

12th February 2024

Dear Members of the Sherborn Zoning Board of Appeals (“ZBA”) and Mr. Murchison:

Included with this letter is a preliminary site analysis of the Phase 2 (Washington St.) site proposed for development as an affordable housing complex in Sherborn. We have serious concerns that, as planned, the development will greatly underserve its intended future occupants. The document elaborates on one of our concerns in this regard.

We ask that the ZBA and Mr. Murchison address the concerns set forth in this letter and document during its open hearing on Tuesday, February 13, 2024.

Sincerely,

Meredith & Steve Wesolowski

Preliminary Phase 2 Site Analysis: Social Considerations

Respectfully Submitted to Sherborn ZBA and Mr. Bob Murchison

A cursory site analysis of the Phase 2 site that focuses on its intended residents and the proposed Phase 2 location & amenities.

What are the main components of a site analysis during development planning?

Arch Daily¹ lists four main factors of any site analysis:

1. Climate Trends.
2. Social Considerations.
3. Zoning and Regulation.
4. Infrastructural.

Factors 1, 3 and 4 are subjects of other components of the approval process. Therefore, ***this site analysis will focus on Factor 2.***

Factor 2: Social Considerations

“Good design should enhance users’ quality of life.”²

A web query of “social considerations in designing for affordable housing” brings up Shelterforce³ - an independent, non-academic publication devoted to community development, affordable housing, and neighborhood stabilization - as one of the top hits. According to Shelterforce:

“It must be understood that good design is far more important, and far more complex, than simply a matter of visual attractiveness or ‘curb appeal.’”⁴

Paraphrasing Shelterforce’s design principles with regard to social considerations, affordable housing design should:

1. Address the **livability** of affordable housing units
2. Address the way their residents feel about their environment
3. Foster social cohesion and interaction within a development
4. Consider the way a development enhances — or detracts from — the long-term sustainability and viability of the community [including environmental impact⁵].

Of these considerations, the livability of the Phase 2 location and its impact on design will be addressed below.

¹ <https://www.archdaily.com/989059/4-essential-elements-of-site-analysis>

² <https://www.archdaily.com/989059/4-essential-elements-of-site-analysis>

³ https://shelterforce.org/2006/04/23/designing_affordable_housing/

⁴ https://shelterforce.org/2006/04/23/designing_affordable_housing/

⁵ Added by author, but implied by Shelterforce.

How is “livability” defined for an affordable housing community?

According to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development⁶ (HUD), the first principle of a livability for affordable housing community focuses on **transportation choices**.

"Livability means being able to take your kids to school, go to work, see a doctor, drop by the grocery or post office, go out to dinner and a movie, and play with your kids at the park, all without having to get into your car. Livability means building the communities that help Americans live the lives they want to live - whether those communities are urban centers, small towns, or rural areas."

-Secretary Ray LaHood, United States Department of Transportation

Transportation Choices

According to the developer: “We intend for the development to be fully affordable below 60% AMI, with eight (8) of the units (or 20% of the project) below 30% AMI⁷.” The 30% AMI economic demographic - or people who earn at or below 30% of the Area Median Income⁸ (see table) - comprise the least-economically secure, and therefore most transportation-insecure, group served by MassHousing except for those who rely on federal or state public housing facilities.

30% Area Median Income (AMI) - “Extreme Low” Family Income Limits

| | AMI | 1 person | 2 people | 3 people | 4 people | 5 people | 6 people | 7 people | 8 people |
|--|-----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| Middlesex County (Including Sherborn) | \$149,300 | \$31,150 | \$35,600 | \$40,050 | \$44,500 | \$48,100 | \$51,650 | \$55,200 | \$58,750 |

The following is a site analysis of current transportation choices for future Phase 2 residents. Transportation modes considered include walking, bus, train, subway, bicycle, and driving.

Although it is assumed most, if not all, of Phase 2 residents will have access to cars, given that the development will draw from the 30% AMI/Extreme Low Income demographic as defined by Mass Housing, it is also reasonable to believe many will not have reliable access to cars and families will likely not have access to more than one car (i.e. driving-age dependents may not have access to a car).

