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May 14, 2019 (first review letter)
July 21, 2019 (second review letter)
Revised October 24, 2019 (third review letter)
September 9, 2020 (fourth review letter)

Marie Rodgers, Administrative Assistant
IPSWICH ZONING BOARD OF APPEALS
Ipswich Town Hall
25 Green Street
Ipswich, MA 01938

Re: **Fourth Architectural Review**
Essex Pastures, Essex Road, Ipswich MA

Dear Maria:

In anticipation of the ZBA hearing for the proposed development on Essex Road that is scheduled for **Thursday, September 17, 2020**, I am providing you with comments on the latest materials that I have reviewed. To help keep track of the progress this project has made, this report includes a selection of the comments from the previous two that I've written. All new information will be highlighted in red. The materials I have reviewed for this letter include:

- Essex Pastures plan set dated May 18, 2020 (24 sheets) prepared by Andrew Zalewski, MZO Group.
- Comprehensive Permit Filing set (6 sheets) prepared by Hancock Associates including Title Sheet dated 7/15/20, Existing Conditions Plan, Layout & Materials Plan dated 8/4/20, Grading & Utilities Plan dated 8/3/20, and Site Details dated 8/3/20 and 7/15/20.
- Landscape set of drawings (5 sheets total) prepared by James K. Emmanuel Associates including Landscape Plan dated 7/10.20, Screening Elevations dated March 5, 2020, Landscape Materials (3 sheets) dated March 5, 2020.
- Essex Pastures ZBA Presentation PowerPoint dated July 16, 2020 (26 slides).
- Vehicle Turning Movement Plans (4 sheets) prepared by Hancock Associates dated 6/1/20.
- Emergency Vehicle Turning Movement Exhibit(s) (7 sheets) prepared by Hancock Associates dated 7/29/20 (includes Staging Exhibit).
- Letter to ZBA from Smolak & Vaughan dated June 17, 2020 (describes changes to project).
- Essex Pastures Rooftop Equipment Noise Prediction prepared by Noise Control Engineering dated March 6, 2020.
- Essex Pastures: Unit Mix Summary dated 6/17/2020.
- Landscape Planting Count & Exterior Water Usage matrix (undated).
- Email to Marie Rodgers from Chief Andy Theriault dated July 9, 2020.
- Email to Marie Rodgers from Rob Spurrier and Paula Jones dated July 15, 2020.
- Email to Marie Rodgers from Joanna Cooper dated July 15, 2020.
- Email to Ethan Parsons from Peter Gordon dated July 15, 2020.
- Email to Marie Rodgers from Joan Gould dated July 15, 2020.
- Email to Marie Rodgers from Joseph Ciardiello (undated).
- Email to Marie Rodgers from Brendyn Lynch (Conservation Agent) dated August 11, 2020.

As is the case with most developments at this point in the 40B process, the project's design is schematic. Accordingly, my comments are limited in detail. My focus to date, pending further project development, has been on broader issues, mainly looking at how the proposed project fits into the existing context, impact to immediate abutters, scale mitigation strategies, perception from the public realm, the quality of the development for the future residents, building code issues, etc. Most of these issues have already been discussed with the development team, and some brought up at my presentation to the ZBA. Once the project "fundamentals" of circulation, parking, massing, setbacks, step-backs, buffers, on-site amenities, etc. are settled on, it will make sense to look more closely at architectural language, materials, and so on. **Following are my comments on the latest materials:**

- Essex Pastures plan set dated May 18, 2020. As stated earlier in this report, the architectural documents are at an early stage of development. Accordingly, comments are limited primarily to basic functional and aesthetic concerns:

