



SELECT BOARD
Town of Middleton
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June 15, 2023

Ms. Kat Miller
Mass Housing
One Beacon Street
Boston, Massachusetts 02108

Dear Ms. Miller:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on the application for Site Approval submitted by Villebridge Acquisitions LLC to develop a rental housing project under MGL Chapter 40B on Boston Street in Middleton. The applicant is proposing to construct a three-story building for sixty (60) units of rental housing, along with parking and other amenities. Fifteen (15) of the housing units are proposed to be affordable at the AMI 80% level. The project is located on the site of the former Angelica's restaurant and function facility at the intersection of State Routes 114 and 62, an important and already stressed intersection in Middleton.

Naturally, much more planning and review is needed for the Town to effectively consider this project. We anticipate that, during any hearing on this matter, the Zoning Board of Appeals and Town departments will have the benefit of qualified peer review resources in order to conduct detailed analyses of technical studies submitted by the developer. Notwithstanding the lack of such information currently, we have solicited department head input and public feedback on the application and materials submitted for Site Approval. We have serious concerns with traffic, fit, character, water usage, as outlined in this letter, and without these concerns addressed, the Town cannot support the project.

The Town of Middleton prioritizes the development of affordable housing, including the adoption of a Housing Production Plan. This Plan seeks the diversification of housing options to allow residents to age in place and encourages affordable housing development to achieve the state Chapter 40B minimum threshold of 10%. While the proposed project may meet these goals; several concerns and issues have been raised about this project that are addressed in the following commentary:

Traffic Safety and Congestion:

This project is located on Route 62 (Boston Street), just several hundred feet from the intersection at Route 114 (South Main Street). The current signalized intersection at this location operates at substandard conditions, routinely resulting in traffic backups throughout the day. There is limited pedestrian and bicycle

access connecting this intersection to nearby destinations, including Town Hall, the Town Common and Playground, the Flint Library, and the commercial center in Middleton Square. The Town believes that this intersection must be studied and solutions developed to enhance its safety and functionality, especially given the proposed development at this location. In addition to this rental housing project, the developer owns an adjacent site along Route 114 that he has proposed for commercial development. The commercial project proposes 13,000 square feet of retail space that will also impact the Route 114/Route 62 intersection. Over a five-year period ending in June of 2022, the Middleton police department has documented 90 vehicle crashes at this location, over a dozen of them with injuries. It is essential that the developer conduct a comprehensive traffic study of this intersection, and propose adequate mitigation, taking into consideration future vehicular trips from his commercial development and other known projects in the area. The study and mitigation package should identify opportunities for walking and biking and propose safety improvements that are incorporated in the Town's Traffic Calming policy and other industry standards. It is noted that traffic planning at this location must be coordinated with MassDOT, which owns and maintains this section of Route 114. Finally, given their control of this site and the adjacent commercial site, the developer should be amenable to working with the Town and MassDOT to dedicate land easements or control if necessary for traffic intersection improvements.

Water Supply:

The water to this development will be supplied directly by the Town of Danvers as governed by an intermunicipal agreement with the Town of Middleton. A Water Management Act Permit limits total withdrawals from the system. The developer must study and document the water demand and hydraulics of this project and determine if there is sufficient capacity to accommodate it. The developer must also plan for compliance with the Town of Danvers and/or Town of Middleton requirements for water conservation and a Water Use Mitigation Program (WUMP).

Wastewater and Stormwater Drainage:

There is no municipal sewer system at this location, requiring wastewater to be collected via a septic system in accordance with Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection Agency's Title 5 regulations under the authority of the Town of Middleton's Board of Health. The project is in close proximity to Middleton Brook, a tributary considered impaired under Section 303(d) of the Clean Water Act. The Middleton Brook connects to Middleton Pond and the Ipswich River, essential for the region's water supply. The developer must conduct a study demonstrating how the septic system will operate at sufficient capacity and protect the quality of Middleton Brook downstream. The Town believes this study should incorporate the wastewater flows from the developer's adjacent commercial proposal.