Walkability

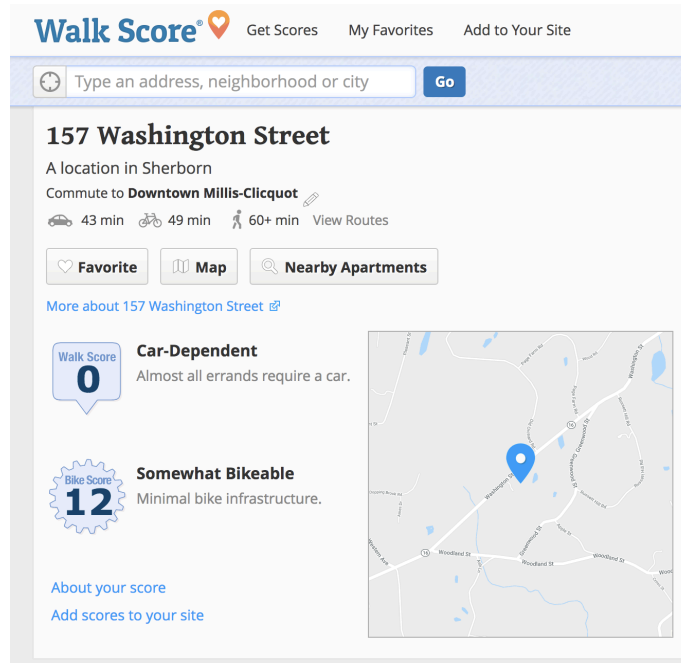
Using the website Walk Score⁹ (used by many online real estate sites, such as RedFin), the walkability score (0 = lowest, 100 = highest) of the Phase 2 site was determined using the adjacent property’s address (157 Washington St.):

⁶ https://www.hud.gov/program_offices/economic_development/Six_Livability_Principles

⁷ <https://www.sherbornma.org/DocumentCenter/View/1995/LIHTC-Description-January-23-2024>

⁸ <https://www.masshousing.com/-/media/Files/Developers/Income-Rent-Limits/2023-HUD-Income-Rent-Limits.ashx> Note: Sherborn follows Boston-Cambridge-Quincy AMI values

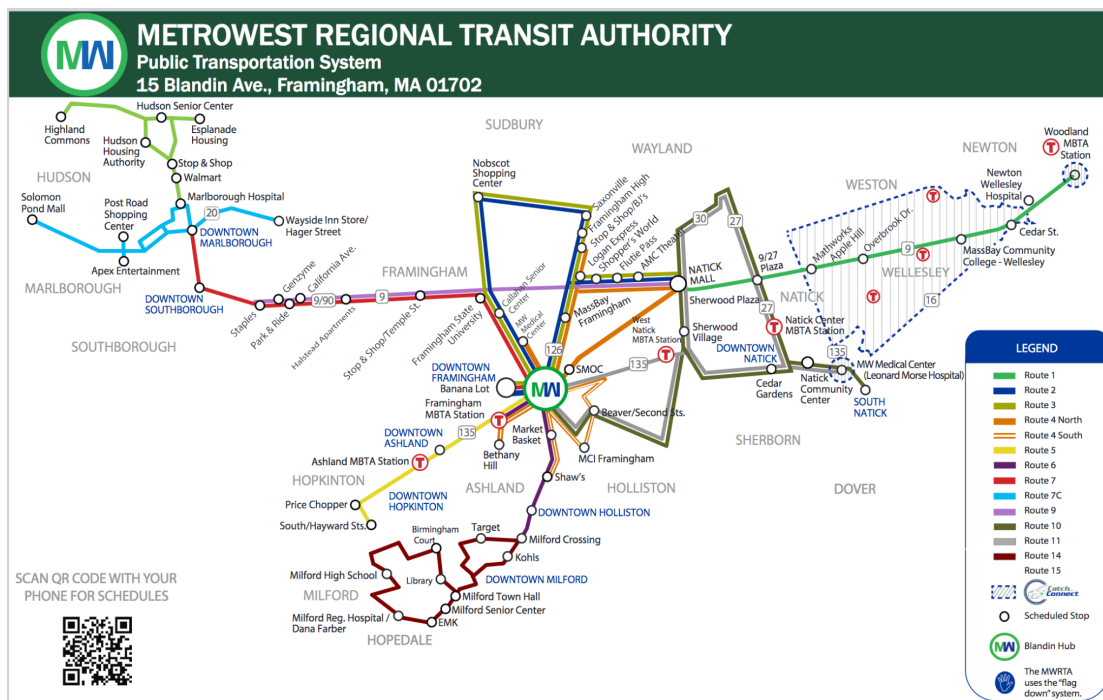
⁹ <https://www.walkscore.com/>



The Phase 2 site has a walkability score of “0,” which corresponds to the lowest possible walkability score.

Local and Regional Bus Access

The town of Sherborn does not provide local bus service, nor do Phase 2’s closest town neighbors of Holliston and Millis. Sherborn is in a geographic region served by the MWRTA¹⁰, which publishes an online bus route map, included below:



¹⁰ <https://www.mwrt.com/>

As reflected in the map, there are no regional bus routes that serve Sherborn (including the Phase 2 site). From the Phase 2 site, the three closest MWRTA bus stops are Downtown Holliston (~2.7 miles), Shaw's in Ashland (~3.4 miles), and Cedar Gardens in Natick (~4.6 miles). There are no other transit authorities with regional bus service in any of the towns closest to Phase 2 towns (Holliston and Millis). Although the MBTA¹¹ geographical service area includes Millis, the closest MBTA bus route ends in Dedham.

