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April 25, 2016

Matthew Sarcione, Assistant Town Planner
TOWN OF SHREWSBURY
100 Maple Avenue
Shrewsbury, MA 01545-5398

RE: The Pointe at Hills Farm Shrewsbury- 40B Development
Architectural Peer Review Report

Dear Matthew:

I'm writing to provide you with a Peer Review Report in accordance with the RFP that you issued dated February 26th, 2016, and my letter proposal to you dated March 18, 2016. This report is formatted substantially in alignment with the "Scope of Services" section of our proposal, but I hope you will contact me if there is any additional information that you require in your architectural review of the Pointe at Hills Farm development.

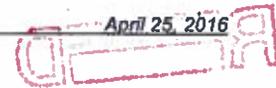
Review of the Developer's Application, Plans, and Drawings

Documents reviewed:

Comprehensive Permit Application, November 2105
Memo from Hill Law, December 14, 2015
Letter Response to Peer Review Comments from Waterman Design Associates, February 26, 2016
Traffic Engineering Peer Review from Conley Associates, January 26, 2016
Preliminary Plan Review from Graves Engineering, January 26, 2016
Architectural Drawing Set by CUBE 3 Studio dated October 7, 2015
Site Plans- Comprehensive Permit by Waterman Associates dated November 6, 2015
Architectural Drawing Set by CUBE 3 Studio dated March 22, 2016
Letter from Shrewsbury Fire Department dated February 22, 2016
Traffic Peer Review Response from Tetra Tech dated February 18, 2016 (reviewed in part)
Traffic Impact and Access Study from Tetra Tech dated November 2015 (reviewed in part)
Letter from Board of Selectmen to John Gulliver dated March 14, 2016
Letter from Hill Law regarding traffic Impacts dated January 25, 2016
Letter from Paynes dated January 25, 2016
Letter from Steve Danielson dated January 25, 2016
Peer Review letter from Conley Associates dated January 22, 2016

INITIAL COMMUNICATION

On February 26, 2016 I received a Request for Peer Review: Architecture, Design, and Massing from Matthew Sarcione, Assistant Town Planner. Documents were accessed online via Shrewsburyma.gov website. Documents were also received via mail.



INITIAL MEETING

On Monday March 28th I attended a meeting of the Shrewsbury Planning Board where the Pointe at Hills Farm project was discussed. Key components of the discussion included:

- Civil Engineering Peer Review comments were presented, and the project Civil Engineer offered partial response. The developer promised a more complete response once the civil engineer had a chance to review the peer review in detail
- The architect presented a series of design changes that effectively reduced the bulk of the buildings, limiting the tallest part of any building to 3 stories rather than the previous 4 stories (at Phase 2, elevation 3A).
- Another change was to eliminate one building on each phase. This resulted in a diminution of the number of units overall from 280 to 250. We have not seen how this will change the parking lot layouts.
- In response to neighbors' questions about the perceived size of the development, the architect explained the stepping profile of the largest building in Phase 1
- The site designer was asked to explain the plan for cutting and filling of grades on each site. The concern was that the buildings might sit high on the site grades, exaggerating the apparent size of the buildings, and also towering over adjacent homes that sit at a lower grade.
- Several neighbors voiced questions about the bulk and height of the proposed buildings, the extent and location of greenspace, and the proximity of the buildings to existing roads and homes.
- Several neighbors voiced questions and concerns about traffic that would be generated by the proposed development.

Site Visit and Reconnaissance of Surrounding Residential and Nonresidential Areas

Before the March 28 2016 meeting I spent some time at and around the site to understand the actual conditions of the site and the surrounding areas. An aerial image of the site is shown below. Bordering the site to the west across Hartford Turnpike are mostly one-story utilitarian commercial buildings and parking lots. The proposed development will have no negative impact there, and indeed will have a much higher level of architectural finish and landscape development than any of these properties.