- Clubhouse building plans not included. The current set includes the Management Office and Clubhouse plan and front elevation. It is a one-story structure that is set near the front of the site. While somewhat screened from view from Essex Street with landscaping between the single-loaded parking and the street, the Clubhouse, along with the elevation of Buildings A (front) and Building B (end elevation) are the “face” of the project. The scale of the Clubhouse is appropriate for this location, and the massing of the structure is broken up with some articulation in the footprint, as well as the roofscape. This building will provide some screening of Building C, which is the 3-story building that is closest to Essex Street. The program for the Clubhouse includes function room, mail room (presumably for the entire development?), business center, shared kitchen space, lounge, conference room, “tenant services” (not defined), two offices, theater, gym, and common bathrooms. There is an outdoor swimming pool, fenced in, adjacent to the Clubhouse and connected with an outdoor patio. This program seems suitable for a development of this scale.
- Clubhouse, Building Front elevation of the mixed use building indicates that the residential entry is very understated. The original mixed use building no longer exists.
- The plans now include five, similar 3-story residential buildings, each with either 27 or 33 units. Drawings include four “types” (that is, there are only two buildings that are identical in design). Much of the revisions to the buildings have been made in response to reviewer comments related to the articulation along the long walls, and as importantly, on the most visible end elevations. While this reviewer continues to believe that more articulation on the long elevations (particularly in the footprint) would be beneficial, stacked balconies and variety of colors and materials will help address this concern. This concern is also mitigated by the fact that there are no longer any 4-story structures proposed. As far as end elevations, with the exception of Building C that is noted below related to its closeness to the swimming area, reviewer’s concerns have been addressed.
- Building elevations are missing material callouts. This should be provided.
- It is not clear from plans how differences in site grade from front and rear are accommodated within the building. Is it possible for all entries to be accessible given grades?
- Changes in grades along length of buildings should be represented on elevation drawings (i.e. elevations and civil grading plans should be coordinated).
- E and G plans are “flipped” relative to site plan. These should be coordinated.
- There does not appear to be any bicycle parking provided inside the residential buildings.
- As noted above, Building C is now very visible from public road. More work on mitigating scale is strongly recommended. Corner nearest community building should be removed to create more space from the pool. While there is some screening provided by the Clubhouse, this reviewer continues to believe that some additional screening on the west end of the façade is advisable. Consider clustering trees at that end (as opposed to evenly spaced trees along the parking lot). Perhaps more importantly, the building is still too close to the swimming pool area, and the end elevations lack articulation given the visibility of the structure. Substituting a “D” type building (with an articulated end elevation) would satisfy this objective (with the loss of 6 units), and would open up additional recreation space near the Clubhouse.
- Building A and B only require one stairwell. No change, but additional stair does not increase visual impact of the building. This is not a serious design concern.
- Locations and plans for Group 2 accessible units not indicated in any of the residential building plans. This information does not appear to be provided in the current set of drawings. It should be provided to ensure that correct distribution of unit types and locations is being proposed. In addition, this reviewer recommends that an accessibility memo be provided by the architect and civil engineer that verifies that full ADA and AAB regulations are met in the current plans.
- As was the case in previous drawings, all units are of sufficient size that the design can be developed so that they can meet Group 1 dimensional requirements. Still is the case in current plans.
- This reviewer continues to believe that the ground floor units should be elevated off of grade to afford a greater degree of privacy, and to further mitigate headlight intrusion. It appears that there is sufficient space with the entry areas to provide a sloped section of corridor to raise the first floor at least 18” above grade without exceeding AAB allowable ramp slopes.
- Architect should confirm that elevators opening directly into corridors meet current building code requirements that address concerns for smoke migration into the hoistways.

