

## Lancaster Historical Commission (LHC)

### Special Meeting Minutes

May 9, 2022 (Single Agenda Item)

**Present:** Marcia Jakubowicz, Heather Lennon, Joan Richards, Karen Silverthorn

**Absent:** Amy Brown, Joy Peach, Mark Schryver, Jean Watson

**Guests:** Martha Moore, Sander DiPietri (Capital Group)

#### **Call to Order:**

Chairperson Heather Lennon called the meeting to order on Zoom ID 831 3969 5996 Passcode: 250993 at 5:08 pm.

**Single Agenda Item:** Discussion of the Capital Group's 40B application sent to the LHC by Town Administrator (TA) Kate Hodges. She asked for feedback to be sent back to her by May 13, 2022. The final (collective) document from the town's response on the 40B will be sent to the Massachusetts Housing Authority (MHA) by May 27<sup>th</sup>.

The 174-page application to the (MHA) was distributed to the LHC members via an email attachment sent by Heather Lennon several days earlier.

**Clarification:** This is for a **40B, not 40R** project submitted to MHA by the Capital Group.

Heather Lennon welcomed the guests. and Sander DiPietri said he was there to listen but could not answer questions that he had not had to do with when the document was created. When asked to reply to questions about specifics, he was clear about not being able to do so. Sander said his area of expertise for Capital Group is Economics. The comment was made that cost increases due to present day inflation will be passed along by the developer and this will not be a very affordable option for many.

- LHC members began by not having specific questions related to costs to the town and taxpayers; however, it was mentioned that the yearly school budgets are about 75% to 80% of the annual budget and a 40B will impact

the taxpayers significantly plus adding the increases in town department budgets to cover increasing population numbers.

- LHC asked about the cost of the rental units and the number of low-income apartments that would be available. Guest Martha Moore asked a question about environmental justice regulations being followed. Environmental concerns like pollution and water issues, are less likely to be addressed by the disadvantaged who are thought to be less likely to complain about conditions where they live. No answer was provided.
- Height of the complex and the 200 proposed units were discussed. There has never been a development of this size proposed for Lancaster before. Single family houses such as those in Eagle Ridge, which was for residents over fifty-five years of age, brought problems to the town regarding water supply and pressure. Also, the owners were paying taxes and having no roads plowed by the town until they went to Town Meeting to vote in this service. Concerns for town services to a 40B would likewise be significant.
- Flood plain concerns included a 100-year flood. Joan Richards reminded the members of the 50-year flood in 1987 where the two branches of the Nashua River spilled all over the roads. The storms of 1936 and 1938 (pictures in the LHC collection document some flooding of the Center Village areas) were costly, and within 10 years the town will reach the time of a likely 100-year flood. Richards reminded the members that all the bridges in Lancaster were flooded out by the two branches of the Nashua. The only way out of the center of town then was Shirley Road, which is closed now by the South Post of Devens. LHC members had questions as to the accuracy of the FEMA data relating to area of North Lancaster; as its impact may be felt by future residents of this development by 2036 (or before with the implications of climate change presently facing much of the country). Have present guidelines been published and examined as storms have significantly increased in the past 10 years?
- The town will have to pick up the cost of significant weather events if this development is allowed. There will be no help from the developers. Taxpayers of the future will be impacted because of questionable planning now. There was a reason this area was not populated through the years!
- Water: The issue of sparse potable drinkable water supply in this area has long been an issue for the Lancaster Water Department. The area is full of bedrock. The agreement with Leominster is on paper for a 25-year connection with their water supply. What are the contingencies beyond that if Leominster needs the water for themselves? What is the alternative plan for Lancaster citizens?

- It seems unfair to make a proposal for future Lancaster citizens to be without water because of a lack of a specific solution detailed agreement from the start. This area of North Lancaster is on record for difficulty finding water supplies for those now residing in the area with poor water pressure. Extremely deep drilling currently has to be done to find water for new structures.
- Mining through the centuries in granite quarries, slate quarries, and now sand removal from the land have been active. Trucking out the natural resources left by the glaciers moving through the area has long been ongoing. The eskers in North Lancaster are recorded as well as the drumlin in south Lancaster in the history books. Will the Keating Company continue to mine the area?
- Historical records since 1653 record low residential populations in this area due to the features of the land. Look at the historic maps for residential housing. Martha Moore mentioned that the residents of Lancaster Woods near the Boy Scouts Headquarters along Route 2 still have issues with water pressure, and three new houses in the area had to go way below normal levels to find any well water.
- Retention basins and drainage for stormwater is a significant concern. Concerns about the amount of impermeable asphalt were raised. Chemicals used to melt winter ice and snow will cause polluting run-off. Where will this contaminated water go? Is there an adequate plan?

Historically, the industry in North Lancaster was the Shoeshank factory once accessed by the Ponakin Bridge. (Route 70 was not open to Union Turnpike then). Previously, Shirley Road was open to Union Turnpike at the intersection prior to Ft. Devens closing the road. Now the road is cut off by the takeover by Fort Devens and the land is used for by the army as a firing range. Of concern now is the lack of more than one way in and out of this proposed 40B project. What would happen in the case of an emergency?

### **Concerns -- Placement of 200 units in this area:**

- Response time for mutual fire coverage from Leominster and Lunenburg fire departments is a serious concern. Lancaster's Center station is far away and is at a disadvantage by having a very small full time staff. The same concern for police coverage was expressed.
- Questions were asked about fencing and border trees. Concerns were expressed that removing trees and vegetation that absorb present levels of rainfall will not be there to keep the area from flooding once the land is

changed. What is the impact of salt and chemicals used on asphalt in winter? Will the vegetation be killed?

- The impact of traffic will be significant, especially for school children. Riding bikes or playing street hockey in a densely populated apartment area of this size raises concerns for safety. Also, will the walking trails exclude bicycle riding?

**Joan Richards concerns not discussed at the meeting:**

- **1.** Lancaster citizens already experience high vehicular insurance rates due to Route 2 accidental fatalities. What is the calculation that even more traffic in this area will add to this impact on insurance rates?
- 2.** Also, prior to urban sprawl in the 1980s, the pond areas were sprinkled with small summer cottages and few full-time residents. There was a YMCA summer camp that is now a housing development area. The increase in full-time residences on Fort Pond, Spectacle Pond, and White Pond is great. These full-time residents both impact and are impacted with increased daily traffic on nearby roads from industrial and commercial companies now located in North Lancaster.
- 3.** Zoning for two acre lots, previously voted on by the Planning Board and approved by Lancastrians, has resulted in numerous 40B projects being proposed by developers who are emboldened to skirt zoning laws.

**In conclusion:** Sander DiPietri was thanked for attending the meeting. LHC members did not vote on this 40B Plan. A list of concerns, in the form of the LHC meeting minutes, will be sent to Kate Hodges, as requested, no later than May 13, 2022.

**Adjournment:** A motion to adjourn the meeting at 6:09 pm was made by Marcia Jakubowicz and seconded by Karen Silverthorn. It carried unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,

Joan Richards, Recorder for the LHC meeting