



**Town of Lancaster**  
**Office of the Board of Selectmen**  
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Lancaster, MA 01523

*Stanley B. Starr, Jr., Chairman*  
*Walter F. Sendrowski, Clerk*  
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November 20, 2018

Mr. Gregory P. Watson, AICP  
Manager of Comprehensive Permit Programs  
Massachusetts Housing Finance Agency  
One Beacon Street  
Boston, MA 02108-3110

**Re: Application for Project Eligibility Determination/Site Approval Goodridge Brook Estates,  
Municipal Comment Letter After 30 Day Local Comment Period**

Dear Mr. Watson,

In response to an application for Project Eligibility Determination/Site Approval submitted to the Massachusetts Housing Finance Authority (MassHousing) by Crescent Builders, Inc., for a proposed development of two hundred (200) units on Sterling Road in Lancaster and pursuant to Massachusetts General Laws, Chapter 40B, Section 20-23 (Chapter 40B), the Lancaster Board of Selectmen (the "Board") is submitting the following feedback following a 30 day municipal comment period as outlined in 760 CMR 56.04 (3).

This correspondence clarifies the Board's previous correspondence dated December 12, 2017. During the municipal comment period, the Board received one hundred and seventy-six (176) communications. The mission of 40B has been well executed in other projects in Lancaster, and these previous developments should be emulated. In fact, Lancaster's Grand Oaks 40B development was recently cited as the Rental 40B example model in the Federal Loan Bank of Boston's July 2018 webinar. The overwhelming response during the recent 30 day comment period is that Lancaster officials and residents recognize the need for increased affordable housing in Lancaster, but should achieve the desired threshold through a far more balanced and sensible approach. This project is out of alignment with many of the intentions outlined in Chapter 40B.

The following points detail areas of concerns expressed during the public comment period.

**I. An Oversized Development Project in a Neighborhood that Can Not Support its Scale**

The proposed project is located on a 45.42 acre parcel that is nearly evenly divided between woods and various wetlands. The rental portion of the project consists of one hundred and twenty (120) apartments in three (3) buildings which contain 5 stories each. The home ownership portion of the project consists of forty (40) duplexes totaling eighty (80) condominiums. The rental apartments are proposed as follows: twenty-four (24) 1 bedroom units, eighty-four (84) 2 bedroom units, and twelve (12) 3 bedroom units for a total of two hundred and eight (228) bedrooms. The eighty (80) home ownership units (condos) consist of three (3) bedroom units with a master bedroom on the ground floor and two (2) bedrooms upstairs for a total of two hundred and forty (240) bedrooms. The combined total bedroom count between rental and home

ownership units is four hundred and sixty-eight (468). However, the building plans submitted at the outset of the project indicate four hundred and seventy-four (474) bedrooms. It is not clear what bedroom count is currently being proposed, as the developer has recently submitted a different home ownership project altogether.

It has been clearly demonstrated to the Board that this level of density on the abutting access roads will be a cause for concern that has not been mitigated within the plan submittals. The access roads surrounding the site - Sterling Road, Deershorn Road and George Hill Road are the access means in close proximity to the site, are all very narrow town-owned streets.

## **II. Project Eligibility Criteria are Not Satisfied**

Chapter 40B establishes seven specific statutory provisions governing site eligibility requirements under 760 CMR 56.04 (4). The public comments in Lancaster highlight problems in meeting several of those eligibility criteria:

### **1. Overall Conceptual Project Design and Integration into Existing Development Patterns**

Many town officials and residents have expressed concerns regarding the project's overall scale and density, and how its incongruous character fails to blend in with the surrounding community. This is an unfortunate departure from the successful 40B projects in Lancaster, including (but not limited to) Blue Heron and Grand Oaks.

As was indicated earlier, this site abuts another high density 40B project, Jones Crossing which has been under construction for some time. It does not seem prudent to put large 40B projects adjacent to one another in a small town with under 7,000 residents.