Train and Subway Access

Using the MBTA schedule-finder, <https://www.mbta.com/transit-near-me>, Phase 2 was determined to be most proximal to the following train and subway lines, with distances noted:

Nearest train: Framingham/Worcester Line, Framingham Station, 3.8 miles away

Nearest subway: Green Line D, Riverside Stations, 10.4 miles away

Bicycle Route Access

According to the organization Cycling in Cities¹², bicycle use is most likely where there are interconnecting bike routes through residential areas, and/or paths that include a barrier between the bike route and traffic. Factors that make bicycle use unfavorable include fast-moving roadways, and particularly highways, that regularly see truck and bus traffic. As Phase 2 will be accessible only from MA Route 16 (Washington St.), an east-west oriented Massachusetts state highway¹³, with a posted speed limit of 45 mph and frequented by large and small vehicles, it is not considered a "Bikeable" location. Walk Score gives the site a 12 (out of 100) score for Bikeability.

Summary of Transportation Choices for Phase 2

- Walkability score: 0 (out of 100)
- No local or regional bus service
- Closest train station: 3.8 miles
- Closest subway station: 10.4 miles
- Bikeability score: 12 (out of 100)

Proximity to Schools, Healthcare, Goods, Services, etc.

As quoted previously, *"Livability means being able to take your kids to school, go to work, see a doctor, drop by the grocery or post office, go out to dinner and a movie, and play with your kids at the park, all without having to get into your car."*

Below is a summary of the closest locations of significance, their driving distance (walking distance noted if different) as well as the time it would take to reach them by foot.¹⁴

¹¹ <https://cdn.mbta.com/sites/default/files/2023-12/2023-12-17-mbta-system-map.pdf>

¹² <https://cyclingincities.spph.ubc.ca/files/2011/10/WhatMakesNeighbourhoodsBikeable.pdf>

¹³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Massachusetts_Route_16

¹⁴ <https://www.google.com/maps/>

| Sector | Establishment | Distance (miles) | Round-trip by Foot |
|----------------------|--|--|--|
| Grocery store | Shaw's, Ashland | 3.5 | 2 hours, 45 min. |
| Pharmacy | Pine Hill Pharmacy CVS, Holliston | 1.8 / 5.5 walking ¹⁵ 3.1 | 4 hours 2 hours, 30 min. |
| Schools | Pine Hill Elementary Dover/Sherborn MS Dover/Sherborn HS | 2.1 / 5.4 walking 5.6 5.7 | 4 hours 4 hours, 4 min. 4 hours, 12 min. |
| Playground | Sherborn Town Playground Goodwill Park, Holliston | 1.9 / 5.5 walking 3.1 | 4 hours 2 hours, 14 min. |
| Urgent Care | CVS/Minute Clinic, Ashland | 5.7 | 4 hours, 4 min. |
| Hospital | MetroWest Medical Center | 5.5 | 3 hours, 52 min. |
| Library | Sherborn Town Library | 1.5 | 1 hour 4 min. (Rt. 16) |
| Restaurant | C & L Frosty's | 1.8 / 5.5 walking | 3 hours, 58 min. |
| Gas Station | Sherborn Fuel | 1.5 | 1 hour 4 min. |
| Post Office | USPS, Sherborn | 1.8 / 5.5 walking | 3 hours, 58 min |

How is a Transit Desert Defined?

*"A transit desert is an area with limited transportation supply. . . . Transit deserts are generally characterized by poor public transportation options and possibly poor bike, sidewalk, or road infrastructure. **The lack of transportation options present in transit deserts may have negative effects of people's health, job prospects, and economic mobility.**"¹⁶*

Based on lack of access to transportation choices, as well as lack of proximity to essential goods and services, the Phase 2 location readily falls within the definition of a "transit desert." Therefore, on-site Phase 2 amenities should help fill gaps to alleviate the potential reduced quality of life posed by its lack of transportation choices and recreational/economic proximity.

Improving Livability in a Transit Desert

The intended 30% AMI, Extreme Low Income cohort this affordable housing development is targeting will lack access to transportation choices. It is therefore incumbent upon the developer to design for improved **on-site livability**. In doing so, it may be helpful to understand what amenities are offered by other nearby affordable housing complexes serving the same 30%-60% AMI demographic.

¹⁵ Increased walking distance as calculated by Google and due to lack of sidewalks along Route 16 with subsequent redirection through residential areas.