- Is a maintenance building still proposed? Maintenance Building un-dimensioned schematic plans and elevations are included in set. It is not clear why the building is as tall as indicated, with one garage door significantly taller than the other. Consider windows to the side elevations.
 - Typical Townhome plans and elevations are in set (un-dimensioned). Plans are typical for that housing type. Architect should confirm that single, open stair is suitable for egress.
 - All townhouse building elevations should be provided, coordinated with civil drawings that show variations in grading.
 - Plan set also include Garage elevations and plan. No issues identified.
- Comprehensive Permit Filing set dated (various dates), Landscape Plans, Screening Elevations, ZBA PowerPoint Presentation. Most of this reviewer's discussions to date with the development team has been related to the site plan. And the plan has been significantly improved to address issues of this reviewer and others. Some concerns remain, including:
 - While there has been progress in "greening" the parking areas, there remains an abundance of parking, virtually all of it head-in, 90-degree parking, with much of it single-loaded. Consideration should be given to changing out some of that parking with parallel spaces along walkways, perhaps designated as visitor parking. While some of the fundamentals related to parking have not changed, other changes have been made to the site-related plans that improve the experience for pedestrians within the site, both residents and visitors. The density of landscaping materials of differing scales has increased, and it has been more thoughtfully placed. Additional walkways have been provided that complete a loop throughout the site. The major public green space is considerably more interesting and inviting, with a clearly defined tot lot area at the northeastern corner (although it is not clear if fencing is provided around the tot lot, which given its adjacency to a driveway, would be advisable).
 - Can some parking areas be eliminated, to be developed only as required after occupancy? This suggestion has not been adopted.
 - Not clear what approach is to EV parking spaces. The trend for transitioning to zero-emissions vehicles is moving at a fast pace. Not clear if any changes have been made.
 - There appear to be some missing walkways on the site plan, including entryways to Buildings A. It appears that the intention is to enter at grade at the ends of A. and B show no connection to sidewalks. This has been addressed at B, no walkway is indicated around the end of Building E. This has not been changed, and should be added, crosswalks are not indicated on the plans. Crosswalks are now delineated in appropriate locations on the site plans.
 - Essex Road street frontage is discontinuous, placement of community building and Building A, as well as the end elevation of Building B feels "random." As discussed above, the community building could provide a more interesting face to the development, and at the same time, expand the distance between the outdoor common amenities and the corner of Building C (this is discussed above as well). See comments above about reducing the scale of Building C to a 27-unit building. This will provide considerably more space for landscaping/passive recreation. Try modifying tree plantings to screen sections of buildings more effectively. Some additional plantings have been provided to screen parked cars from Essex Street.
 - The new arrangement of buildings that are visible from Essex Road, with the exception of Building C, are all two story (or less), and are an appropriate scale for making the transition from the Road to the larger buildings in the rear part of the site. Building C should be modified to help mitigate its scale, at the very least to the same degree that D, E, F and G were (cutting off corners). It is strongly recommended that the footprint also shift at a logical place to break up the length of the structure. See comments above. Generally, site plan in area of the swimming pool, Building K, and Building C needs more work (starting with changing the form/scale of Building C). Plantings in the middle of the front looped parking could be increased to help screen Building C.
 - Buildings A and B are both single-loaded, two story buildings. These are also structures that should incorporate a shift in the footprint to follow the roadway (in the case of Building B), and to create

visual interest and breakdown in scale (Building A and B). In this way, those buildings will relate more successfully to the townhouse structures. Note that both Building A and B only require one stairway, that if re-oriented and placed at an intermediate location, could be used as an element to break up the buildings' massing. **This reviewer still believes the footprint should be shifted, perhaps more importantly at B than A. This is a very simple adjustment with a meaningful positive impact.**

