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February 14, 2022

Marzie Galazka
Office of Community & Economic Development
TOWN OF SWAMPSCOTT
22 Monument Avenue
Swampscott, MA 01907

Re: Elm Place 40B
Preliminary Architectural Peer Review

Dear Marzie:

I am writing to provide you and the ZBA with a preliminary architectural peer review of the proposed Elm Place 40B development on Essex Street, Pitman Road, and Elm Place in Swampscott. As is typical at this stage of a development of this type, the architectural and civil engineering drawings are at a very schematic level, so for the purpose of this letter, I will restrict most of my comments to the "project fundamentals", mainly discussing the site strategy, mitigation options, overall scale and massing, etc. (as opposed to detailed analysis of floor plans, building elevations, etc.).

This letter follows the form of my proposal for services that I sent you in December of last year. As I noted in that letter, I believe that the format I've adopted, at a minimum, covers all of the services that were described in the RFP that you sent me.

I am looking forward to presenting these thoughts and answering any questions you may have at your ZBA hearing that is scheduled for the evening of February 15, 2022.

1. ***Review the developer's application, plans and drawings, reports from other peer reviewers and Town officials, letters from neighboring residents, etc.*** For the proposed Elm Place project, I have reviewed the following materials:
 - Project Eligibility Letter from Massachusetts DHCD to Swampscott Housing Limited Partnership dated March 23, 2021.
 - Elm Place drawing set issued by TAT dated 08/12/2021 (11 sheets).
 - Elm Place drawing set issued by TAT and Hancock Associates dated 9/13/21 and 9/14/21 (9 sheets).
 - Elm Place Supplement to Application for Comprehensive Permit dated September, 2021 (originally submitted January, 2021).
 - Elm Place Application for Ch. 40B Permit slide deck for presentation to November 30, 2021 ZBA hearing.
 - Draft revised Layout and Materials Plan issued by TAT and Hancock dated 01/04/22.
 - Garbage Pickup Swept Path Analysis Plan (Progress) issued by TAT and Hancock dated 01/11/22.
 - Elm Place Application for Ch. 40B Permit slide deck for presentation to January 11, 2022 ZBA hearing.
 - List of Waivers produced by Swampscott Housing Limited Partnership dated November 23, 2021.
 - Elm Place Project Team Comments to Planning Board letter to ZBA dated November 22, 2021 (comments reflect latest site, parking, and circulation plans).
 - Letter to Marzie Galazka from VAI dated November 22, 2021.

Town, Peer Review, and other Reports:

- Traffic Impact Assessment Peer Review prepared by WorldTech Engineering dated October 25, 2021.
- Fire Prevention Memo issued by Deputy Chief James Potts dated 11/3/2021.
- Letter to ZBA from Town of Swampscott Planning Board dated November 22, 2021.

Communications from citizenry:

- 15 emails/letters addressed to Marissa Meaney dating from October 31, 2021 to November 27, 2021.

(REFERENCE MATERIALS)

- Chapter 40B Handbook for Zoning Boards of Appeal published by MHP in cooperation with DHCD, MassHousing, and MassDevelopment dated March 2017.
 - Local 40B Review and Decision Guidelines published by MHP and Edith Netter, November 2005
 - Handbook: Approach to Chapter 40B Design Reviews, prepared by The Cecil Group, Inc. for DHCD, MassDevelopment, MassHousing, and MHP, January, 2011
2. ***Participate in an initial meeting at the site with the developer's design team and a representative of the Town***
Content of this letter is based on an unaccompanied site visit and drive/walk around the neighborhood on January 26, 2022 (as well as review of submitted and otherwise posted materials).
 3. ***Conduct site visit and reconnaissance assessment of surrounding residential and nonresidential areas within 1/2 mile of the project site***
Letter is based on site visit on January 26, 2022 as well as Google Earth review.

Comments on site reconnaissance: The site is bounded by Essex Street to the north, Pitman Road to the west, Elm Place to the east, and the commuter rail tracks to the south. It is considered a transit-friendly, pedestrian-friendly site, as it is a very short walk to the commuter train, a bus stop is close by on Essex Street, there is good sidewalk network that connects to the high school a short distance away, as well as other services and amenities. There is significant nearby outdoor space, including a modest lot at Jackson Park on Burpee Road, adjacent to the high school and the recently-completed senior housing at the Machon School. Sharing the same site as the proposed development is the Burke Tumbling Academy, a popular site for children's gymnastic training, etc. A future attribute of this site (and the entire nearby neighborhood) is a connection to the Rail Trail on the other side of the tracks.

