



## The Design Review Board Memorandum

**Project:** 'Spruce Corner' New Mixed-Use Residential/Office Development, West Acton, MA

Architectural Proposal by: Peter Quinn, Peter Quinn Architects

Developer: Mark Roderick, HOUSE&GARDEN Real Estate, LLC

Drawing Date: July 26<sup>th</sup> 2010

**Date of Review:** 9/01/10

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The DRB met with the project team several times over two plus years. We enjoyed working with the team and appreciate the effort they made to meet with us and be open to ideas from the community at large. We have seen or reviewed some five different versions of this project to date (see DRB minutes online) and with the proponents' help, held a Community Forum on building concepts for this corner with more than a dozen abutters in November 2008. This memo is our first to the Selectmen, prompted by the proponents' Site Plan Special Permit Application of July 26<sup>th</sup> 2010. The proponent was not present for this latest review.

We note that this site is tricky not just because of wetlands, but because the Spruce Street side is commercial while Arlington Street has a small-scale, residential character. How does one development meet these competing requirements? How does it act like a good neighbor and follow Acton's Village Plans *to enhance* the community *overall* and *improve* the pedestrian experience? Will it show that greater building density works in West Acton?

It's a tough job. The DRB believes that this latest iteration, dated July 26<sup>th</sup>, goes a long way towards these goals and – with a few refinements – will be able to meet them.

We recommend:

1. The proponent reconfigure the Arlington Street Duplex (Unit 4+5), revising its mass and proportions to be in keeping with those found in adjacent older residential architecture and to follow the Town of Acton's Design Review Guidelines. We are concerned the building now shown creates a TALL wall, some 25-feet high, think stack, as you enter West Acton on Arlington Street, much like the Kmart Condos do in Kelley's Corner; this will dwarf its neighbor, the beautiful historic farmhouse and barn about 20-feet away. We believe that if you were to walk around West Acton village today, you would not find a single residence with such a startling, tall sidewall. Paying careful attention to existing eave heights (where the roof starts) of the better local architecture and copying them as feasible could solve this problem.

2. To enhance pedestrian experience, make this same building, Arlington Street Duplex (Unit 4+5), parallel to the street; this is how great walking streets are made; currently this building sits askew onsite.
3. Finally Simplify. That is the West Acton building tradition. Avoid multiple roof lines and gables and multiple exterior finish types; if the form is right, the fussiness isn't necessary in West Acton.

We are pleased with the way the proponent handled the parking overall and the careful design of walkways, although we would prefer not to have garage doors directly on Arlington Street (again because this is not in the West Acton village vernacular). We understand, however, that this may be difficult to fix with the number of units proposed.

In terms of the new mixed-use building at the corner; this building has a strong form overall and we believe it's well sited providing a new gateway to the Village. There is some concern that the eave height (where the roof line meets the front facade) again will make the building appear much larger than it really is and dwarf adjacent buildings. This is because we find the Spruce Street Elevation as now shown will have a sidewall height that is not found elsewhere in the West Acton village.

To address this issue, we strongly recommend that the proponent provide an elevation drawing that shows the new proposed commercial building next to the outlines of existing neighboring buildings on Arlington as well as one showing the buildings adjacent to the project (Ernie's Auto Body + Klinger Victorian Residence) on Spruce Street. It is impossible to assess the impact of a new infill development in the way our community deserves without these drawings. (One suggestion: lower the eave line of the commercial building to the base of the third floor and add a shed dormer across the third floor to visually lower the building, making it fit with established neighborhood vernacular.)

Below please find an example of an earlier Arlington Street design the proponent provided the DRB in April 2009. It shows the adjacent historic barn on Arlington as well as the renovated historic farm house on site (now slated for demolition.) The DRB believed this was a very successful design, fitting in well, even maintaining the look of Arlington Street with the detached homes, separated by open, green space. The proponent has explained that economic and other site constraints make this no longer feasible.



APRIL 2009 Draft ELEVATION for ARLINGTON STREET

The DRB looks forward to meeting with the Board or the proponent at any time to further explain issues raised here. The DRB again commends the proponents for their patience working to understand the unique nature of this part of Acton many people care so deeply about. The DRB also, like many others, looks forward to seeing this project move forward at last.

The Design Review Board  
The Town of Acton