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MEMORANDUM

DATE: August 19, 2012
FROM: Clifford Boehmer, AIA
Principal, Davis Square Architects
TO: Medfield Zoning Board of Appeals
CC: Judi Barrett
Community Opportunities Group, Inc.
RE: 40B Architectural Review
PROJECT: The Parc at Medfield

PAGES: 9
PROJECT No.: 12049

Per our agreement with the Town of Medfield, this memo constitutes Davis Square Architects' document review associated with Gatehouse Community's proposed 40B development on West Street in Medfield. In addition to our review of documents, we have visited the site, and plan to present this memo, along with other comments, at the Medfield Zoning Board of appeals meeting scheduled for August 27, 2012. The document review was completed by myself, along with another Massachusetts registered architect, Sharon MacNulty, LEED AP.

Please call me @ 617-283-7878, or email at cboehmer@davissquarearchitects.com with any questions or comments prior to the August 27 ZBA hearing.

Included in the documents reviewed were:

1. The Parc at Medfield Comprehensive Permit Application dated March 15, 2012 sections:
   - Application for Hearing (1 page).
   - Executive Summary (2 pages).
   - The Parc at Medfield drawings dated February 29, 2012, that include a Cover Sheet, Site Photo sheet, Civil Engineering Plans prepared by Merrikin Engineering, LLP (14 sheets), Architectural plans, elevations, and photos of residential structures prepared by VMY Architects, LLC (4 sheets), and Architectural plans, elevations, and photos of the clubhouse and maintenance building, also prepared by VMY (2 sheets). Also included in the maintenance building drawings is a detailed wall section of the residential structures.
   - Outline Specifications prepared by VMY Architects, Inc. dated February 29, 2012 (6 pages).
   - Site Development Report for The Parc at Medfield prepared by Merrikin Engineering, LLP, dated February 29, 2012.(17 pages).
   - Appendix A, Massachusetts Historical Commission Project Notification Form (2 pages)
   - Massachusetts Department of Housing & Community Development Site Approval Letter dated January 17, 2012 (2 pages).
   - List of Waivers Requested from Local Requirements dated March 14, 2012 (11 pages).
   - Statement of Local Need (3 pages).

2. Peer Review of Comprehensive Permit Application for The Parc at Medfield dated June 30, 2012, prepared by Professional Services Corporation, PC. (15 pages).

3. Zoning Bylaw Town of Medfield Massachusetts Revised to April 30, 2012.

4. Handbook: Approach to Chapter 40B Design Reviews prepared by The Cecil Group, Inc., dated January 2011.

The intent of this review is to provide an "architectural perspective" on the proposed development. It is important to note that Davis Square Architects (DSA) has not had access to any construction budget information, and accordingly, has not factored costs into any criticisms or recommendations. Nor has DSA evaluated any environmental issues associated with the development of the site, beyond what was reported in the PSC civil engineering review. While there is inevitable overlap between these categories, this report is organized in the following sections:

Neighborhood Context
Neighborhood Project Impact
Site Plan
Building Plans
Building Massing and Elevations
Building Specification
Construction Period Comments

NEIGHBORHOOD CONTEXT

Observations:

1. The site was formerly conceived as a 9.2 acre wedge of land, within a large triangle of land totally dedicated to commercial use, defined by railroad tracks to the northwest, Route 27 to the northeast, and West Street to the south. On the day of DSA's site visit, the commercial uses immediately to the west of the subject property appeared to be active, as were those at the corner of Route 27 and West Street. Very little activity was noted at the large structure at the north border of the site.
2. The three existing low-rise commercial structures to the west of the subject property were developed with a generous setback from West Street to the buildings' front elevations. This large space provides enough space for parking between the buildings and West Street, but more importantly, provides a green "front yard" space of adequate depth for significant landscaping improvements. It is important to note that it is the consistent depth of the "front yard" that provides continuity along that stretch of the street.
3. To the east of the subject property lies more commercial development up to the intersection with Route 27. These properties were developed with a smaller setback, but retained parking between the structures and West Street. As a result, there is no opportunity to provide a successful landscaped "front yard".
4. Across West Street to the south are small scale, well maintained single family homes. The homes have a uniform setback from West Street, and maintain some degree of landscaped front yards facing West Street. In all cases, while a grassy front yard presents well, there is adequate space for significant tree growth. Most of the landscaping efforts at these homes has been in development of privatized back yard areas, several of which include swimming pools.
5. There are currently no pedestrian walkways on either side of West Street, the entire length between Route 27 and somewhere south of the Charles River after West Street has changed to Dover Road. There do appear to be pedestrian sidewalks in some of the small scale residential streets to the south and east of West Street, including Newell Drive, Brastow Drive, Marsh Street, Baker Road, Richard Road, Charlesdale Road, etc.