There is a varied development pattern within ½ mile of the site, largely because of the railroad right of way. As is typically the case, there is a mixture of uses immediately abutting the tracks including multi-family residential and a variety of commercial uses. On the other hand, beyond the railroad tracks, there is a prevalent, consistent pattern of smaller scale one and two-family homes in a dense pattern of relatively small, 2 to 2.5 story, woodframe structures, tightly spaced, with small setbacks from the public way. Side setbacks are of a scale generally only big enough to accommodate driveways and minimal landscape screening. Streetwalls along nearby streets (Maple Street, Maple Avenue, Columbia Street, Essex, Beach, etc.) are generally of a consistent scale and style, often with prominent entries and porches that engage the street. Sidewalk conditions are variable, sometimes separated from the street with narrow planting strips. Back yards associated with most existing homes are rarely expansive.

The regularity of the residential pattern is evident on the Google Earth aerial view included at the end of this letter. Also included is a photograph of a fully accessible commuter line underpass in Cambridge, MA that could serve as a model for a future underpass at the end of Pitman Road.

There are several nearby neighbors who will be the most directly impacted by the proposed development. They are all of the homes on Pitman Road, the senior housing development on Doherty Circle, and the homes on Elm Place. There has been concern expressed by the neighbors on the south side of the tracks related to the potential for increased reflected train sound resulting from a taller building sited close to the tracks, as well as noise generated from use of the roof deck.

4. ***Consult with the Applicant's design team, as appropriate.*** Contact with the development team has been limited to a phone call "orientation" to the project on January 25, 2022. This reviewer was on the call with Angela Gile (Winn), and a representative from the architect, Andrew Stebbins. In addition, application materials have been exchanged via several emails.
5. ***Provide an initial oral presentation to the ZBA. Said presentation typically includes comments and preliminary recommendations on the following (presentation to the ZBA is scheduled for February 15, 2022):***
 - a. ***Orientation of building in relation to parking areas, open space and on-site amenities.***
Comments: The proposed building is a large, roughly T-shaped, 4 to 5 story structure. This reviewer could not locate the proposed gross square footage in the application materials. The residential program includes 120 rental apartments, 7 @ studio, 77 @ 1-bedroom, 24 @ 2-bedroom, and 12 @ 3-bedroom. This is a total of 168 bedrooms (which mean that there are 48 "extra" bedrooms that could house school-age children).

The leg of the building along Pitman has a four-story façade. The building height steps up to 5-stories on the eastern façade of that leg along the project's triangular-shaped parking lot, drop off, and garage-access area. The wing of the building that runs along the railroad tracks is five stories, with parking occupying the entry level. The northern end of the building where it meets Essex has been designed to have the appearance of a two-story, single-family home with a generous entry canopy where it meets the sidewalk. While there are some parallel parking spaces proposed along Pitman, the primary vehicular entry to the facility is off of Elm Place. In addition to the surface and garage parking spaces, there is a 17-car remote parking area to the east of the new structure, also accessed from Elm Place. Overall, without opining on issues that may be associated with the ratio of parking spaces to dwelling units, the organization and functionality of the parking options work well.

Recent revisions to that area have included separating the parking for the tumbling facility from the residential use. This modification was made in response to safety concerns, and it appears to have addressed those satisfactorily. However, it is not clear that the Fire Department has reviewed this revised plan (the Fire Prevention Memo included in the application materials is dated 11/3/2021. Revised site plan is dated 1/04/22).

There is very little proposed usable outdoor space on the site. There is a small patch of green "park space" shown between the new structure and the tumbling facility (400 SF?). The programming of this space is not indicated on the Landscape Plan. Where the building meets Essex, there is a triangular green area adjacent to the main entry where a "potential bus stop/shelter" is indicated on the plans, as well as the project's transformer.

There is a green, planted buffer proposed along Pitman to provide separation and screening of individualized building entries from the public sidewalk, as well as a pattern of street trees. There are also some plantable areas within the primary outdoor parking area, presumably designated for larger canopy trees, as well as six street trees along Elm Place (these are called out as "potential tree locations" on the latest Landscape Plan).

Other outdoor amenities that are proposed within the building footprint include private balconies in many of the units, and a large roof deck at the southwest end of the fifth-floor (1800SF?), reportedly with views of the ocean. Interior amenities for residents include two lobby areas, club room, fitness room, resident lounge, mail room, laundry rooms, storage areas, a business center, and a leasing office.

b. Function, use and adequacy of open space and landscaped areas.