### **2. Financial Feasibility within the Housing Market in which it will be situated**

The financial model in the proposal uses rents that exceed the income limits defined by the Department of Housing and Urban Department (HUD). The published income limit in Eastern Worcester County for an individual in FY 2018 is \$50,350. Assuming that 30% of the income went to rent, which is the generally accepted definition of "affordable rental housing," then annual rental payments of \$15,300 (\$1,275/month for 1 BR) would be above what is considered affordable. It is therefore unlikely this financial model will meet Lancaster's local affordability needs. This is also communicated under the Eligibility Criteria wherein the financials do not reflect the local housing market, and again do not meet Lancaster's affordability needs. The Board of Selectmen would like to see this data better defined or revised to make sure the units are in fact meeting the target objectives of affordability.

### **3. Pro Forma Submitted for Each Project**

The eligibility criteria also include verification that the Initial Pro Forma has been reviewed, and the project appears financially feasible on the basis of estimated development costs. However, if the entire home ownership portion of the project has changed from what MassHousing reviewed and for which it issued preliminary approval, then this important verification is missing. The building typology and count, and overall bedroom count are all different. The Pro Forma included in the home ownership application is for forty (40) three bedroom duplexes (eight condos) versus the current plan for sixty-two (62) four bedroom houses.

## **III. A Town Water Shortage and Low Water Pressure**

The availability of potable, public water is an overarching challenge for this proposal. Water sources and delivery methods have been a well-documented challenge for Lancaster for many years. The Town is served by two wells that are located adjacent to one another, pumping from the same aquifer. Should this aquifer be over-pumped or become contaminated (contamination can also be caused due to over-pumping), there is no other backup solution in the Town. A site for a third well in town has not been permitted, and when it eventually is, it may take several years to make it operational.

The Town of Lancaster is currently pumping above the withdrawal permit level issued by the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) to serve the existing users, and has entered its buffer capacity in 2018. The remaining buffer capacity is expected to be used by several dormant sites. There is also a residential development under construction that includes 16 houses, and the 60,000 SF expansion of an industrial manufacturing facility on Sterling Road (James Monroe Wire & Cable) will be coming on board with 24 additional employees per shift. Not to mention the already permitted Jones Crossing 40B development with 32 additional homes.

Lancaster will be challenged to meet the water capacity of these existing sites, and will certainly not have the capacity to meet the needs of the Good Ridge Brook Estates bedroom count without obtaining a new water withdrawal permit first, the cost of which will likely be significant. We would expect that the developer to take the appropriate financial responsibility for mitigating this capacity issue.

#### **IV. Sewer Capacity and Inflow/Infiltration**

It is not certain at this time whether Lancaster has the sewer capacity for this project, an issue that is currently under review. Pursuant to a strict DEP mandate, there is a considerable amount of Inflow/Infiltration that would need to be removed from the wastewater treatment system that is currently not available within Lancaster to “free up” capacity at the Massachusetts Water Resources Authority (MWRA) Treatment Plant in Clinton. No solutions have been offered by the developer to assist or mitigate these major hurdles relative to the project’s water and sewer needs, and further exploration of an onsite “package” plant or septic system need further investigation.

#### **V. Traffic and Public Road Safety**

Many of the comments we received were equally concerned about the added traffic impact to the narrow, winding country roads adjacent to the site. According to the developer’s traffic engineer, this project will add 1,600 trips from the site per day. The roads impacted are not scaled accordingly, and yet there is currently little mitigation proposed by the developer. Several roads are already the easy “cut through” to major destinations, and their use will increase dramatically given the scale of this proposed project.

Lancaster has three railroad intersections adjacent to and within a quarter-mile from the project site. Traffic engineers have proposed increasing the visibility of the railroad crossings, but there is little that can be done to prevent the dangerous gridlock created by a sudden increase in traffic on single lane roads with three crossings, including Sterling Road and Route 62. Sterling Road in particular should also be evaluated given the limited sight distance, shoulders on both sides, and swales and topography changes. In addition to the large volume of trailer truck traffic due to the commercial businesses located there, the residents of Sterling Road and Mary Catherine Drive must use Sterling Road daily, and describe speeding and near accidents as a routine occurrence.