- Is the path to the playground (which as currently drawn is also a link in in the pedestrian sidewalk loop throughout the site) still proposed to be stone dust? Path through primary green space must meet all accessibility requirements (as all walkways do). **The walkway that accesses the playground is still noted as stone dust. Developer must confirm that stone dust is a suitable walkway, for all seasons.**
 - It appears that all walkways are called out "Bituminous Concrete/Cement Concrete Walk." These are two different materials, and it is not clear which walkways are meant to be constructed of which materials. Nor is it clear how wide the walkways are. Reviewer strongly recommends cement concrete on all principal walkways, including all leading to building entries. Potentially, some secondary walkways could be bituminous. Principal "loop" walks should be 5 feet wide minimum.
 - Loading/dumpster areas for buildings do not appear to be indicated. Still not clear if there are dumpsters. No trash rooms are shown on buildings. What is sitewide trash management plan?
 - There do not appear to be bike racks indicated at any of the buildings.
 - Is any privatized space/fencing/patio proposed behind each townhouse that corresponds to location of at-grade family rooms?
 - Ornamental Fence indicated in the Side Elevation (L-1.2) does not appear to be called out on civil plans or landscape plan. Developer should confirm that it is in the proposed scope.
 - Screening Plan is generic. Confirm that rendering conforms with intent at all three-story residential buildings.
 - Are proposed plantings sufficiently drought-tolerant to ensure that no negative impact will occur on town water supply?
 - Consideration should be given to re-shaping the "town green" detention area in order to maximize the usable area of the open green space to the east of it. The "pond" could likely be compressed in the east-west access, and "fattened" in the north-south axis to achieve this.
- Vehicle Turning Movement Plans/Emergency Vehicle Turning Movement and Staging Exhibits. No issues identified by this reviewer.
 - Letter to ZBA from Smolak & Vaughan. No issues identified by this reviewer.
 - Essex Pastures Rooftop Equipment Noise Prediction. Report was based on representation that rooftop equipment on the large residential buildings will be located in a four-foot deep well in the center of the building roof. The developer should confirm that this depth is adequate to mask the equipment that will actually be installed. The placement in the well is also appears to be the proposed method of visually screening equipment from the ground. There does not appear to be information related to the other types of structures that are proposed for the site. Is the solution similar? Will any equipment be ground-mounted? If there is ground mounted equipment proposed for the smaller buildings, it should be shown on the site plans.

- Unit Breakdown spreadsheet dated 5/7/2019. While there are particular exemptions in the code for townhouse units, there is not an exemption from the requirement that the complex include at least one 3-bedroom Group 2 unit. As currently designed, the only 3-bedroom units are in the townhouse buildings. This type of unit cannot be configured to meet Group 2 requirements. If the developer's intention is to exclude three bedroom units from this requirement, a variance from the Architectural Access Board will be required.

Another accessibility concern is that there are no townhouse exceptions for AAB's Group 1 requirements. The site plan indicates that climbing stairs would be required to enter some (if not all) of the townhouse units. Whether this is code compliant should be evaluated. **The revised Unit Mix Summary indicates that there are two 3-bedroom units in Building C that could solve the issue that was discussed in the previous review letter. However, the current plans for Building C only show one 3-bedroom unit, and there does not appear to be an entry to the unit from the common corridor. This should be clarified/corrected.**

- Letter to ZBA from Smolak & Vaughan. No issues identified by this reviewer.
- Landscape Planting Count & Exterior Water Usage matrix. See comments above re: drought-resistant plantings. This concern was brought up by the Conservation Agent as well as a resident of Ipswich.
- Email to Marie Rodgers from Chief Andy Theriault. See Turning Movement diagrams that were produced by the proponent to address the concerns of the local fire chief. Access to the facades of the buildings appear to meet code.
- Email to Marie Rodgers from Brendyn Lynch (Conservation Agent). No additional issues identified by this reviewer. Developer should provide a response to this memo and make adjustments to plans as required.
- Comments from the public. None of the five emails that were reviewed for this report appeared to be in support of the proposed development. Issues ranged from too much impervious surface area, stormwater management, excessive water usage, traffic increase, construction management (specifically, limiting passage of heavy trucks on nearby street), comments on home ownership vs. rental developments, school population increase, overloading of police force, light pollution, noise, and general lack of empathy for the neighbors. These comments are not surprising given the scale of the project.
- SketchUp model of Essex Pastures, The MZO Group. Comments: **No new model available for review. A current model would greatly enhance the ZBA's and public's ability to evaluate the proposed development and its impact on the public realm, as well as give a good sense of the project from the perspective of future residents.**

I hope that you find these comments useful. I'm looking forward to discussing the proposed development at the ZBA hearing scheduled for September 17.

Sincerely,
DAVIS SQUARE ARCHITECTS, INC



Clifford Boehmer AIA
President + Principal