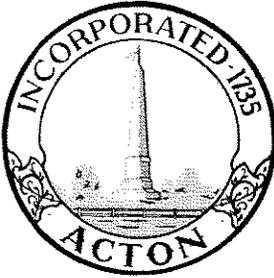


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Planning Department

MEMORANDUM

To: Board of Appeals **Date:** November 1, 2005
From: Roland Bartl, AICP, Town Planner *R.B.*
Subject: The Woodlands at Lauren Hill – Review of October 05 submittals

Materials reviewed on which these comments are based on:

- 10/19/05 plan of "The Woodlands at Laurel Hill" – multiple sheets.
- 10/19/05 plan of "Roadway and Utility Improvements Acton & Westford" – multiple sheets.
- 10/19/05 letter from David Hale, with attachment re: construction sequencing
- 10/23/05 Subdivision Rules requested exception and waivers.

A "Stormwater Analysis" report, dated 10/19/05, was also received in this office. I defer to the Engineering Department for review and comments of this document.

The plan now shows more detail than the previous concept plans reviewed in this office and by the Planning Board. The arrangement of streets, ways, and parking lots, and the location of buildings seem to have changed very little, if at all, since the last review. There was no new documentation provided that indicated any further proposed changes in the unit compositions, affordability, bedroom count, etc. Accordingly, this review is limited to the technical and procedural aspects of the project.

Requested Exceptions and Waivers (10/23/05):

The request for waivers from the Acton Subdivision Rules and Regulations (SRR) begins with reference to the condo portion of the project on Lot 4 and cites various sections in the zoning bylaw that make direct or indirect reference to the SRR. I am not clear if this introduction is intended to limit the waiver requests to just to the condo project on Lot 4, or if the waiver requests are intended to cover the entire project. In any case, the only subdivision street technically shown on the plan is Laurel Hill Drive up to the fork. My comments regarding the waiver requests keep this in mind. However, there are several non-subdivision streets and ways within the project – see General Comments below:

SRR section	Comment
4	√
5	√ - in general. See comments on plan below. Also, consider comments and recommendation from the Engineering Department.

- 6 √ - Provided the Board of Appeals sets forth other suitable measures to secure the completion of streets, utilities, and services for the project. The ultimate purpose of subdivision performance guarantees is to protect the Town from the liability of finishing the work with taxpayer's money should the developer fail to do so. The methods of securing performance that are set forth in the Mass. Subdivision Control Law, and spelled out in more detail in the SRR, are time-tested to accomplish this objective. Any alternative arrangement should provide the Town with at least an equal amount of protection.
- 8.1.6 Not an appropriate request. The Board of Appeals should ensure compliance with the tenet of this section. It cannot abdicate this to a State entity, which in turn relies on the local Board of Appeals to do its job under 40B.
- 8.1.9 √ - However, I note that the proposed location of the recycling center adds a fifth dimension to the intersection in question. Can it be relocated?
- 8.1.13 & 8.1.14 Superelevation – √
- Sight Distances – Adequate sight distances are critical for safe street designs and I would recommend against granting any blanket waivers. I would need more specific information on where, how much, and how it was measured.
- Grade – Where is the 9.1% grade?
- K-Values – In two locations, Laurel Hill Road, as proposed, does not meet the minimum K-values of the subdivision rules. I defer to the Engineering Department to advise if a waiver is appropriate here.
- 8.1.16 This appears like an inappropriate waiver request. The plan does not propose dead-end-streets as such are defined in the SRR (single access with no provisions for a turn-around).
- 8.1.17 √
- 8.1.18 √
- 8.1.19 This appears like an inappropriate waiver request. The plan shows secondary access which is an option under this rule. Generally, this secondary access appears adequate – see comments below.
- 8.1.23 This appears like an inappropriate waiver request. Section 8.1.23 aims at compliance with the Wetlands Protection Act, which is applicable to 40B projects. The SRR does not insist on compliance with the local wetland bylaw.
- 8.1.25 √ - subject to inter-municipal agreement with Westford, satisfactory to the Board of Selectmen, for services to the Westford portion of the project.
- 8.2.2.1 I defer to Engineering Department review.
- 8.2.2.4 I defer to Engineering Department review.
- 8.2.3 I defer to Engineering Department review.
- 8.2.4 & 8.3.5 I defer to Engineering Department review.
- 8.5.4 I defer to Engineering Department review.
- 8.6 This appears like an inappropriate waiver request. The Town of Acton has no master sewer plan for the subject area. Therefore, this section does not apply.
- 8.7.6 √ - The applicant might want to rethink this for Laurel Hill Drive. The easement would be helpful for a possible future street ownership that is not concurrent

