

March 12, 2024

Dear Members of the Zoning Board of Appeals and Board of Health,

I'm writing because I'm perplexed by the nature of the proposed Washington Street apartment complex.

I have several worries, first and foremost being the protection of well water in town. I cannot see how a project of that size and scale could be constructed in a way that would ensure the integrity of all our well water. Given all the impervious surfaces, including the building itself, supporting structures, and parking lot; the size and scale of the septic needs; the proximity to wetlands; and more, I do not see a path forward where water quality would not be at risk.

I'm concerned that this project will put the natural resources we all rely on in jeopardy. I'm receiving medical care that makes me more susceptible to infection. Anytime I become unwell it means delays in my medical treatment, so I'm especially worried about keeping contaminants out of our drinking water.

I reviewed the online materials the developer submitted and this raised many question and concerns that I'm hoping can be addressed during the public hearing period. For example:

- Given the size and scale of the impervious surfaces (building, parking lot, etc.), how can the town ensure this will not lead to excess runoff and/or other harm to our groundwater?

According to the Cheapeake Bay Foundation, one inch of rain falling on a hard surface results in [27,000 gallons of runoff](#). For example, researchers in Indiana calculated that the amount of [runoff](#) generated by car parks in Tippecanoe County were [900% higher](#) than before the land was converted.

The EPA recognized stormwater runoff as a leading source of contaminants, stating that "research has found a direct relationship between the amount of impervious surface in a watershed and a watershed's water quality."

We already grapple with pollution from runoff issues. As we experience more extreme weather, those issues will only increase.

- There seem to be numerous potential risks from human activity that could not feasibly be monitored or curbed to protect the water supply. Potential contamination sources include oil, gas, and antifreeze spills from cars; parking lot sealants; heavy metals; road salt; pesticides and fertilizer; sealants for balconies or other surfaces; roadway trash/debris; and more).

- How could a septic system of this size not be detrimental to the water supply and to nearby wetlands?
- How could you determine the size of septic systems needed for the site when there is no way to reasonably enforce occupancy limits?
- There appears to be quite a bit of standing water on the lot, and many areas in the neighborhood struggled with flooding in recent months. How can a lot with that much high water be safely built on?
- What oversight does the Board have in terms of the timing and validity of perc tests to ensure they accurately reflect the nature of the water drainage?
- How does the developer intend to provide clean drinking water without any reliance on the town?
- Eliminating even more trees and natural filtration will exacerbate runoff yet we often see developers do just that. We previously lived near a townhome development (not in Sherborn) where the developer gave assurances that they would not clear-cut the land. They did it anyway, claiming it was a misunderstanding with their crew. The town had no recourse, and there was no undoing the damage. How could we prevent this from happening here?
- The project says there will be parking for +/- 60 cars. How would that be enforced to ensure there are not more vehicles and increased pollution sources and traffic congestion?
- Would the building be visible from Greenwood St? Are there height restrictions for such structures in a residential/neighborhood setting?
- What assurances could the developer provide that they would not do blasting at the site? How could that be enforced? (When we lived in Hopkinton, our home and that of eight neighbors were damaged due to dynamite blasting from a construction project.) In this case, the Washington St. developer told me verbally that he has dug on the site and there is no ledge and he does not plan to blast. However, who would independently provide assurances that there is no ledge on the site? Could the ZBA issue a condition that no blasting occur? If so, how would that be enforced? If I understand correctly, a well elsewhere in town has been damaged from blasting in the past.

- The developer's documents state, "In cases where ledge, buried foundations or boulders are present, DGT Associates shall not be responsible for the amount of rock or concrete encountered." What does that mean?
- The project documents say they plan for 20-30' clear area to reduce PV shading. This increases the concern for runoff. What is the PV for?
- Would there be an exit/entrance onto Greenwood St?
- I'm concerned about the traffic impact as well as the impact of emergency vehicles getting to/from the site and to get through Washington St during rush hour, especially since traffic is often backed up quite far on the street at that time of day. I see there was a traffic impact study but who independently ensures that is accurate? (It seems like developers consistently give reassurances that their projects are not going to negatively impact traffic yet we've seen ones that cause safety concerns and more traffic congestion.)
- re: electric utilities, are those being buried underground? If so, how do you ensure that the underground materials such as metals and other materials don't leach into the groundwater? Does installing those increase pathways for VOCs to travel?
- How would trash collection/removal be handled? What assurances could be provided that debris and other trash was properly secured and removed on a timely basis to avoid attracting pests?
- I see there is a proposed 40,000-gallon underground water storage tank for fire suppression. Is that exclusively water or would chemicals be used for fire suppression?
- What kind of fire suppression and fire extinguisher systems would be used in the building? What kind of chemicals? If there is a fire, how do you prevent these chemicals from seeping into the groundwater?
- Are there any requirements for follow-up that the septic system be monitored to ensure it's maintained and operating correctly?
- re: the soil absorption system, is that entirely underground? The description says it's 28 trenches with 6' minimum separation.
- What would the source of heat for the apartments be? If that's oil, how to you ensure the oil tanks don't leak and harm the water supply?
- Can radon levels in the water or ground be impacted by construction of this scale?

- Does your Board or any other in town have any oversight when it comes to noise pollution and/or light pollution from the project?

I also wonder how this site was chosen. If one is truly interested in serving the needs of low-income residents, why select a site that isolates people who don't drive from critical resources like medical care, food, and public transportation?

In its Principles of Affordable Housing, the Urban Land Institute states that *every effort should be made to site affordable housing developments close to public transportation*. Overlooking this basic need does not seem fair to potential residents.

AAA reports that it costs an estimated \$10,728 a year to own and operate a car. This is out of reach for many low-income families. Building the site in the proposed location would mean anyone without the financial wherewithal to have a car or who is otherwise unable to drive would not be candidates to live there, since they would have no means to access medical facilities, grocery stores, childcare, places of employment, or any other essential amenities. This would also exclude many of the [91,000 older adults](#) in Massachusetts living below the federal poverty level, a significant portion of whom either cannot afford a car and/or no longer drive.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Kindly,
Leslie Doyle
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