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DESIGN REVIEW BOARD RECOMMENDATION

PROJECT: INDEPENDENCE VILLAGE COMPREHENSIVE PERMIT APPLICATION
ADDRESS: 25 PLEASANT STREET
APPLICATION: ELDER FRIENDLY HOUSING LLC

September 24, 2018

Members of the Zoning Board of Appeals,

In response to your request for comments relative to the Independence Village Comprehensive Permit application the Design Review Board held public meetings on September 4, 11 and 24 to review the application materials available on the Zoning Office's webpage and we hereby offer the following comments and recommendations relative to our Design Review Principles and Standards contained in Section IX.K of the Zoning Bylaw¹. It should be noted that the Board received significant public input regarding the project, both in writing and at the public meetings. It should also be noted that the applicant's Managing Member and President, Karl Mayer, attended the meeting on September 4.

Overall Assessment:

The proposed project does not meet the Ipswich design review principles for the following primary reasons:

- ***The site planning including building and parking layout, and the excessive scale of the building leaves little to no room for meaningful open space or effective screening and exacerbates the incongruity of the building and parking area with its surroundings along with the pattern of mostly modest single family homes in the neighborhood.***
- ***The Board has identified several potential deficiencies with the plans, which calls into question the constructability of the project as depicted on those plans. Furthermore, while the project is being billed as an ageing in place project, there are serious accessibility impediments within the building and on site.***

The Board's design principles are intended to enhance the social and economic viability of the Town by preserving property values and promoting the attractiveness of the Town as a place to live, visit and shop; encourage the conservation of buildings and groups of buildings that have aesthetic or historic significance; discourage construction that is incompatible with the existing environment; and encourage creativity and variety in development.²

Design review is an important component of the Comprehensive Permit application review process. The Massachusetts Housing Partnership's (MHP) Chapter 40B Handbook for Zoning Boards of Appeal includes design review among the typical peer review aspects of the Board's review. The Handbook reads: *Design Review:*

¹ Zoning Bylaw Section IX.K, Design Review, makes design review mandatory for any multifamily dwelling, development or residential mixed-use development that is subject to a Special Permit.

² Zoning Bylaw Section IX.K.1.a-d

Architectural peer review typically includes a review by a registered professional architect of the proposed buildings, their relationship to and impact on surrounding areas, and architectural design, e.g., conceptual design drawings of the site plan, exterior elevations of all sides of the proposed building, landscaping and outdoor lighting, open spaces, and where applicable, outdoor amenities. The MHP's Handbook refers Zoning Boards to the *Approach to Chapter 40B Design Reviews, January 2011*. The Design Review Board encourages the Board of Appeals to consider the information presented in these guidance documents in addition to considering the Board's recommendation herein.

The purpose of Design Review is intended to ensure that proposed projects enhance the social and economic viability of the Town by preserving property values and promoting the attractiveness of the Town as a place to live, visit and shop; to encourage the conservation of buildings and groups of buildings that have aesthetic or historic significance; to discourage construction that is incompatible with the existing environment; and to encourage creativity and variety in development.³

Following are specific comments on this project based on the design principles and standards set forth in the DRB Standards and Guidelines:

Height: the height of any proposed building should be compatible with the character of the site being altered and that of the surroundings.

- The proposed building is significantly taller and larger than the structures in its vicinity.

Proportions: the proportions and relationships of height to width between windows, doors, signs and other architectural elements should be compatible with such relationships in the surroundings.

- Repetition of the windows with no variation in size and texture is monotonous and reinforces the disproportionate mass of the proposed building.
- The use of shutters, of a size not completely related to the windows, neither addresses the scale or ornament nor respects the local vernacular.
- The size of the entry doors relative to the roof structure of each entry is disproportionate.
- The general proportions of fenestration are incompatible with surrounding structures.

Relation of Structures and Shape: the shape of roofs, windows, doors and other design elements should be compatible with the architectural style and character of a building or site and that of its surroundings.