Situated between Phase 1 and Phase 2 currently are several mostly one-story utilitarian commercial buildings and parking lots with a somewhat nicer level of architectural finish and landscaping. One lot appears to have an extensive parking area for trucks. The proposed Pointe development will likewise have no negative aesthetic impact on these sites.



Corner of Stoney Hill and Hartford Turnpike near Phase 1 looking west.



Corner of Stoney Hill and Hartford Turnpike near Phase 2 looking north.

The most sensitive neighborhood impact will be the single-family residential developments to the west and southwest of the proposed developments. These neighborhoods are serviced by Stoney Hill Road, Pheasant Hill Drive, and Thistle Hill Drive. These single-family homes are predominantly two-story woodframe structures with pitched roofs.

The scale of the Pointe development could possibly appear large and intrusive from some of these homesites, but this effect depends largely on several factors:

- The relative level of the adjacent land on which the Pointe is constructed
- The relative height of the new structures compared to the existing
- Architectural qualities including massing, setbacks, and surface texture and color
- Proximity of ancillary structures such as garages, parking lots, dumpsters, etc.
- Buffering techniques using landscaping, planting, and fencing.

From our review of readily accessible areas around the site, along with the topographical plans provided, it appears that at Phase 1, existing grading varies from 494' to 418', with post-development grading varying from 490' to 418'. The proposed buildings closest to the site is shown situated at 464' at the highest end, and steps down to 434'. So the buildings closest to the Thistle Hill Drive homes will not be built at the highest part of the site. The topographical information provided is insufficient for us to tell the exact grades

at the single-family homes. At the northeast corner, the site will be excavated from about 490' to 466', lowering the grade significantly. At the south corner, the site will be cut and filled to create the detention basin, but the closest building will be a 1-story garage, so there will not be a tall building right near the property line.



The uphill corner of Phase 1.

From our review of readily accessible areas around the site, along with the topographical plans provided, it appears that at Phase 2, existing grades vary from 524' to 488', with post-development grading varying from 514' to 488', showing significant excavation at the highest area and leveling of the building site. A large part of the site toward the south will remain unchanged. At no point will the 3-story building be closer than 180' from the neighboring single-family homes. The topographical information provided is insufficient for us to tell the exact grades at the single-family homes on Pheasant Hill Road.



Overlooking the lowest side of Phase 1 from Stoney Hill Road.



View from Stoney Hill Road looking toward a neighboring home near Phase 2.



View from Pheasant Hill Road looking toward the proposed Phase 2.



View from Thistle Hill Road looking toward the proposed Phase 1.

Report to ZBA:Elevations and Architectural treatment

Site Design, Grading, and Orientation:

Building Height

- The maximum height of the buildings, now reduced to 4 stories, is more in keeping with the height of other area buildings. Still, the building height and bulk exceeds many of the homes in the surrounding area. This is expected in order to contain the number of units proposed.
- The building that was eliminated from Phase 1 is Building 1, which was the one closest to Stoney Hill Road. The remainder of the buildings are set back substantially from Stoney Hill road, the main entrance to the neighborhood.
- Two buildings are stepped in height

Building Bulk

- In Phase 2, the building number has been reduced from 3 buildings to 2. However, the unit count is unchanged, and the building bulk may actually appear greater due to 2 buildings being combined into 1.
- In Phase 1, the building count has been changed from 5 to 4, with a small wing being added to each remaining building to compensate. This change is beneficial, especially because the building closest to Stoney Hill Road will be eliminated.

Grading

- While site grading will have a great effect on building height with respect to adjacent buildings and roads, the site grading plan is not fully detailed at this time.
- Stepping of the site grading, corresponding to the stepping of the building height, will have a very positive effect by retaining some of the natural gradients of the site. Instead of cutting and filling the site to create a perfectly flat area for the building, the site will remain sloped and appear more natural and in keeping with the hilly area.

Facades

- The facades have been articulated by the architect using four different materials, plus balconies.
- The facades are also stepped in and out to break up the continuity and apparent size of the buildings.
- At Phase 1, where a small wing was added to each building, the resultant façade of the buildings is quite broad and flat compared to the modulated surfaces everywhere else in the development. We recommend that the architect do additional studies to these facades to make them appear less flat. Varying the roofline over these areas might also help.

