



PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT • CITY OF NORTHAMPTON

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STAFF REPORT

TO: Planning Board
FROM: Carolyn Misch
APPROVED: Wayne Feiden
RE: Mar 26, 2009 Planning Board Meeting
DATE: Mar 18, 2009

1. **Continuation of a Joint Public Hearing with Ordinance committee on:**
 - a. Zero Lot Line Changes Development to eliminate fences, reduce 30' side setback to 15', and allow lots next to non-zero lot projects. Workshop was held 3-17 (~20 people)
 - b. site plan submission requirements for Traffic Mitigation
 - c. New Hearing on clarifying use standards for Planned Village District.

2. **Special Permit(continuation from 12/11 & 1/22):Townhouse Development**

Project Address: Northern Ave.

Zoning URB

Adjacent Uses: Residential

Conformance with Sustainable NH: This is in-town lot abutting the rail trail that will have access to the rail trail. Preserves more than 50% of land as treed wetland, provides recreational access internally and externally, infill, design compatibility,

STATUS: Conservation Commission has closed the hearing but not issued a decision. Applicant has requested a withdrawal without prejudice in order to refile. Applicant would like to use the Planning Board continuation to discuss alternative layouts based on Cons Comm discussions

In your packets you have 2 revised plan sheets. One labeled L2a, which is the plan in front of the Conservation Commission and is different from the one the Board reviewed on 1-22. This shows a reduction in total units from 25 to 23. The second plan is labeled "Concept D" and maintains a total of 23 units but drops the loop road from North Street. Instead, units are pulled back from the wetland boundary and there is overall less paved roadway with parking arranged in a couple of small "pods". There is a path system that is both concrete sidewalk and gravel path that connects all the units.

The applicant would like to obtain feedback from the board on the layout of concept D depending upon the feedback, may resubmit this scenario to the Conservation Commission for approval. The applicant is not seeking a final vote of approval on this concept on the 26th.

Issues raised in the public comments from the last hearing:

- LOS D: By looking at the traffic study the issue was raised that LOS D was the current and no build stated and the applicant would not be addressing this. The ordinance does not require applicants to address all street deficiencies in existence. Neither the ordinance NOR POLICY documents, including transportation plan, stipulate that new projects should not be allowed if current conditions are substandard within the neighborhood. The ordinance does require that applicants address *their own* impacts on the street network.
- Issues of streets in neighborhood as cut through – There are many neighborhoods that have gridded streets and this provides the ability for all residents (those of the neighborhood as well as those outside the neighborhood) to chose routes according to ease of access. In fact the goal of not approving any more cul-de-sac public streets is to ensure that there are as many route options as possible through the city so that one street and its associated neighborhood does not

become a thoroughfare for the entire city and thus unduly burdened to the benefit of others. Multiple street grids/networks and traffic distribution also facilitates slower speeds compared to creation of a single wide thoroughfare.

- Design compatibility. The proposed architecture utilizes elements of surrounding neighborhood. There is not one design in the neighborhood. There is a mix of 1, 1.5, 2, 2.5 story homes of Victorian, bungalow, ranch styles, as well brick apartment buildings and rowhouses. The unit designs proposed are very similar to the new two-family house shown on the poster board by Adam Cohen on Woodmont. They aren't exactly like the old houses in the neighborhood but they use elements of the styles. Zoning does not say that compatibility means that all new structures have to mimic existing structures. Additionally, the proposal does not include apartment blocks, which would clearly be less compatible. .

Other notes on design comments:

- Units could be 2 attached like many of the 2 families in the neighborhood but the overall footprint would be greater than the way the applicant has clustered them.
- Zoning allows townhouses in URB. It does not mandate single family detached structures.
- Why not a subdivision street to create single family units? The ordinance does not mandate a subdivision. As stated above the ordinance does allow townhouses in this district which is defined as anywhere from 2-8 attached units. The City cannot require the applicant to file a subdivision if the same project can be accomplished differently.
 - Additionally, subdivision streets and lotting on individual lots would create a greater impervious footprint and would not be in keeping with the more urban character of this location. It is contrary to sustainability to spread units out unnecessarily just to create detached units. More land can be preserved when they are attached.
- Too high a density. 23 units for 5.59 acres works out to be about 4 units per acre or one unit per 9,000 square feet. This is far less dense than URB and URC neighborhood where single family homes have a minimum lot size of 8,000 sf or 6,000 sq feet. Much of the neighborhood actually predates the current minimums and therefore lots sizes are much smaller. This is obvious when you look at the aerial submitted by the applicant. There are several lots in the vicinity (North St/View/Northern where the lots are 5,000 + with 1 and 2 and some 3 families.
- Yard size- "lack thereof" – There is no mandate for certain size yards for each unit. Minimum lot size and density, to a certain extent, dictate a standard. Within the North Street Neighborhood area there are apartment buildings (Union Street, Graves Ave etc where there are no yard areas for the units. Large yards are a product of suburban development patterns. This neighborhood has house lots with smaller yards and yields greater walkability and access to the bike path and downtown.
- Lights from King Street shining into neighborhood. Over half of the tree cover on the lot will be maintained. Additionally, it is not the property owner's responsibility to maintain a buffer for other properties within a neighborhood.
- Water in basement—High water table? Construction will be slab on grade and not intercept the water table. Regardless construction in an area with high ground water does not raise the water table. Wont increase water in basement if there is high ground water or perched table. There are rain gardens and roof leaders to drain toward the wetland not toward the neighbors lots.
- Stormwater system is partially comprised of rain gardens and other infiltration mechanisms directing water ultimately back to the wetlands on site instead of being carried offsite. Additional buffer plantings are included to both aid in infiltration and to demarcate an absolute no-disturb area. This system meets all the requirements under the city's stormwater ordinances which is as stringent as the state and federal standards.
- The wetlands have been used as a dumping ground in the past with at least one old washing machine and other appliances, tires and garbage that has been or will be removed as part of this project. A significant portion of this property contains undocumented fill from years of dumping from construction projects and thus the site is not a pristine site.
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Staff Recommendation:

Overall staff feels that concept D is a better plan because it reduces roadway infrastructure, allowing more of the site to remain vegetated or open for passive use by the owners. Additionally, there is better pedestrian connectivity throughout the site and to the abutting streets. The units have also been pushed pack from the wetland boundary. Therefore staff recommends that the Board encourage applicant to proceed with full engineering on this concept for a continued hearing.

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Request by Hospital Hill LLC for definitive subdivision approval on the north campus of the Village at Hospital Hill (Moser Street Extension). Located off Village Hill Rd, Map ID 31C-17 Northampton.