- The height, length and monotony of the roof ridge reinforces rather than softens the large mass of the building and its incongruity with buildings in the neighborhood.
- Roof pitches of homes in the neighborhood were designed to create habitable spaces within the attics, thereby increasing living space in small footprints. The proposed building's roof pitch is said to mimic this, however without utilizing the space within the roof it artificially increases building height. Perhaps the upper level could be made habitable, utilizing dormers, and thereby allowing the overall building height and stories to be reduced.
- There are no design elements that speak to the neighborhood, local or regional vernacular.

Landscape: any proposed landscape development or alteration should be compatible with the character and appearance of the surrounding area. Landscape and streetscape elements, including topography, plantings and paving patterns, should provide continuity and definition to the street, pedestrian areas and surrounding landscape.

- The applicant proposes to remove significant existing mature canopy/over-story vegetation and replace it with plants that offer no canopy, which offers little to no building and parking area screening.
- The proposed structure leaves little to no outdoor green space, no outdoor gathering space for the residents, and inadequate room for landscape screening.

³ Zoning Bylaw Section IX.K.1.a-d

- The Blaisdell parking spaces necessitate major regrading and retaining wall installation. What will the walls look like?
- The large parking areas at the subject intersection are incongruous with the pattern in the neighborhood.
- There is inadequate screening of the parking areas, no street trees and foundation planting to soften the appearance of the site and mitigate the project's impacts.

Scale: the scale of a structure or landscape alteration should be compatible with its architectural or landscape design style and character and that of the surroundings. The scale of ground level design elements such as building entryways, windows, porches, plazas, parks, pedestrian furniture, plantings and other street and site elements should be determined by and directed toward the use, comprehension and enjoyment of pedestrians.

- Two, two or two and a half story buildings could be far more appropriate for this neighborhood and should be explored. Each building could have street entrances, which would be compatible with homes in the neighborhood. Parking could be contained in between the buildings, which would allow for more effective screening.

Directional Expression: building facades and other architectural and landscape design elements should be compatible with those of others in the surrounding area with regard to the dominant vertical or horizontal expression or direction related to use and historical or cultural character, as appropriate.

- The siting of the building to one side of the lot produces an inconsistent spatial relationship and fails to maintain the Pleasant Street and Blaisdell Terrace fabric and presence.

Architectural and Site Details: architectural and site details including signs, lighting, pedestrian furniture, planting and paving, along with materials, colors, textures and grade should be treated so as to be compatible with the original architectural and landscape design style of the structure or site and to preserve and enhance the character of the surrounding area.

- It does not appear the dumpster, which is located in front of the building can be safely and conveniently serviced or screened from view.
- The applicant should show all exterior utility meter locations, HVAC equipment locations, transformers and similar as this will have an impact on the design and appearance of the building and site.

Signs: the design of signs should reflect the scale and character of the structure or site.

- None proposed

Garages and Accessory Buildings: garages and accessory buildings should be sensitively integrated into the overall development, and should not be the predominant design feature when viewed from the street.

- None proposed

Accessibility and General Livability Concerns:

- The Blaisdell Terrace off street parking configuration would require maneuvering and backing out directly onto Blaisdell Terrace as well as require a large uncharacteristic curb cut.
- There is no natural light in the living spaces of several units.
- The Building Code might require fully enclosed stairs with appropriate fire rated doors at each level. One cannot leave the rated stair enclosure to get to the next flight of stairs as might occur with the current layout. Correcting this deficiency might affect the overall layout and massing of units and quantity of units.
- The Building Code may require two means of egress for each of the three floors. It does not appear that requirement has been met.
- The ZBA should ensure the project meets the accessibility requirements of 521 CMR under Massachusetts Architectural Access Board.

- Unit 1 bedroom has no windows.
- The community space on the lowest level has no windows and is uninviting. The stair is located in this space. The egress path cannot go from an area of lower hazard to an area of higher hazard. If not properly enclosed, this egress path would not be acceptable.
- The application materials do not indicate design features that particularly address the needs of aging, independent residents. There is a reliance on stairs within the building, no elevator, there is no sidewalk on the project side of Blaisdell Terrace, the community space within the building is only about nine feet wide and shares the role of stair hall, and there don't appear to be details about the accessibility of the units.



Ken Savoie, Chairman