6. The scale of the buildings, both commercial and residential, in the immediate neighborhood is smaller than the proposed three story, pitched roof residential structures. The tallest (and largest footprint) existing structure is immediately to the north of the project. It is "flat-roofed", and presents an un-fenestrated end elevation that appears to be approximately 30 feet tall.
7. There site abuts wetlands (and some standing water) to the northeast (that may extend virtually to Route 27?), as well as wetlands (and standing water) to the north. These wet areas are connected by a spillway that cuts the site in half.
8. West Street appears to be a cut through road from Route 109 to Route 27. During the site visit by DSA (a weekday late afternoon) vehicles proceeding west on West Street (after the light change at 27) appeared to be exceeding the speed limit as they rounded the curve in the road in front of the subject property. DSA did not have access to the traffic study prepared by Vanasse & Associates to confirm this observation.
9. No indication is provided in the application materials regarding future development of site to northeast.

Comments:

- The re-purposing of the subject site from commercial use to residential makes sense, particularly from an economic perspective. However, as currently depicted, the four new residential buildings and accessory structures feel a bit "shoehorned" into the site. This is due to the limitations imposed by the ponds and wetland setbacks, but as importantly, because of a lack of meaningful link into the surrounding context.
- Cues for a relationship of the project to the existing street can be taken from the commercial developments immediately to the west of the project. If parking must remain between the structures and West Street, setbacks should be calibrated to continue landscaped "front yard" appearance.
- The absence of pedestrian walkways that connect the proposed development to other residential areas, as well as nearby commercial development serve to isolate the project.
- Can the town consider providing bike paths to connect the site to the center of Medfield? This would provide a "tie-in" to the development and likely result in commercial benefit to local businesses.
- Consideration should be given to landscape improvements that can be made to both sides of West Street (including the front yards of the single family homes) that will help to tie the two residential uses together.
- Is it possible for the Town to slow down the traffic on West Street between Route 27 and Dover Road?

NEIGHBORHOOD PROJECT IMPACT

Observations:

1. By re-purposing the site, the development will provide much-needed affordable housing and potentially significantly upgrade the stretch of West Street from Dover Road to Route 27.
2. If properly designed and executed, the development should enhance property values of the homes on the south side of West Street.
3. The scale of the proposed buildings (152 feet X 50 feet X 46 feet high) is much larger than any residential structures across the street and the long, low-rise commercial structure to the west. From a scale perspective, the proposed residential buildings are more similar to the tall commercial structure to the north.
4. Headlights from cars exiting the development will adversely impact the single family home across West street.
5. The existing vegetative buffer along West Street is made up of both deciduous and coniferous trees. This makes visual screening dependent on season.

6. DSA has not reviewed the traffic impact study, and therefore cannot comment on trip generation, adequacy of parking, site lines, etc.
7. The proposed project driveway is east of the existing drive, closer to Route 27.

Comments:

- The new development should be inviting not only to the people who live there, but also the residents of West Street (at the very least as a pleasant place to walk). There may be some potential for sharing some amenities (bus stop, community center, tot lot, etc.).
- Given that the scale of the buildings is significantly different from any nearby structures, careful attention should be paid to the appearance of the development from West Street. A landscape buffer can be used to help mediate the scale issue by providing foreground interest, as well as structuring views into the site.
- Consider retaining existing curb cut into site if new drive location is determined to be hazardous.
- Design of parking area lighting (particularly in lots along West Street) must be designed to minimize impact on neighbors across the street.

SITE PLAN

Observations:

