

ZBA FY2020-39, Valley CDC, Comprehensive Permit Application for 132 Northampton Road

ADDITIONAL PUBLIC COMMENTS:

Additional Comments received from August 21, 2020 at 2:20PM until September 9, 2020 at 10:00AM:

1. Maura Keene, Comments Submitted via Email, Dated August 23, 2020;
2. Meg Gage, Comments Submitted via Town Website, Dated August 24, 2020;
3. Thomas Kegelman, Comments Submitted via Town Website, Dated August 25, 2020;

From: [Maura Keene](#)
To: [Pollock, Maureen](#)
Subject: 132 Northampton Rd
Date: Sunday, August 23, 2020 4:14:13 PM

Dear Maureen and ZBA members,

In looking at rental properties in Amherst, I came upon an ad for a “one bedroom” unit at 70 University Drive. This 381 square foot unit was renting for \$1450 per month, and the floor plan showed that there was no bedroom. The bed was in the main room with the sitting area and kitchenette, so it was really a studio. For those who say the 230 square foot average unit, 393 square foot handicapped units planned for 132 Northampton Rd are too small, clearly they are not that much smaller than market rate units that are out of reach for the people who will be living at 132 Northampton Road. And the floor plan for 70 University shows a double bed, so possibly a couple could be living there.

The high rent being collected for tiny spaces is why there is such a dire need for affordable housing in Amherst. Hopefully, this project will be approved expeditiously so we can add to a desperately needed segment of our housing stock.

Sincerely,
Maura Keene
25 Dennis Drivet
Amherst

Print

132 Northampton Road - Comments on 40B Comprehensive Permit Application - Submission #15665

Date Submitted: 8/24/2020

Comment Form

To: Amherst ZBA
From: Meg Gage, District One
Re: Enthusiastic support for the Northampton Road studio apartment project
Date: August 24, 2020

I strongly encourage you to advance the exciting project on Northampton Road to build small, affordable rental units for extremely-low and low-income residents. This plan is well-designed and integrates support services some of these tenants may need to pull themselves out of poverty. The location is ideal; while on the edge of a residential neighborhood, it is on the other side of Northampton Road and should have no impact on that neighborhood. This is something we talk about needing and valuing. It's time to make this happen. It's time we put our spoken goals into real plans and realities.

There are always many reasons people can find not to do something. The social and community value of this new construction outweighs all of the reasons people have come up with to oppose it. We know that housing is the single most important component of helping people get out of poverty. If they have reliable housing they can get jobs.

Please support this important project that so many have worked on for so long.

Meg Gage
413-222-5316
meginamherst@gmail.com

Please type comments in the box above.

Attachments

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**132 Northampton Road - Comments on 40B Comprehensive Permit Application - Submission
#15669**

Date Submitted: 8/25/2020

Comment Form

Thomas P. Kegelman
649 East Pleasant Street
Amherst, MA 01002

Steve Judge, Chair
Zoning Board of Appeals
Amherst, MA

Re: 132 Northampton Road, Amherst Studio Apartments

Mr. Judge:

I am writing today in 3 roles: 1) foremost, a long-time resident and homeowner in Amherst; 2) one of the founding members of the Amherst Municipal Affordable Housing Trust; and 3) a long-time professional housing developer.

1. As a resident and homeowner, I daily witness the evidence of the housing crisis in our community. It is hard to ignore. Just yesterday, two young friends were about to be evicted from their apartment as the lease expired. They had applied to over a dozen apartments where the applications numbered in the dozens. At the last moment, they happened to call a landlord just as another applicant withdrew. But for that bit of luck, they would have been homeless. They are college-educated, professional musicians and they, individually, would have been eligible for the apartments being proposed.