Stormwater management in Massachusetts is governed by sections of state Wetlands Regulations and Water Quality Regulations, as well as the DEP stormwater management guidelines. The developer must study and propose solutions to dealing with stormwater from the development that prevents untreated

flow into nearby water bodies, controls the flow of stormwater to prevent erosion and otherwise meets the rigorous standards imposed by the federal, state, and local government. Again, the Town suggests that the developer incorporate and coordinate the impact of his proposed commercial development when studying the impacts of stormwater from the Villebridge housing project.

Fire Safety and Access:

The Fire Chief has expressed concerns from the preliminary site plan about the department's access to all areas of the building to facilitate effective firefighting and emergency medical response. The issue of emergency access has been a particular concern of 40B developments that may seek to construct projects without the normal safeguards to ensure adequate access. The current layout of roadways and parking lots on the site appear to limit 360-degree access to the building and effective deployment of fire apparatus. We encourage the developer to work with the Fire Chief to develop solutions to these limitations, including the use of his adjacent commercial parcel and cooperative arrangements with adjacent property owners, if necessary. The Fire Chief has also requested sufficient peer review resources necessary to evaluate compliance with Fire Safety codes and related industry standards.

Neighborhood Impacts and Sustainability:

Clearly, the development of a large-scale apartment complex will have impacts on the health, character, and quality of life on the immediate neighborhood. Middleton is a small town predominantly made up of single-family homes with a rural feel. The preliminary design of the apartment building is incompatible, in our opinion, with the character of the neighborhood. The developer must make sufficient efforts to create a design and materials that are more consistent with the neighborhood, such as current structures like Memorial Hall, Middleton Green, and the Flint Public Library, all of which are within a few hundred feet of the site. Additionally, care must be taken both to avoid light from the development to shine onto neighboring properties, and to mitigate impacts from vehicular light, noise, and exhaust as they enter and exit the property. Proper sound attenuation for air handlers, rooftop mechanical equipment and other operations must be planned to meet state noise regulations. Measures should also be taken to reduce single vehicle trips, including bicycle accommodations, car sharing services, and shuttle bus facilities.

To date, the developer has demonstrated a commitment to deal fairly and directly with neighbors. We encourage him to continue this effort, above and beyond the public hearing requirements of the Comprehensive Permit process.

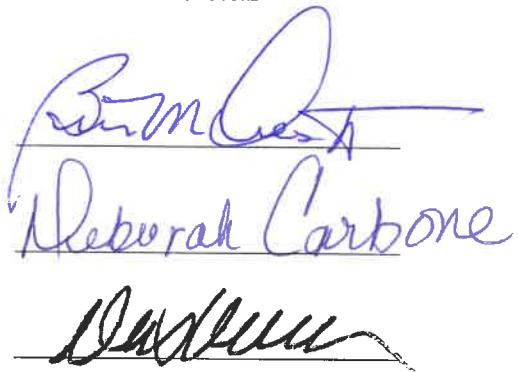
In summary, the Town is supportive of affordable housing that meets the goals set out in its Housing Production Plan. However, while this project does offer much needed affordable housing, the project's location and size requires additional comprehensive planning and solutions to mitigate the impacts to the neighborhood, town, and region. In the event Mass Housing issues a Project Eligibility Letter for Site Eligibility approval, we strongly urge it to require the developer to study the issues raised in this letter, advance specific mitigation proposals and provide the Town with resources necessary to conduct effective peer review.

In the course of developing comments to this application, the Select Board has solicited public input. In addition to incorporating these concerns in this letter, we have attached written commentary from the public for your review and consideration. Finally, we have another meeting with the developer scheduled for June 20, 2023. We appreciate the opportunity to supplement these comments following that meeting.

Thank you for your consideration of these comments.

Sincerely,

Select Board
Town of Middleton


Deborah Carbone

cc: Jackie Bresnahan, Interim Town Administrator
Jay Talerman, Town Counsel