Comments: As noted above, there is very limited at-grade outdoor space for use of the residents. While it makes sense that the nearby tot lot and other open space at Jackson Park and the high school will serve the needs of children who will reside in the development, in a development of this scale, one would expect to find onsite, passive recreation/socialization spaces for adult residents (particularly as 70% of the units are studios and one-bedrooms). There is a very generous roof deck, but it is unlikely that food grilling, fire pits, and other popular amenities will be possible in that setting. The possibility of making a connection from the site (or adjacent to it) to the rail trail opens up considerable access to outdoor amenities.

The landscaped areas on Pitman appear to be suitably sized to distance dwelling units from the sidewalk, and the proposed street trees on Pitman and Elm Place will greatly improve the existing streetscape. More large-scale plantings in the parking lot would be beneficial (understanding the limitations imposed by subterranean infiltration systems).

A more detailed Landscape Plan should be provided that includes a planting schedule to facilitate a more in-depth review.

c. Use and treatment of natural resources.

Comments: The existing site is fully developed with homes and associated yards scheduled for demolition, a large construction storage barn, and paved parking areas. Some existing, mature trees will be removed to make way for the new structure. The proposed plan, like the existing conditions, will primarily consist of impervious parking areas or rooftops. While not within the scope of this peer reviewer, it is presumed that the new plan will improve on the management of stormwater from the existing conditions.

d. Building design, setbacks, massing and scale in relationship to the surrounding context and topography.

Comments: As noted above, a large percentage of the proposed building is separated from the existing small-scale residential fabric by the railroad tracks. The proposed situation along Elm Place, as far as setback from the two existing structures across the street, is not radically different from the existing condition (the existing homes will face

a parking lot, although with an improved streetscape due to introduced street trees and enhanced pedestrian access to Essex). The building itself, while much taller than any existing context, is significantly set back from Elm Place and the existing homes.

Pitman is a different situation. The proposed building along Pitman starts at Essex at a scale similar to existing context, but the building façade grows to 4 stories as it stretches down the street towards the tracks. This will have impact on the 1.0 to 1.5 story homes across the street, both with direct shadow impact in the morning hours and access to view of the open sky to the east. The Applicant has made significant modifications to the building height along Pitman by deeply stepping back the top floor. The building is also set back 16 to 20 feet from the property line along Pitman to mitigate the height of the new structure. Floor to floor heights in the new structure are not excessive, which helps to control the overall height of the building.

While street level perspectives have been provided to help understand the proposed streetscape, it is difficult to thoroughly analyze impact to the neighbors without additional documentation. Most important would be east-west street sections that include the neighbors across the street, as well as shadow studies. Adding more context to the perspective views would also be useful. Although the Elm Place neighbors are less impacted, additional street level perspectives along that frontage are also important.

Where the provided street level perspectives are most useful is in understanding the degree of detailing of the building façade that helps to break up the long footprint's scale, both vertically and horizontally. These design devices include placing the top floor within a roofscape (at least along Pitman), individualized entries and low porch roofs along Pitman, patterns of protruding bays, etc.

In brief summary, there has been meaningful effort through building setbacks, step-backs, and small-scale façade detailing to tie the large structure into the nearby smaller scale, dense, fabric. Additional materials, particularly 3-D renderings, will help to determine if additional efforts are required. A small, but potentially important view to study is from Essex Street to determine how well the northern-most elevator hoistway extension ties into the overall composition of the building.

Best case for this reviewer and the ZBA would be access to the architect's 3-D model (which should include nearby context) in order to have the capacity to view the project from any perspective.

e. Viewsheds of the project visible from the public street, public areas and from the vantage point of nearby residential neighborhoods.

Comments: Most importantly, as noted above, more information is required from the development team to accurately assess the visual impact of the project from the public realm and the immediate neighbors.

f. Pedestrian and vehicular access and circulation; adequacy of accessibility provisions. Of particular interest are the implications of access and egress in terms of pedestrians, bicyclists and motorists. Adequacy of parking facilities.

Comments: The location of the site is pedestrian friendly, and the proposed plan improves walkways along Pitman and Elm Place. Beyond the provision of outdoor bike racks, there does not appear to be other measures taken to encourage bicycle use. Most importantly, there does not seem to be secure, indoor bike storage within the parking garage or elsewhere.

