

July 11, 2006

To: Acton Planning Board

From: Bettina A. Norton, Tonandi Farm, 115 Quarry Road

Re: Woodlands Proposal

Please pardon my sending this by email and not attending the hearing. I fully intended to go, with comments, but the thunderstorm this afternoon completely derailed us. My husband's sister, who is close to death, asked that he go to California to see her one last time, so he leaves tomorrow morning. In addition, we are now in Boston to attend another hearing, originally scheduled for 5:30, which is to go on at 7.

We would not make it back in time. So - please accept these comments.

As some of you may know, we have not opposed this project, from the time it was first put forth. But I do have major reservations about the change to Senior Housing from additional affordable units.

First, it seems to me that a change in the proposal allows for a change in terms. Specifically, if the former affordable housing section to be on what was known as "Heider's Hill" has been changed to Senior Housing, the Town should have the opportunity to make some changes, too.

Basically, the proposed Senior Housing is too dense. There are too many units in too little space.

This could be addressed in two ways: waivers and project cost-and-return evaluation.

First, the changed value of the project. Has the Planning Board analyzed the figures, affordable units versus projected sale price for the Senior Housing and determined what the difference will mean to the developer? Possibly, this figure might tempt the Town to look for a smaller project? Is the Town sure it is to get a fair shake?

Now, the question of waivers:

1) Does the Planning Board agree that setbacks should be waived. Why? No waiver would necessitate less building, and probably solve the density problem.

2) Why should enforcement of rules for Senior Housing be waived? What would be enforcement? Even if the waiver is not granted, what would be the mechanism for enforcement? Is it reasonable to expect a constant policing of the rules? Does the Planning Board really think they would be upheld by owners/tenants? COULD they be? How can anyone say who should visit, or for how long?

3) Does the Planning Board accept a 12-foot separation between multiple-unit buildings? A 12-foot space is nothing but an alleyway, unattractive and not useful. Why not put several units together and create more space between them?

4) No sidewalks for this project? This should be mandatory.

My last reservation is on the placement of the proposed fire station. I adamantly am opposed to having it near the intersection of Routes 2A/119 and 27. Surely, the Town must know that is asking for trouble?

Has a traffic study of that intersection been done lately, - especially taking in the parking for the ball fields? That location is totally impractical and unsafe. I cannot believe there is not a good location closer to the development, or WITHIN it.