



**DRB Memorandum  
Piper Lane 40B  
Condominium Project  
9-26-18**

First Review

DRB Members in attendance: Holly Ben-Joseph (Chair), Peter Darlow (Assistant Chair), David Honn (Recused from review of project), Kim Montella, Emily Ying (Planning Board Liaison), and Janet Adachi (Board of Selectmen liaison).

Owner: The project's proponents were not at the meeting to present the project.

Neighbors: Ms. Jillian Watson, Ms. Christy White, Ms. Barbara Morse, Mr. Shirish Khandekar, Ms. Sandra Mika, Mr. Warren O'Brien, Ms. Alissa Nicol, and Ms. Ruth Thatcher

Plans Reviewed:

2013 Orthophotograph of land near Piper Road and School Street intersection

Existing Conditions Plan Dated July 2018 prepared by GPR engineers

Preliminary Site Layout Plan Dated June 2018 prepared by GPR engineers

40B Concept Plan Dated June 2018 prepared by GPR engineers

Conceptual Conventional Subdivision Dated April 22, 2015

Prototypical Architectural Plans – representing possible floor plans and elevations, not specific to this project

This is the first review of the Piper Lane 40B project. This project is an 'unfriendly' 40B and is being submitted directly to Mass Housing. The site is comprised of four separate parcels, the largest of which extends into the Great Hill Conservation Area, and cuts through an existing walking trail. The one existing building on the site is the historic Tuttle Barn built circa 1850s, the rest of the site is heavily wooded. The proposed 40B will have forty 3 story townhouse units.

The School Street frontage is very limited, making site access tight. The project sits adjacent to the South Acton Historic District (the opposite side of School Street is in the historic district), and in a neighborhood of mostly modestly sized single family homes, about half of them historic. In addition, the neighborhood includes a fire department station, a church, and a few active commercial buildings on Route 27.. The commuter rail station is a bit further than a half mile away.

The site's topography is sloping especially at the edge near School Street. A significant wetland is located within the north end of the property, in the Great Hill Conservation lands.

The following are comments on the development:

1. The 40 units are situated on a single access road with no outlet or fire emergency road at the end. The length of the single access road is close to three times the length allowed per Acton zoning. There is no apparent turn-around shown for any large vehicle, such as a fire truck or school bus.
2. The units closest to the School Street frontage have their backs visible from School Street and will

present as a massive blank wall, given the foundation required to overcome the very steep pitch at this portion of the site. In addition, a large drainage pond sits between the units and the street and will be the first visual of the neighborhood. This layout is not compatible to the surrounding neighborhood, and should be addressed. The DRB recommends the portion of the property developed adjacent to School Street have an appropriate scaled building which faces the street.

3. Most of the development slices up into the Great Hill Conservation Land and the DRB believes this will destroy the integrity of this important open space, and could be harmful to the ecosystems the Town has worked for years trying to protect. As recently as 2015, the Town bought an adjacent property for protection and enhancement of the Great Hill Lands.
4. The proposed realignment of the walking trail through the property seems awkward and we wonder if hikers would use it.
5. How will the bus stop work? With this many units, there could potentially many children. Will the bus pick-up children on School Street? School Street already has heavy traffic backups during rush hours, this would make travelling even worse.
6. The site does not show any community space or sidewalks. Will inhabitants walk down the street to get to School Street? Those who live deep within the property will be far removed from the South Acton neighborhood.
7. Since the grade is sloping significantly, especially at the entry drive and pinch point, we question how safe is the drive and suitability and school buses? Significant retaining walls may be necessary to overcome the topography in order to flatten the pitch for larger vehicles to not bottom out.
8. Will the existing stone walls along the western property line be maintained?
9. Will any of the existing trees be saved? Again, a devastating impact to the surrounding ecosystems, as it seems that beyond the wetlands area, no existing vegetation will be maintained given the proposed density of the development. The DRB recommends retaining as many existing trees as possible.
10. According to the neighbor living on Piper Lane, there is a town easement restriction which doesn't allow for changes to the drive, this project will significantly change Piper Lane. Other neighbors noted that the intersection of the drive up into the proposed development will intersect School Street at a blind curve on an already heavily traveled road. Traffic impact of the development should be studied.
11. The DRB offers no comments on the housing types as they are generic and not specific to this project.
12. The DRB highly recommends that the townhomes be developed in more interesting groups or clusters, rather than repetitively stamped across the site in groups of three. Larger clusters of townhomes will ultimately allow for larger open spaces between the homes.
13. Topography has not been acknowledged given the housing arrangements shown in plan.
14. For the reasons listed above, the DRB cannot support this proposed 40B development. This proposed 40B development will be harmful to the overall citizens of the Town.

Respectfully Submitted  
Design Review Board