¹⁶ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Transit_desert

Using the Housing Navigator Massachusetts¹⁷ website, which allows users to search for affordable housing options across the state, income-restricted affordable housing units similar to those proposed for Phase 2 were located for an area centered on Sherborn. An initial query provided 15 results, three matching the intended demographic of Phase 2 (30-60% AMI residents; not age-restricted). As this first query afforded few examples, a second query was performed for all of Framingham, and three more properties were found. The six total affordable housing developments serving 30-60% AMI residents are listed below, along with notable transportation- and amenity-related details for each.

| Property Name | % AMI Limit | Walkability/ Bikability ¹⁸ | Amenities Provided |
|---|-------------------|--|--|
| Cochituate Homes Coop, Framingham ¹⁹ | 30% | 44/27 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • owned by residents (cooperative) • most townhomes, some garden style • majority of units w/ fenced backyards • assigned-space parking • playground • basketball court • on-site after school program • community room • heat, hot water included • on-site or on-call property management • pets allowed |
| Wilkins Glen, Medfield ²⁰ | 50% 60% 80% | 62/47 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • State Public Housing • Preference given to homeless (natural forces, public action, domestic violence) • cable TV • garbage disposals • resident clubhouse • laundry facilities • 24-hr emergency maintenance service • cats permitted • parking |
| Framingham Housing Sites ²¹ (Coburn St.) | 50% | 76/51 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • State Public Housing • parking • laundry facilities • pets allowed • scattered housing sites - not within one development; other amenities vary |

¹⁷ <https://search.housingnavigatorma.org/>

¹⁸ <https://www.walkscore.com/>

¹⁹ <https://www.maloneyproperties.com/rentals/cochituate-homes/>

²⁰ <https://www.wilkinsglenbc.com/>

²¹ <https://framinghamhousingauthority.org/framingham-housing-development-corp-ii-properties-fhdc-ii/>

| | | | |
|--|-----|-------|---|
| Saxonville Village, Framingham ²² | 30% | 74/51 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • parking • community room • playground • electric • water/sewer • elevator |
| Edmands House, Framingham ²³ | 50% | 46/22 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • balconies • heat, hot water & electricity included • basketball court • courtyard • elevator • fitness center • laundry facilities • on-site maintenance • on-site management • playground • access to public transportation |
| Pelham II Apartments, Framingham ²⁴ | 50% | 60/45 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • lifelong learning center • playground • 24-hour on-call emergency maintenance • street and guest parking • planned resident events and activities • after school programs/activities • on-site professional management • laundry facility • computer room |

According to the developer's LIHTC Description dated January 23, 2024²⁵, the Phase 2 on-site amenities will include *"newly developed trails, a playground, a multi-purpose room and community laundry . . . and the landlord will pay for all utilities."* The comparator sites have much easier access to goods & services due to their locations, increased walkability & bikeability scores and therefore access to recreational facilities within their communities. Yet they still provide many more on-site amenities than are planned for Phase 2 in the proposed Sherborn plan. Due to the transit desert that Phase 2 will comprise, it is incumbent upon the developer to increase the available number of amenities, particularly those for children and youth living in the apartments. Recommended additions include:

- Age-specific playgrounds (under-5 y.o. & 5-12 y.o.) with surrounding benches
- Basketball court (half-court or larger)
- Soccer field (potentially on septic field)
- Paved pathway from apartment and along a portion of Washington St.

²² <https://www.winncompanies.com/fyh-results#?lat=42.279286&long=-71.4161565>

²³ <https://www.edmandshousebc.com/>

²⁴ <https://www.pelhamapts.com/>

²⁵ <https://www.sherbornma.org/DocumentCenter/View/1995/LIHTC-Description-January-23-2024>

- Traffic light with crosswalk connecting Phase 2 to Old Orchard (allowing a walkable/bikable pathway to Sherborn center, Fessendon Fields, etc.)
- Secure bike rack
- Picnic tables and grilling stations
- Dog walking area (if pets allowed)
- Aftercare activities/community programs
- Study area/computer room
- Fitness center

These are consistent with those amenities requested by residents, HUD,²⁶ and designers.^{27 28} They are also consistent with amenities offered in other affordable housing communities beyond those listed above.^{29 30} This and any other comparable affordable housing unit design for Sherborn should consider site-specific transportation choices, and if the site is classifiably a transit desert, provide amenities to attempt to offset the resulting reduced livability.

²⁶ <https://www.hud.gov/hud-loans-blog/top-5-amenities-for-affordable-housing-properties/>

²⁷ <https://butterflymx.com/blog/apartment-amenities/>

²⁸ <https://www.apartmentlist.com/renter-life/apartment-amenities>

²⁹ <https://www.maloneaffordable.com/rental-properties/oxbow/>

³⁰ <https://www.georgetownebc.com/amenities>