The change by the developer to build sixty-two (62) houses instead of forty (40) duplexes, and include driveways with direct access to Sterling Road is highly problematic. The original plan submitted to MassHousing used an access road into the site to reach the duplexes, which is far safer.

#### **VI. Safe Width Needed within Goodridge Brook Estates**

The development’s interior site roads do not currently meet the Town’s code requirements. Mr. Dean Harrison, the spokesman for the developer, has explained the intention is for the roads to remain private.

##### **1. Fire Protection and Life Safety**

Due to the nature of a small town, Lancaster has a legitimate need for streets wide enough to accommodate multiple mutual aid emergency vehicles from surrounding towns in the event of a fire emergency, as well as for the cars and trucks from volunteer personnel. Lancaster’s public

safety needs thus require ample street width for parking on the street within the development, particularly during an emergency. There is a general concern that there is currently not a secondary entrance and exit point in the event of an emergency, particularly in the higher density rental portion, and an overall concern for safe traffic flow if the primary entrance and exit point is blocked during an emergency.

**2. Child Protection and School Bus Safety**

The developer's representative has stated in a public forum that the intention of the project is school children will be able to take the bus by accessing it on Sterling Road. This presents a significant safety concern for groups of children waiting for, entering, and exiting school buses. By far the safer alternative would be for children to wait for, board and exit the school bus within the confines of the proposed development, and not directly on Sterling Road. In addition, it is generally the practice of the Nashoba School District to pick up and drop off all kindergarteners at the entrance to their home.

**3. Sidewalks and Pedestrian Safety**

Despite proposing 200 residential units, there are limited sidewalks within the development for safe pedestrian circulation. Children will need to safely reach school bus stops within or just outside the site. A proper curb and appropriate sidewalks within the development site should be included in the plans to assure public safety. The latest submission from the developer has made a partial response to the sidewalk concern, however they are limited and provide no "connectivity" throughout this high density, high-traffic development.

**VII. Insufficient Parking**

The current site plans do not have an adequate number of parking spaces for the number of units and their visitors. The surrounding area does not have "on street" parking available and given the narrow width and high traffic there are no safe alternatives. Therefore, additional parking should be added on-site at the development to meet this need. Additionally, we suggest that the project plan ahead for designated parking for a MART area bus service stop, which is frequently used by the elderly in the area.

The most recent 40B development completed in Lancaster (Grand Oaks) includes two (2) full-size parking spaces per unit, and it seems reasonable to require that the rental portion of this project include the same allocation of parking for residents and any guests.

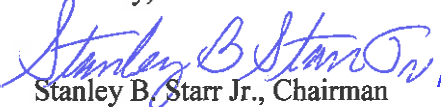
**VIII. Greater Environmental Protection**

The project as proposed poses a serious threat to the local ecosystem. There is a relatively rare cold water fishery close to the western boundary of the site, and a tributary is located on the site. The Lancaster Conservation Commission has requested a study be conducted to ascertain potential damage that will likely occur to local habitat, wetlands, and waterways. As confirmed by the peer review engineer, this proposal already triggers the Massachusetts Environmental Protection Act (MEPA) due to (1) its overall altered acreage and (2) creation of impervious surface. The project should not go forward till the developer submits a formal Environmental Notification Form (ENF) to the MEPA office under 301 CMR (11), and this review process is complete.

**In Conclusion:**

The Board of Selectmen strongly suggest that MassHousing take these comments into consideration and support the Lancaster Zoning Board of Appeals in a fashion that will meet objectives that will encourage the appropriate development of affordable housing in a manner more consistent with the character of the Town.

Sincerely,

  
Stanley B. Starr Jr., Chairman

  
Walter F. Sendrowski, Clerk

  
Mark A. Grasso, Jr., Member

C:

Michael Busby, 40B Specialist, MassHousing  
Lancaster Zoning Board of Appeals