As noted above, while not within this reviewer's area of expertise, it appears that vehicular circulation, drop off and pick up, trash collection, and parking have been sufficiently accommodated.

g. Integration of building and site, including but not limited to preservation of existing tree cover, if any.

Comments: The site slopes away from Essex Street, towards the railroad right of way. The proposed building makes minimal changes to the slope, as it is bound by the elevations of the streets on three of four sides. Changes in site grade are dealt with internally with the building's circulation system. In the sense that the at grade program follows existing contours, the building is well integrated into the site. While there is a loss of existing trees, the Landscape Plan indicates an intention to provide new plantings well in excess of existing conditions.

h. Exterior materials.

Comments: Building elevations have not been annotated to indicate material selections. This is critical missing information that should be provided by the Applicant.

i. Energy efficiency.

Comments: While drawings and specifications are not adequately developed at this point to assess efficiency, submitted materials indicate a commitment to a high efficiency building envelope, Energy Star windows and appliances, high efficiency heating, cooling and ventilation, LED lighting, and super low-flow plumbing fixtures.

j. Exterior lighting.

Comments: A photometric plan is included in the materials, although it needs to be updated to reflect the revised site plan. It is not clear from the plan which fixtures are specified for designated locations.

k. Proposed landscape elements, planting materials, and planting design.

Comments: See comments above. A more detailed Landscape Plan should be submitted.

l. Feasibility of incorporating environmental and energy performance standards in the design, construction and operation of the buildings.

Comments: There are a multitude of third party environmental and energy performance standards that a building of this type could comply with (LEED, Energy Star, Passive House, Enterprise Green). The Applicant has committed to meeting Stretch Code level of Building Code mandated compliance. Additionally, there is a commitment to third-party (undesigned) inspections and commissioning. Solar panels are indicated on the roof plan.

Given that there is a gas connection indicated on the utility plan, it is not likely that the building will be all electric.

m. Any other design-related considerations identified by this peer reviewer, the ZBA, town staff, working group, or the citizenry of Swampscott.

Comments: As noted above, a better understanding of the project's impact to the nearby neighbors and public realm will be possible with access to more documentation. In addition to that request (as well as others included in this letter), other concerns/questions and/or deficiencies include:

- Can a less prominent location for the transformer be found on the site?
- Given the intensity of development on the site, a Construction Management Plan should be submitted. CMP should reflect any requirements imposed by MBTA given proximity to tracks.
- The Applicant should provide additional detail for the "potential" bus stop shelter.
- Project should provide information regarding proposed number and location of Group 2 fully accessible units, as well as a diagram that ensures that there is an accessible path between all amenities (including the proposed park space).
- What is the projected population of school age children?
- Is a garage door proposed (this is a very visible element, and not clear what intention is)?
- Elevation keys on Level 1 plan need to be corrected. Also, East-Elm Place elevation unclear.
- Provide detailed floor plan for 16 stack of units (it appears that there may be inadequate access to exterior wall to accommodate a living room and a bedroom).
- Provide more detail regarding program of roof deck (there has been some concern expressed by neighbors about use of the deck).
- At Level 1, the southern elevator needs to open up at both the corridor level and the resident lounge level.
- How are the Level 1 storage units allocated? Are they for management or resident use?
- Balconies are missing on level 3 plans, railroad track side of building.
- GSF of units should be noted on plans.
- An acoustical and vibration study should be commissioned that will specify any building design accommodations that need to be made to meet HUD standards. Potential reflected sound impact on neighbors on south side of tracks should also be considered.
- Is another egress door required from the western end of the parking garage?
- The future connection to the Rail Trail should be indicated on civil plans (at a minimum, to provide assurances that the construction of the building will not block its construction).
- Central laundry rooms appear to be very small.
- How many EV parking spaces are proposed?

- No elevator lobbies are indicated. How will code compliance be met?
- If LIHTC funding is anticipated, are DHCD Design Requirements adhered to (for example, 2-bedroom units are typically limited to one bathroom)?
- Is any screening of rooftop equipment required (none is shown in elevations or roof plan)?
- What is status of discussions with Zipcar and MBTA?
- Has a full geo-technical report been generated? If so, this should be made available.
- Will the development require impact-resistant glazing on windows given proximity to open water?
- It is unclear if current plans satisfy Fire Department request for access to roof from all stairways.
- Turn around space is indicated on site plans. Is the Applicant still looking at creating a gated access to Doherty Circle?
- Developer should finalize and commit to a detailed Transportation Demand Management Plan that describes measures to encourage alternative modes of transportation.

n. Techniques to mitigate visual and other impacts.

