



TOWN OF FOXBOROUGH

Director of Land Use and Economic Development

40 South Street, Foxborough, Massachusetts 02035

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February 16, 2023

Barnett Ovrut, Chair
Foxborough Zoning Board
40 South Street
Foxborough, MA 02035

Re: Walnut Master Ground Lessee LLC Comprehensive Permit Application

Dear Mr. Ovrut and Members of the Board,

Background

The submission before you differs from other comprehensive permit applications previously filed with the Zoning Board because this project originated with the Town of Foxborough and its Housing Authority, and is on land owned by the Housing Authority, as described below. The only way for the project to gain approval at the density proposed, which is needed to make the project viable, is through the 40B approval process.

The Town of Foxborough and the Foxborough Housing Authority (FHA) have been working on this affordable housing site for years. In 2013, the Town retained the services an engineering firm to perform a site feasibility on the property. At that time, based on Title 5 requirements, it was estimated that 90 beds could be accommodated on the site (note: 90 beds did not provide sufficient density to allow this project to proceed which is a major reason why it has taken this long to move forward). In 2016, the 15+-acre parcel was conveyed to the Town of Foxborough's Housing Authority through Chapter 314 of the Acts of 2016 which stated "*An Act authorizing the Division of Capital Asset Management and Maintenance ... to convey a certain parcel of land in the Town of Foxborough to the Foxborough Housing Authority.*" The Act indicates the "*use of the parcel ... shall be restricted to the development of affordable housing which shall be approved by the department of housing and community development.*" The Act further states "*[n]otwithstanding the foregoing or any other general or special law to the contrary, the Foxborough Housing Authority may lease the parcel or portions thereof to any entities and may enter into agreements with those entities for the purpose of developing, constructing, operating and maintaining affordable housing on the parcel.*"

Infrastructure

In 2020, the Town applied for and was awarded a Housing Choice Capital Grant to allow the Town to proceed with a signal design for the Walnut Street/Commercial Street (Route 140) intersection.

The design includes 3,000 feet of roadway improvements along Walnut/Commercial/I-95 SB Ramp including two new traffic signals (Walnut/Commercial St and Commercial/I-95 SB Ramp). The Housing Choice Capital Grant also funded a sewer extension design to increase the site's development capacity from 90 beds to up to 250 housing units, which made the project financially feasible. By way of background, the sewer installation will involve a proposed low-pressure sewer (LPS) system design on Walnut Street that will tie into the existing town sewer system located on Central Street. The LPS system will run 3,100' +/- west to east on Walnut Street, beginning about 450' west of the southwest corner of Route 140 and Walnut Street. The future affordable housing site will be serviced by the proposed LPS system, which will be designed to handle the flows from the proposed development and the existing buildings located at Walnut Terrace (FHA property with failed septic system), 71 Walnut Street, 72 Walnut Street. The LPS system will run from 500' west of the intersection of Walnut Street and Route 140, across Route 140 and continuing east on Walnut Street to the end of the road before passing thru a utility easement on the property of 70 Walnut Street and 237 Central Street to an existing sewer manhole on Central Street, at Interstate 95.

Construction cost estimates for the signal and sewer improvements are \$5,500,000. In October, 2022, the FHA was awarded a \$4,000,000 MassWorks grant for the infrastructure work because it unlocks development of the 200 affordable senior housing units¹. As of last week, thanks to the tireless assistance of our state delegation (Senator Feeney and Representative Barrow), the Town of Foxborough and the FHA have secured the remaining \$1.5 million in funding to allow construction to begin on these infrastructure improvements. The DPW will be issuing bid solicitation documents in spring 2023.

Housing Project

In 2021, the Town and FHA undertook an extensive process to develop a Request for Proposals (RFP) to identify a development team to help create senior affordable housing on the Walnut Street site. MassDevelopment provided a grant for the development of the RFP and a second grant to assist the FHA with the process of interviewing and identifying a developer. MassDevelopment hired Innes Associates, a Massachusetts planning and design firm, to assist the FHA. MassDevelopment hired FXM Associates to analyze the pro formas of the submitted proposals. During the RFP development process, two neighborhood meetings were held. As a result of these meetings, held in May and July 2021, the RFP included the following language for prospective developers

Conditions for Site: Integration into the Community

Members of the community value the existing wooded location and do not wish to disrupt the views from Walnut Street or from those homes along North High Street that abut the

¹ Without housing project, funding would not (will not) be awarded. Without infrastructure improvements, housing project cannot be built.

property. In addition, some residents voiced concerns about the disruption to wildlife and suggested that corridors be retained to allow access to wooded areas.

- Significant natural buffer between existing neighborhood on North High Street and new development.
- Preservation of tree buffer along Walnut Street.
- Meetings with neighbors pre-permitting and during the construction process.
- Energy-efficient lighting that is compliant with Dark Sky standards to reduce overspill or glare.
- Architectural design that reflects the design elements of a New England small town and are responsive to the aesthetics of the adjacent neighborhood and the Town of Foxborough. Materials should be traditional New England materials of clapboard, brick, and/or stone.
- The height of the building(s) shall be no more than 60 feet to the top of the highest ridge from the average grade. The FHA anticipates there may be more than one building on the site. The building, or if more than one, the tallest building(s), shall be located closer to Route 140. Buildings closer to the North High Street neighborhood shall step down in height to be respectful of the adjacent residential community. The goal is to minimize visibility from the adjacent neighborhood.
- The design of the site should include common outdoor spaces for the residents that integrate the existing natural features of the site, including the required buffers, existing wetland areas, and existing topography.
- The development should be well-integrated into the wooded site and adjacent neighborhood.

In the spring of 2022, the FHA chose the Walnut Street Joint Venture (WSJV) team to develop the Walnut Street property. The WSJV is led by the Peabody Properties, Inc., Affordable Housing and Services Collaborative, Inc., and the Onyx Group. The development team held a third neighborhood meeting in June 2022.

Submitted Application/Plan

The proposed project consists of 200 senior apartments in three buildings constructed in two phases. Phase 1 will consist of 61 units in Building 1 and 80 units in Building 2, and Phase 2 will consist of 59 units in Building 3. All 200 units will be affordable below 80% of AMI with deeper income targeting below 60%, 50% and 30% of AMI.

A review of the plans shows a design that appears to respond to neighborhood concerns. The buffer area along the rear of North High Street homes has been maximized. The buildings, which could have conceivably been four-story in height, are three. They are located as close to the highway off-ramp as is feasible. Building design appears to reflect New England character. Many amenities are proposed on site.

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Given the community needs that will be served by this project (and its linked infrastructure improvements), this office strongly supports the Walnut Street affordable senior housing project proposed by the Walnut Street Joint Venture team. We look forward to the public hearing process to work through any issues that the Zoning Board might identify.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Paige Duncan", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Paige Duncan, AICP
Director of Land Use and Economic Development