And just next door to us, five unrelated adults are crammed into a small, single-family home. The landlord has just dug into the front yard to add pavement for the extra cars. Down the street, many of the homes have been converted to similar rental homes. Responding to the increasing demand and relatively cheap homes for sale, developers are buying up Amherst homes for conversion to rental housing. Many of these developers skirt the few laws that constrain them, with lax management that does little to control inexperienced renters. Partly due to these conversions, starter homes for young families are harder to find and our adult children are forced to move away from Amherst to start a home for their family. The development of well-managed apartments with appropriate amenities is badly needed to meet the overwhelming demand. The proposed project by a responsible landlord should be welcomed in Amherst.

For several months this year, my wife and I hosted a gentleman who had difficulty managing his affairs. Luckily, for him, his family could provide the means for him to pay for the services he needed to survive. But for those unearned resources, he would have been sorely in need of the kind of supportive services proposed for these apartments.

2. As a member of the Amherst Municipal Affordable Housing Trust, I am bound by the Town of Amherst to “promote the town’s affordable housing priorities, as determined through the most recent town housing plan, particularly to create safe, decent, and affordable housing for our most vulnerable populations”. The Housing Production Plan that the Town of Amherst officially adopted states the need for residential development for both low income individuals and families. Unmet housing needs were identified as follows: 1,970 units for Extremely Low Income households, 505 for Very Low Income households, and 575 for Low Income households, as well as 15 for persons who are homeless. This Plan received a thorough review and significant support from town government and town residents, at large. It represents our promise to the people of Amherst. Nevertheless, there are precious few opportunities for the Town to implement this plan. Building affordable housing requires money, permits and land. The AMAHT has little money and no land or permitting authority. Much of its work relies on the cooperation of other town officials to provide the necessary land, money and permitting. As one town official to another, I am asking you to support official town policy and to work with AMAHT to do the work that the Town requires of us. The question before you is whether to waive certain zoning requirements in order to allow development of this housing. I believe that the waivers are both necessary and acceptable and encourage you to join with your fellow Town officials to make good on our promise.

3. As a professional housing developer, I have over 40 years of experience working with the homeless, managing housing for them, and developing properties designed, built and managed to support homeless families and individuals. As a resident of the Pioneer Valley for most of those 40 years, I have watched Valley CDC develop several properties in Northampton, Easthampton and Amherst and I have always been impressed by their care and diligence in all aspects of their work. I can find nothing in their proposed plans that I can fault (and found a few ideas for my own projects!).

Specifically, the amount of supportive staff time committed to serve these residents is extraordinary. I recall partnering with one of the nation’s largest affordable housing developers a few years ago and their service budget for over 200 units was \$30,000. That would have paid for a .75 FTE at the time. That works out to .004 FTE’s per household. Unfortunately, that is not atypical of many developers in the field. In our own properties, we have 3.5 FTE’s for approximately 400 units of various incomes, or .009 FTE’s per household. Similar to VCDC, our organization additionally contracts with volunteers and outside service providers to provide counselling, youth development and enrichment. Many of our peers have commented on the exceptional work that we have done recently during the COVID crisis, providing rent assistance and referrals, emergency food deliveries and academic support. The .75 FTE for Valley CDC’s 28 unit project is .026 per household, considerably more than one would typically find. (It is worth noting that the first priority for vouchers from housing agencies is homelessness. Since landlords cannot refuse someone for using a voucher, any landlord in Amherst renting their apartment to a voucher holder at Fair Market Rent may be renting to a formerly homeless person.)

For those who believe that the Amherst Studio “homeless” residents will need constant care, I can confirm that the homeless are much like your neighbors—a bit untidy, at times; a bit quarrelsome, at times. Our homeless residents are homeless mostly due to a tight rental market, a job loss, a health emergency, or domestic violence, NOT because they need extensive services. What is being proposed is NOT a nursing home or a group home or any of the residential models that are designed for those with severe disabilities. Many need no services at all and go on to buy homes and build families. Mostly, they are extremely grateful to have the opportunity to have a decent, safe, and affordable place to live. I very much hope you give them that well-deserved chance.

Thanks for your consideration,

Thomas P. Kegelman

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