

[on BOS letterhead w/PB name/title]

October __, 2016

Michael J. Busby
Massachusetts Housing Finance Agency
One Beacon Street
Boston, MA 02108

Re: The New England Village, 31-39 & 45 Martin Street, Acton, MA - Site
Approval Application: Comments of Town of Acton

Dear Mr. Busby:

The Acton Board of Selectmen welcomes the opportunity, pursuant to your letter of July 6, to submit comments about the proposed Chapter 40B residential development on Martin Street in Acton. The Board voted to approve the submission of this letter at its meeting on October 5, 2016.

The Selectmen first would like to note Acton's longstanding, well-documented commitment to affordable housing. The Acton Community Housing Corporation (ACHC) is the Town committee dedicated to increasing and preserving affordable housing. In recent years, the ACHC has worked very effectively with developers to create smaller-scale, "friendly" Chapter 40B developments that work well in a community that has grown significantly in recent decades but still retains areas of rural charm and character. In addition, through the Community Preservation Act (CPA) that the Town adopted over a decade ago, the Town annually appropriates CPA funds for community housing. The Town most recently has reaffirmed its support for affordable housing in the 2015 update of the Acton Housing Production Plan, and the 2020 update of the Acton Comprehensive Community Plan.

The Town's support for affordable housing, however, should be considered in the context of the importance to Acton residents of the Town's cherished history and natural resources. Both are relevant to the Martin Street project. The Town places a high value on the preservation of historical structures and landscapes, and the protection of open space, wetlands and water resources. The Selectmen's comments about the project reflect the significance of these assets to the Town.

Project proponents Mark Gallagher and his son, also Mark Gallagher, representing Seal Harbor Development, appeared at the Board's meeting on September 26th to provide an overview of the project and answer questions. Since early in 2016, the proponents have met with various Town staff members, committee members and residents, who also provided written and oral comments that the Selectmen considered in their discussion of the project. A number of Selectmen also were present when you conducted your site visit on August 29th. Among the many observations and suggestions by the Selectmen and others during the September 26th meeting, the following are the issues that the Board considered most significant:

1. Drainage, flood-prevention. In an area that already is prone to flooding, with a high water table, bordering wetlands and proposed construction encroaching on riverfront, the Board would

like to ensure at minimum that the Martin Street development does not worsen conditions for not only the current residents, but for future residents buying units in the new development. If and when the project moves to the comprehensive-permit stage, the Board endorses the ACHC's recommendation of a peer review of the proponent's engineering and drainage plans.

2. Historical houses, barns. The Board appreciates the proponents' willingness, at great expense and at the suggestion of neighbors, to preserve the three existing historical houses by moving them from the knoll where they currently sit to a location fronting on Martin Street; the proponents have confirmed that the move will include the barn attached to one of the houses. The Selectmen are aware that one of the existing houses is in such poor condition that moving it might be impracticable, if that should prove to be the case, the Board would encourage the proponents to determine whether the alternative of leaving and rehabilitating the third house in place, and integrating it with the new units, would be at all feasible. Although some commenters have suggested that all three structures should remain at the locations that are an inseparable part of their history and should be incorporated into the new development, the Board understands that the financial viability of the project might be contingent on relocating the structures.

3. Density, Number of proposed housing units. The Board understands that Chapter 40B allows for increased density, and appreciates the inclusion of duplex units in the mix of new units, and the inclusion of four accessible units, with two to be affordable. But given the aforementioned high water table and risk of flooding, the Board would encourage the proponents to consider omitting some of the proposed units at greatest risk.

4. Traffic. The proponent should conduct a traffic study, at the comprehensive-permit stage if not earlier. Several commenters expressed concerns about the development's potential impact on traffic. The Acton Engineering Department, which noted that Martin Street handles some 3,500 cars per day and therefore is a "collector" road, also recommended a traffic study.

Other comments and suggestions flagged potential areas of archaeological sensitivity on the project site, the Town's sidewalk-construction requirement, concerns relating to house-designs and siding materials (the recommended use of Hardie Board in lieu of vinyl siding), and the like. The Board is aware that there will be a later opportunity for the Town to raise these and other issues. The proponents furthermore have indicated that they would be open to discussing all.

Thank you for your consideration.

Very truly yours,

Peter Berry