1. Parking for Buildings 1 and 2 is located between the front of the building and West Street.
2. Overall concept along West Street appears to rely on screening to define relationship of new development to the existing single family homes across the street.
3. Setback of buildings on West Street, with parking in front, limits ability to fully screen buildings.
4. Detailed planting plan provided in drawing set is limited to area along West Street.
5. Site is organized by access drive and placing building frontage on parking areas.
6. Green spaces are non-hierarchical, uniformly distributed throughout site.
7. Layout of buildings on site is restricted by wetlands, ponds, watershed, and easements.
8. Locating buildings between two wetland/pond areas will result in large insect impact on residents.
9. Site amenities are spread out throughout entire developed area, i.e., both phases of the project. Amenities included clubhouse, public patio, mail pavilion, maintenance building, dumpster, and tot lot.
10. No privatized yard spaces are provided for individual units.
11. Parking fields are not broken up by landscaping elements.
12. All parking is in lots (i.e., no street parking).
13. Phases are not adequately delineated to be able to determine viability of a "free-standing" Phase I.
14. Fronts of buildings very close to parking spaces, parking spaces oriented towards units.
15. Limited planting indicated on sunny sides of buildings ("Quantity, size, & species TBD")..
16. Usable common green space development limited by stormwater basins.
17. No apparent access to ponds, visual or physical.
18. Very limited site fencing indicated on plans.
19. A/C condensers on ground close to units.
20. No direct site access from any units.
21. Bike racks, outdoor benches, trash receptacles, etc. not indicated on plans.
22. Crosswalks, traffic calming not indicated on plans.
23. Mail pickup pull off limited to one side of street.
24. No obvious pedestrian path to dumpsters except through parking area.
25. On-site useable green space very limited, particularly given projected school age population (60 to 70).
26. Site plan appears to cut off access to commercial development to north by six foot high fence.
27. Site plan indicates accessible parking spaces, but site-wide accessibility not specifically delineated.

Comments:

- Generally, parking should not be included in the front setbacks. The design of the setback should create an inviting environment for pedestrians and pleasant views for motorists.
- If a landscaped buffer is to be utilized to screen the buildings and parking, use it as an opportunity to create a continuous streetscape that relates to the "front yard" approach of the adjacent commercial developments to the west.
- Parking lots should include landscaping that break up the large paved areas. Planting peninsulas of widths adequate to support mature tree growth should be included approximately every 5 spaces.
- Use care in choosing plants that create year-round visual buffers, and are low maintenance.
- Consider organizing site around concentrated amenities to help encourage visual interest and resident interaction within the site (currently mail kiosk, trash compactor, tot lot, clubhouse, maintenance building, and public patio are spread out throughout the site).
- Given the significant scale difference between the proposed residential structures and the existing homes across West Street, consider rotating front buildings so that end elevations face street instead of long elevations.
- To help tie in development with the existing streetscape, consider placing smaller structures (clubhouse with rental office, maintenance area, mail kiosk) at front of development, most likely at location of Building #2.
- Increase size of front yards of buildings to create more space for shade producing landscaping, cut back on headlight impact within ground floor units, etc.
- Consider individual entries for ground floor units with privatized planting areas to encourage residents to personalize their environment.
- Increase site amenities to increase interaction of residents. Consider community garden, barbeque area, more centralized tot lot, bike racks, increased number of walkways, etc.
- Create a hierarchy of green spaces to increase likelihood of use by residents.
- Use landscaped parking as buffer between buildings and less desirable perimeter of site, specifically commercial development to west and north (existing curb cut could be retained as entry to parking restricted to Building #2; parking area for Building #4 could be on north side to create space between existing large commercial structure).
- Breezeway design of buildings could be utilized to encourage passage through at ground level that connects to a public amenity (e.g., screened in porch overlooking wetland, shared patio, play area, etc.).
- Main entry drive can be relocated to minimize headlight impact on West Street homes.
- Consider fencing to increase safety of areas of standing water.
- Provide outdoor, passive recreation areas near common use amenities.
- Relocating A/C condensers could increase lawn space and minimize noise impact at ground level units.
- Different massing of large residential buildings can help make link between commercial buildings and smaller scale residential buildings (specifically, the 6:12 pitched roofs increase the bulk of the buildings, without really relating to the small single family homes).
- Phasing of project needs to work to provide all necessary services for Phase I residents, as well as minimize impact to residents during construction of Phase II. This is of particular importance given potential time lags inherent in funding available from DHCD.
- Consider off-site improvements to help balance tie-in of development, while providing screening/buffering that mediates bulk of residential structures (e.g., street trees).
- Provide traffic calming within development; discuss possible means of traffic calming along West Street (signage, crosswalk, well-delineated street parking, bike path, etc.).
- Consider provision of walkway along West Street to encourage pedestrian activity, provide easier access to small scale residential areas to south with sidewalks already in place.
- Improve edge of wetlands to the degree possible to create a site amenity (landscaping, passive recreation areas, lighting, nature walkway, etc.).

- Site/configure buildings, stormwater basins, parking areas, etc. to preserve existing mature trees.
- Consideration should be given to sitewide insect mitigation strategies.