Comments: This is discussed above.

6. *Participate in meeting(s) with municipal staff and the developer team ("working sessions"), to address to the ZBA's charge(s) to the developer.* (No working session has been scheduled at this point).
7. *Provide a written report(s) and oral presentation(s) to the ZBA on the Applicant's submission(s) prior to the close of the public hearings that addresses, at a minimum, the aspects of the development identified in number 5 above. Said report(s) and oral presentation(s) shall also include recommendations relative to design-related conditions to be incorporated in a potential approval of the Comprehensive Permit, including but not limited to modifying specific aspects of the site and building design in order to improve the overall development and its relationship to its surroundings and to mitigate potential negative impacts. (Final report not yet drafted)*

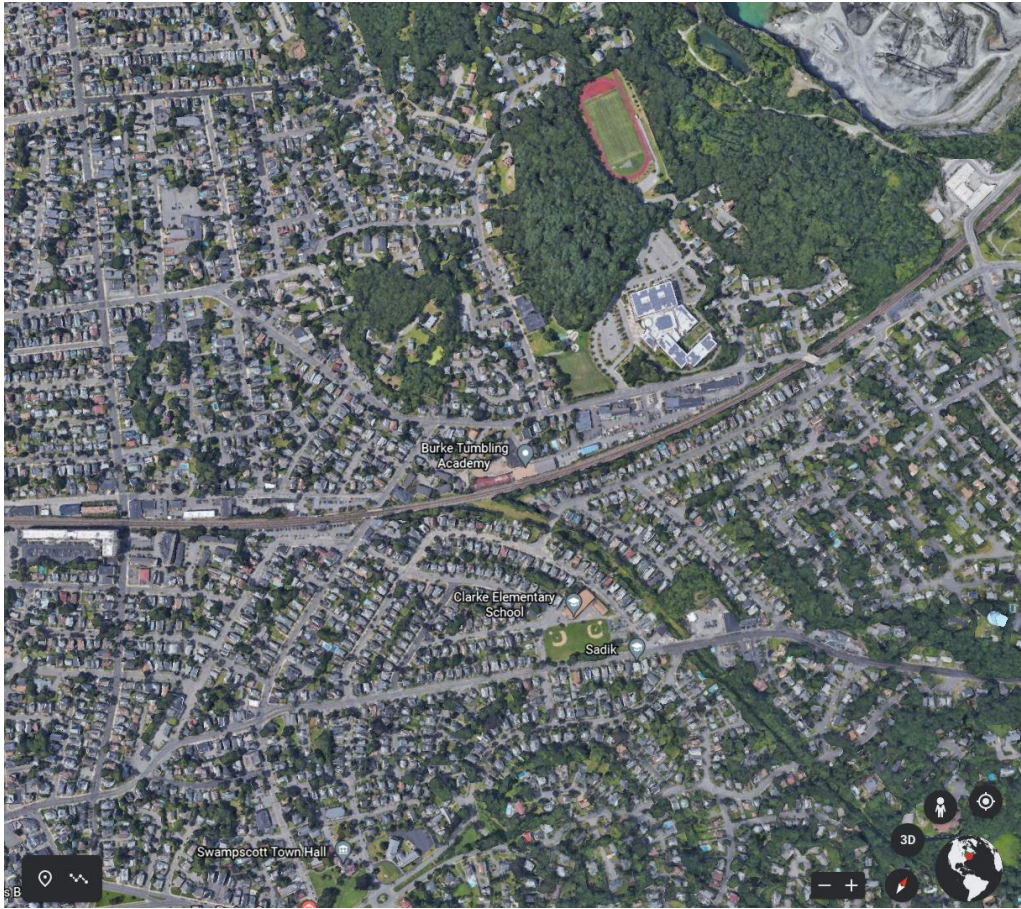
In brief summary, this reviewer believes that this site is very well suited for a 40B development. It is clear that while the project is large, significant efforts to mitigate its scale and tie the building into existing context have been made. While many questions remain across multiple disciplines, it is likely that they are resolvable.

I am looking forward to seeing further development of the proposal. Photos are included on following page.

Sincerely,
DAVIS SQUARE ARCHITECTS, INC



Clifford Boehmer AIA
Principal



Context within 1/2 mile of the subject site.



Commuter line pedestrian underpass in Cambridge, MA (Pemberton Street in North Cambridge).