Greenspace/ Open Space

- Greenspace and landscaping should be utilized to minimize the impact of the development, especially to the neighboring homes, as well as the appearance of the development from the Stoney Hill Road.
- The landscape plans show a good number of plants and also has a list of species. However the effectiveness of the buffering landscape will depend upon the spacing and size of the plants chosen for the site. We recommend that the landscape architect be more specific about the location, number, and size of plantings.

Traffic at the Intersections between Stoney Hill Road and Hartford Turnpike

Traffic increases, safety, and delays at the intersection are a concern, however we will leave it to traffic consultants to comment on these aspects.

We are especially concerned with safe student access to school bus stops.

Green Building Design

Insufficient information has been included to make detailed judgements about the energy efficiency and sustainability of the proposed development. But from the information provided, the following are some comments:

- The building section is insufficiently detailed for us to determine the level of insulation that will be provided.
- Shrewsbury is not a Stretch Energy Code town, so the project needs to comply only with the Energy Code requirements for the State of Massachusetts.
- Individual heating, cooling, and domestic hot water systems are apparently proposed for each unit. This is usually not considered the most energy efficient approach, but we assume there is a desire to separately meter services to each unit.
- Exterior surface materials are not specified, therefore we cannot comment on the durability and maintainability of these surfaces and features.
- Sustainable site selection depends partly on developing additional density on site that are served by existing infrastructure- roads, utilities, etc. We leave it to the civil engineer to comment on the adequacy of existing infrastructure.
- Sustainable site plan- The site plan shows accommodations for parking, stormwater drainage, existing natural features, etc. Adverse heat island effects can often be moderated by planting shade trees along the south side of parking.

Entry Layout and Unit Plans

- At Phase 1, the common entries are spread throughout the site, with each set of stairways (front and back) serving only 12 to 15 dwelling units. This will tend to enliven the exterior of the entirety of the buildings, rather than have everyone entering at just a couple main entrances.
- At Phase 2, buildings are served by an interior double-loaded corridor, so entrances will be concentrated in just a few locations.
- Most units throughout the proposed development will have a balcony, which is both a good private amenity, and a good way to activate the exterior appearance of the buildings.

Architectural Accessibility

- The older architectural plans show a unit mix that includes 20/280 units total will be Group 2 HC units. This is equal to 7%, significantly over the 5% required by Massachusetts Architectural Access Board. We have not yet received a new unit table that corresponds to the new, reduced building layout.

SUMMARY RECOMMENDATIONS

- Request that the development team submit a site section drawing perpendicular to Hartford Turnpike showing accurate levels of the site, proposed buildings, and at the buildings on adjacent properties on both sides.
- Request solar shading studies to show any shading the proposed development will cause to neighboring homes. Include conditions throughout the day, at both solstices and equinoxes. We anticipate the impacts will be minor, as the development is generally to the north of the neighboring homes.
- Request a building wall section drawing specifying all exterior siding, trim, and roofing materials. A material board providing actual examples of all materials would be helpful.

- Request a series of markers on the site to indicate the future location of architectural features. This may include a marker elevated to indicate the proposed location and height of roof ridges or eaves.
- Provide a color board showing actual colors, or alternatively request that all color selections be submitted for departmental review before finishes are applied.
- Request a detailed site plan showing actual number and types of all plantings, including size at installation.
- Request a description of how site and exterior building lighting will effect neighboring properties.
- Request a plan for school bus stops and/or any other public transportation that does or will serve this development.
- As the project is further developed, provide updated, coordinated site plan, building plans, and elevations.

We hope this report is sufficient for your needs at this time. Please let us know if you would like us to review any other documentation of the project, and/or make additional site visits.

Sincerely,
DAVIS SQUARE ARCHITECTS, INC.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Iric L. Rex".

Iric L. Rex, AIA