BUILDING PLANS

Observations:

1. Development consists of 4 similar buildings, 24 units per building. Unit mix is 24 @ 1-bedroom (650 SF); 48 @ 2-bedroom (925 SF); 24 @ 3-bedroom (1150 SF).
2. Plans only include ground floor level of whole buildings, and enlarged plans of typical units.
3. Enlarged accessible unit plans are not provided.
4. All three-bedroom units are in Buildings 2 and 3; all one-bedroom units are in Buildings 1 and 4.
5. Due to unit mix, Buildings 1 and 4 have a shorter footprint (152 FT. vs. 171 FT at Buildings 2 and 3).
6. All units are walk-up, with common stairs contained in breezeways as opposed to enclosed stairwells and corridors.
7. Breezeway appears to have only one stair that connects grade to second floor units (upper level whole building plans are not provided to confirm this).
8. All one-bedroom units have one full bath; all two-bedroom units have two full baths; all three-bedroom units have two full baths.
9. All ground floor units are reported to be Massachusetts Architectural Access Board Group 1 or Group 2 units.
10. A total of 6, fully accessible Group 2 units are proposed, 2 of each unit size.
11. A total of 6 Hearing Impaired units are included in the design, 2 of each unit size.
12. All units appear to be designed with either a side-by-side or stacked washer/dryer hook up.
13. Kitchens of one and two-bedroom units appear to be identical in size, three-bedroom unit kitchens appear to be slightly larger.
14. Living rooms of one and two-bedroom units appear to be same size, three-bedroom unit living room is smaller than ones and twos.
15. All units feature one bathroom that is "privatized" for use by the master bedroom; two and three bedroom units also have a common use bathroom that is accessible without passing through a bedroom.
16. One and two-bedroom units have storage space within the unit, independent from bedroom and linen closets. Three-bedroom units do not have additional storage within unit.
17. Buildings 1 and 4 include small storage areas within breezeway.
18. All units include defined dining area, as well as kitchen open to living area with eat-in countertop.
19. No units have direct access to site.
20. No units appear to have privatized outdoor space (patio, planting area, patio, etc.).
21. All units appear to have individualized hot water and space heating.
22. Community building includes Great Room with small kitchen, public baths, laundry room, reception area, business center, work room, rental office and outdoor patio. Entry is through a covered sidewalk on the front, or presumably through the Great Room patio.
23. Mail Kiosk is protected by a hip roof that extends over a concrete pad.
24. The Maintenance structure includes a garage space, storage, one office, one bathroom, and is connected to a trash enclosure that contains a dumpster and a trash compactor.

Comments:

- Compliance with AAB and other applicable access regulations should be confirmed with submission of detailed construction documents.
- Unit sizes appear to be generally compatible with DHCD guidelines, however, some individual room dimensions may be lacking (for example, living room in three-bedroom units).

- Kitchens in three-bedroom units should be enlarged.
- Two and three-bedroom units "split" the bedrooms, i.e., they are separated from each other by the living room. This can result in some inefficiency in floor planning.
- Consideration should be given to making one-bedroom unit bathroom accessible without traveling through bedroom.
- Given likelihood of insect issues, should breezeways be enclosed (or at least screened in?).
- Direct access to outdoors should be considered for units at grade, with potential for privatized patio space. Public patio space can be provided for upstairs units.
- Developer should confirm that single stair from second level of breezeway to grade is adequate for safe egress.
- Consider providing more individual unit-dedicated storage.
- Provide lockable bike storage area in breezeway?
- Can public, or unit-dedicated screened-in areas be provided to enhance appreciation of natural setting?
- Some funding agencies may consider two full baths for two-bedroom units to be "excessive."
- Breezeways provide an opportunity to connect to a semi-private site amenity, i.e., dedicated to each individual building. This would help create a hierarchy of site-wide greens spaces.
- Why do all units have W/D hookups, as well as access to a public laundry room in the community center (could be considered "excessive" by some funding sources)?

BUILDING MASSING AND ELEVATIONS

Observations:

1. All residential buildings are three-story walk up style, with open breezeway circulation vs. enclosed stairwells.
2. Floor to floor height is approximately 10 feet, that with an allowance for structure, provides for 8-foot finished ceiling height within units.
3. Residential buildings have 6:12 sloped roofs with a ridge height of at approximately 43 feet.
4. Length of buildings is variable, depending on unit mix.
5. Length, height, and width of buildings is larger than any nearby, existing residential structures.
6. While the length of the buildings is substantial, the massing is well-broken up by protruding full-height bays, as well as add-on trellis structures that define the entry into the breezeways.
7. Rear elevations do not appear to include lattice entry enhancements.
8. Massing is also broken up by generous use of built-up running trim that divides the height of the building into thirds. Vertical trim is also employed to further break up the length of the buildings.
9. Roof overhangs with soffits are generous helps create shadows on the elevations.
10. Lattice work on upper level of breezeways creates visual interest, and assists in breaking down the length of the buildings.
11. Photographs of previously built projects, presumably of identical buildings, are provided with the elevation drawings. Photographs include images of gable overhangs at end elevations that help control the scale of the significant ridge height. Trellis structures in photographs are of varying complexity and layers.
12. End elevations include horizontal trim that breaks large surface into smaller pieces. There is some indication of a desire to use contrasting colors in the siding material.
13. Roof areas along main elevations are articulated with small gabled areas with generous overhangs.
14. Windows are double-ganged double-hung throughout the elevations, with the exception of the end elevations that include some single, double-hung widows.
15. Gas and electric meters are mounted on the end elevations.
16. Wall section indicates wood fascia that backs up rain gutters (all other trim appears to be PVC).
17. Both the Clubhouse and Maintenance buildings are pleasant, in-context, small-scale structures.

