



TOWN OF ACTON  
DESIGN REVIEW BOARD  
Review Memorandum: 22 Elm Street  
PCRC plans  
September 1, 2020 Virtual Meeting

DRB Members in attendance: Peter Darlow (Chair), Holly Ben-Joseph, David Honn, and Dean Charter, (BOS Liaison), Robert Hummel Planning Department

Guests and potential members: Tom Doolittle, Richard Kelleher

Proponents in attendance: None

Documents Reviewed:

Page titles Site Plans dated June 15, 2020

The Residences at 22 Elm

1 of 10 Title Sheet

2 of 10 Master Plan

3 of 10 Record Plan

4 of 10 Natural Features & Existing Conditions Plan

5 of 10 Site Development Plan

The proponents are proposing to develop a planned conservation residential community at 22 Elm Street, currently a single family home with a horse corral at the front of the property along Elm Street. The rear of the property consists mainly of wetlands. A portion of the rear neighbor's lot was purchased in order to come into compliance of the PCRC regulations for percentage of upland vs wetland in the open space area. The plan is divided into three parcels – parcel C contains the residences, and parcel A and B contain the open space. The proposed plan has five new residences and the one existing residence. A new garage is proposed next to the existing residence. Access into the proposed public area is indicated to be at the terminus of Elm Court, a neighboring private drive. Some of the existing trees will remain, but other are not indicated on the plan, and some will be removed.

The DRB has the following comments:

1. The DRB questions how much the public will benefit from this project. The proposed open space is largely unbuildable wetlands and appears to be inaccessible. It is an island of land surrounded

by private property. In addition, no paths or boardwalks are shown within the open space on the plan- how could anyone with mobility issues use the space?

2. Regarding access into the proposed public space, the DRB questions accessing the open space through Elm Court a private drive as suggested on the plans. The DRB understands that a PCRC's open space set aside requires access to a public way, in this case Elm Street. Elm Court is a private drive which fails to meet this PCRC requirement. Residents on a private drive should not be subjected to public use of their drive in order to satisfy an adjacent property owner's development proposal nor should the public be made to feel uncomfortable while attempting to access the open space. DRB members questioned if the Elm Court residents have agreed to this access or will they block it off in the future.
3. The DRB suggests that if this project is accepted as a PCRC community, then access into the site should be ironclad. Therefore we recommend that access should be on the proposed development's land along the west property line behind the houses. This could be accomplished by:
  - a. Moving the road to the east, essentially following the existing driveway's alignment,
  - b. Moving the line of homes to the east, providing for more space at the back of the homes so that a path can be added along the property line from Elm Street into the open space.
4. The project is located adjacent to typical subdivision found throughout Acton, with single family homes on large parcels. The proposed development is significantly more dense and the DRB is concerned about the visual impact to the neighborhood. The DRB suggests that the front residence at Elm Street be facing Elm Street, so that it reflects the orientation of the rest of the homes on the street.
5. In addition to orientation of the front home, the DRB suggests other elements be added along the frontage to help blend this development into the existing neighborhood. Ornamental fencing and layers of landscaping are highly recommended.
6. The DRB would like to know what is planned for the existing row of mature evergreens on the east side of the property, between the driveway and the neighbor's fence. These are not shown on any of the documents. Will they remain?
7. The DRB is concerned that because of the density and the front garages, the streetscape will be overwhelmed by garage doors. The DRB recommends that driveways be placed to the sides of the homes and be shared, and to locate the garages on the sides of the buildings. This was successfully done on a similar development on River Street. Providing usable front porches in place of garages along the street promotes a sense of community.
8. The proposed new garage is placed in an awkward location and is on a diagonal to the rest of the buildings. It is also at the end of the siteline of the street, the DRB suggests moving it to the west side of the existing home, aligned with the existing building and planting a specimen tree in this location.
9. The DRB believes the proposed footprints of the buildings are over-sized for proposed lot sizes and suggests reducing them.

Respectfully submitted,  
The DRB