- with the adjacent land. I understand that this is not the present intent.
- 8.8 √
- 9.1.1 I defer to Engineering Department review.
- 9.1.8 This appears like an inappropriate waiver request. As far as can tell, the proposed width of Laurel Hill Drive meets the SRR standard.
- 9.1.9 The section is listed but no waiver is being requested.
- 9.2.4 I defer to Engineering Department review.
- 9.2.7 √ - subject to agreement by the Board of Health to the premise set forth in the waiver request.
- 9.3.1 I defer to Engineering Department review. Concrete bounds will not be as durable in the long haul.
- 9.4 √
- 9.5.2 √ - I can't see how sloped granite curbing is less safe for bicyclists. Granite curbing is more durable. That is why the subdivision rules require it for areas where curbs tend to be banged up by snow plows. Saving money now will cost more in maintenance in the future.
- 9.6.2 √ - Technically this waiver request is acceptable. There is no public street on which this project has frontage. However, see comment below regarding sidewalk on Westford Lane (a private way).
- 9.6.3 √ - Perhaps the sidewalk could "meander" and only abut the street pavement edge where slopes are a serious consideration. Also, consider vertical curbing and greater width where sidewalks are placed right against the roadway. We have some 5-foot wide sidewalks in Town with low-profile bituminous curb. Walking on them does not feel safe.
- 9.6.4 √ - See previous comment.
- 9.6.7 √
- 9.8.1 √ - I defer to the Tree Warden for details
- 11.2 √
- 11.6 From the information presented in the construction sequencing description that is attached to the 10/19/05 letter from David Hale it appears that this waiver request is superfluous.
- 11.8 √ - Provided that the Board of Appeals institutes other suitable enforcement tools.

General comments on the 10/19/05 plan:

1. Adequate performance guarantee should be required not only for the subdivision street (Laurel Hill Road, but for all other street and ways, sidewalks, utilities, parking lots, drainage systems, and other public or quasi-public services.
2. The plan labels the subdivision street from Nagog Park Drive as "Laurel Hill Drive" except on the record plan sheets where it is labeled as "Road A". The record plan should also bear the name of the street.

3. On the record plan sheets 4 & 6, the abutter reference for McPherson is outdated.
4. The endorsement lines on the record plan sheet should be for the Planning Board rather than the Board of Appeals. I am not aware that the Registry of Deeds accepts plans endorsed by anyone other than the Planning Board or its designee of record.
5. Sidewalks should be added on Westford Lane¹, from Westford Lane into the project, and in the loop of the lot 4 condo development; and all sidewalk/walkway pieces within the development should be connected to form a complete system for convenient walking connections between buildings. At a time when fuel costs are skyrocketing and obesity has been identified as a national public health threat, sidewalks and walkways should be project elements as basic as streets and parking lots, and it should not be necessary for me to have to "lobby" for them.
6. There should be a formal pedestrian connection or foot trail from the loop in the condo development on lot 4 to the portion of the private right of way also referred to as "Old Acton Westford Road" that lies within lot 4.
7. Do the building numbers shown on the site plan sheets also represent proposed street address numbers? Will all street addresses be Laurel Hill Drive addresses?
8. There appears to be no leveling-off area at bottom of the street by building 11 as it intersects with Westford Lane. I would strongly a leveling area if the grade approaching Westford Lane is anywhere near 5% or steeper.
9. Consider traffic calming devices at the Laurel Hill Drive intersections with the various driveways. A simple neck-down opposite the driveway would suffice.
10. Street sign locations and locations of traffic signs and pavement markings should be discussed with the Engineering Department.
11. There are no architectural plan sheets in the 10/19/05 plan set. However, reading from the site plan sheets, the facades of the condos may consist largely of two-car wide garages. That's 64 double garage doors lined up in on both sides of the circle with little else showing to the street at ground level. This is a very poor design that will look stark and unfriendly. The derogatory word for this in planner's jargon is "snout houses". Many communities across the country do prohibit such designs. I urge more creativity here. Perhaps, not all units need to have garages. Perhaps, some units can be offered with a one car garage. Perhaps, garages can be recessed several feet back so that the garage doors are screened out in an angled view.
12. There is a sea of parking in the rental portion of the project. To the extent that all this parking is necessary, the applicant should consider garage-under parking even if that might somewhat increase the overall height of buildings. The sloped site is perfectly suited for garages under the buildings.

Cc: Planning Board ✓
Town Manager
Engineering

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¹ The Westford Lane to STA 14+50 is wide enough between to accommodate a sidewalk. The proponent should ask Fenton for a sidewalk easement (STA 14+50 to 16+50). There is already a proposed grading easement. From STA 16+50 to the road into the project, the applicant owns the land.