18. All buildings are fully clad in vinyl siding and PVC trim.

Comments:

- Generally, particularly as indicated in photographs, the massing and height of the large residential structures is adequately broken up by the use of trim, some articulation of the footprint, roof overhangs, and add-on breezeway entry pieces.
- Bays at the end elevations would help to present a more appropriate scale to the tallest part of the buildings.
- Consideration should be given to well-detailed, articulated facades with a flat-roof system instead of 6:12 pitch (that greatly increases the building height). Flat roof could also provide a visual link with adjacent commercial structures, and could provide space for easy installation of PV or solar hot water panels, as well as space for re-location of A/C condensing units.
- Use of varied window types would add to visual interest of elevations.
- Consider screening or partial enclosure of electric and gas meters on end elevations.
- Providing more articulation of footprint at building end elevations will help with breaking down the scale.
- Shifting of building footprint along the long elevation will create more visual interest, break up long expanses of roof area, and focus emphasis of elevations on breezeways (current elevations have a gable in the middle of the building that doesn't correspond to an important part of the building).
- Serious consideration should be given to cladding the building in cementitious siding instead of vinyl.

BUILDING SPECIFICATIONS

Observations:

1. 6 page outline specification is included in submission, organized by CSI divisions, serving primarily as a materials list.
2. Medfield is not a Stretch Code community, so energy saving requirements must meet MBC 8th. Edition base code.
3. Generally, while not detailed, appears to meet code requirements relative to energy conservation and life safety.
4. Energy Star windows, residential appliances, water heaters, and A/C condensing units are called for.
5. All units are pre-wired for CAT 5E connections and cable.
6. Site pole lighting is all specified to be LED.
7. Bath tubs fiberglass or enameled steel.
8. Unit floor finishes carpet except in kitchens (VCT), baths (CT), and breezeways (traffic membrane).
9. Wall insulation specified as closed cell, R-24 (would require 2X6 construction); roof is blown-in R-44.
10. Interior painting is to be No-VOC.
11. Specification calls for 75% recycling of construction waste.
12. Parking lots are to be bituminous.
13. Sidewalks to be concrete (presumably, Portland cement concrete).
14. Compactor enclosure is specified as split-face colored concrete block.

Comments:

- Consider meeting Massachusetts Stretch Code requirements, even though not yet adopted by Town (it may be adopted by the time the project is permitted).
- Expand Energy Star compliance to 3.0 that includes strict construction monitoring for air sealing, proper flashing installations, etc.
- Consider use of composite bathtub instead of fiberglass on steel.
- Incorporate water-saving plumbing fixtures, including 1.2 gallon toilets, low-flow shower heads and faucets.

- Consider harvesting of rainwater for site watering/irrigation (could be limited to rain barrels).
- Install 2-speed, continuous running bath fans to ensure higher interior air quality.
- Vent kitchen exhaust fans to exterior (intent not clear from drawings).
- Consider alternatives to carpeting for floor finishes (can greatly improve interior air quality).
- Increase wall insulation by continuous exterior wrap of rigid insulation, combined with blown in at stud bays (as opposed to closed cell foam limited to stud cavities).
- Install floor mat systems in breezeways to limit pollutants brought into unit interiors.
- Ensure that adequate make-up air is provided to units, particularly because of in-unit mechanical systems and laundry equipment. Consider including air exchange system that can temper fresh air.
- Confirm that sound isolation is adequate between floors (both airborne and impact) and horizontally from unit to unit.
- Consider incorporation of solar DHW system (at least an Clubhouse) and PV panels for common electrical usage.

CONSTRUCTION PERIOD COMMENTS

1. Consider requiring a clerk-of-works during construction period to ensure quality of work.
2. Plan phasing so that all amenities are available to first residents, and to minimize construction-related issues during building of Phase II.
3. Properly protect all landscape materials scheduled to be left in place.

END OF REPORT