character of the residential neighborhood and who have paid hefty taxes for a long time with little return. Neighbors who welcome and volunteer at the Survival Center, who anonymously clean up the Mill River Recreation Area, who shovel out bus stops for students because the PVTA doesn't, who provide housing in their homes for low-income and homeless people, who host and feed and house college students, who gather together in real community for meals, celebrations, and shared work.

If you grant this permit, you are foregoing the opportunity for a win-win-win situation and asking me and my neighbors to bear the significant losses and costs of this oversized development without protection, amelioration, compensation or even the respect of an acknowledgment that there will be costs. In contrast, the non-resident property owner retains ownership of this land, ownership of adjacent land yet to be developed, a considerable multi-million dollar pay-out for the ground lease and a steady stream of commercial revenue—all without significant investment towards the project and without clear conditions or accountability. The out-of-town developer gains financial return with limited accountability or consequences after the grant is awarded if the promised design and management concepts don't match the actual implementation of the project. The town benefits are unclear. There will be an increase in tax revenue, but we do not know the extent because the costs have not been considered carefully and will vary based upon occupancy. Despite claims of economic development potential, the proposed project will not diversify the tax base or generate new forms of commercial enterprise—it will perpetuate the current pattern of reliance on residential taxes with some retail commercial taxes. Affordable housing is a definite benefit, but it can be achieved in a more modest development.

Because I would like this development to happen, I believe that you should attach substantial conditions to the grant to downsize this development and orient it toward the commercial corridor on Sunderland Rd. and away

from Montague Rd. If these changes can't be worked out during the hearing process, then I urge you to deny the permit to allow for a revised development proposal that truly balances social goals. The closest thing to true collaboration we have seen regarding N. Amherst development occurred in the charrette led by the Cecil Group several years ago. Many stakeholders, with diverse interests, participated. In case you were not involved or are not aware, I would like to share with you the proposed conceptual design that arose from that process. In order to help promote development in N. Amherst according to the principles inherent in that concept (including the protection of Montague Rd., incentives for development along Sunderland Rd, and improvements to the existing village center) I urge you to:

1) Deny waivers (in order to restrict the number of units to more fully align with current zoning)

- Waiver request # 7 Dimensional Regulations in Article 6 Table 3 regarding additional square feet required for additional units
- Waiver request #9 Dimensional Regulations in Article 6 Table 3 regarding Rear and side yards
- Waiver request #10 Dimensional Regulations in Article 6 Table 3 regarding lot coverage
- Waiver request #11 Dimensional Regulations in Article 6 Table 3 regarding maximum floors
- Waiver request #12 Dimensional Regulations in Article 6 Table 3 regarding maximum height

AND/OR

2) Require an extension of the ground lease boundary (to include the property owner's adjacent commercially zoned parcels north and west of the proposed development) while maintaining the same number of proposed residential units.

AND

3) Require/guarantee substantial infrastructure improvements (likely involving intensive private/public collaboration) to orient the development toward Sunderland Rd. and protect Montague Rd.

- Extend Cows Rd. sidewalk all the way to Sunderland Rd. and complete missing portions of sidewalk along Sunderland Rd. (Despite claims that the affordable housing units complement the Survival Center services, there is no safe pedestrian access to it.)
- Create a pedestrian walkway to Sunderland Rd.
- Create a vehicular entrance from Sunderland Rd.
- Close off a small portion of Montague Rd., at the library, to direct traffic along Sunderland Rd.
- Make improvements to Summer St./Montague Rd. intersection to clarify traffic direction and slow cars turning onto Summer St.
- Consider closing off the east end of Montague Rd. or making it one-way into the development. (Not necessary if the above structural changes are implemented.)

Finally, if you grant the permit as is without substantial changes, please consider a method to ameliorate and compensate for the nuisances and harms to abutters. I don't know if you can require the developer and/or owner to establish a grievance fund. I don't know if the town can approve tax abatements. For all the potential benefits that this development may bring, it will bring costs that should be acknowledged and addressed. Thank you.

Valerie Cooley
125 Montague Rd.