



TOWN OF ACTON
DESIGN REVIEW BOARD

Review Memorandum: 31, 39 & 45 Martin Street
Room 9, Town Hall
January 04, 2017

DRB Members in attendance: Holly Ben-Joseph (Chair), Peter Darlow (Assistant Chair), David Honn, Kim Montella, and Janet Adachi (Board of Selectmen liaison).

Applicant: Seal Harbor, LLC.

Documents Reviewed: Anthem Villages 40B Comprehensive Permit Application drawing set sheets CP-1, CP-2, CP-3&4, CP-5, CP-6, CP-7, CP-8, L-1 and L-2.

The existing approximate 12.5-acre site is comprised of three lots with existing single-family homes that are set far back from the street. All three of the homes are listed on the Acton Cultural Resources List (CRL) and in the Massachusetts Cultural Resource Inventory System (MACRIS). Typically, alteration and/or demolition of MACRIS listed properties require the proponent to file an Environmental Notification Form (ENF) with the Massachusetts Historical Commission (MHC). The DRB did not notice this form in the Comprehensive Permit Application. The site is in the R-2 zone.

The applicant did not appear before the DRB for this follow-up review of the proposal. What follows are comments and questions prompted by the available information reviewed at the meeting.

The DRB is pleased to see that two of the existing residential farmhouse structures, (39 and 45 Martin Street), are proposed to be saved. Each will be relocated close to Martin Street which will help create a screen of the new densely developed housing within the center of the site. The DRB is also pleased to see that the primary drive, (Kayla Lane), will maintain an original treed allee into the center of the site, that an additional existing farm structure is proposed to be reused as a common storage building for the property along the drive, that an out building styled carriage house structure will be built over some proposed common parking, and that the developer is proposing a section of communal garden plots close to Martin Street.

The DRB is disappointed to see that the third existing farm home (31 Martin Street) is no longer shown to be repurposed. The DRB notes that the application did not contain written reports from an architect or engineer summarizing the conditions of the three existing structures. This is

standard practice in the industry when proposing structures be moved and reused. The DRB recommends that the town request a third party structural/architectural review of all three existing farm property structures to determine whether it will be economically feasible to reuse more of the structures than is presently proposed by the proponent. The application contained resumes of project participants such as the site engineer but was deficient in regard to the plan for, and the entities responsible for, the historic structures dismantling, moving and reconstruction (typically a specialized discipline).

The DRB also suggests that one of the conditions contained in the Comprehensive Permit be that the repurpose and relocation of the farm houses be required to be completed prior to permission to proceed with the balance of the new development work. Without an explicit condition, the DRB's experience has been that assurances of historic building reuse can be reneged upon under the guise of being "infeasible" or "uneconomic" without third party verification.

As before, the DRB views the majority of the proposal in its current form as a predominantly market-rate subdivision being set into an existing open tract of land. Instead of seeing the existing fields and the three neighboring farm properties as one drives by the site, the view will be altered to show a tight cluster of 26 homes, densely placed side by side onto 4.5 acres, positioned at the crest of an existing hill. One particularly troubling aspect will be the view of the three-story rear-sides of houses and partial basements from Martin Street and by residents of Heron View and Overlook Road. As the proposal has evolved, in the DRB's opinion, it is now far from fitting in comfortably with the surrounding neighborhood.

The DRB notes that the updated proposal has lowered the quantity of proposed residential homes from 31 to 28. However, the DRB is very troubled by the proposed increase in overall project density. The mix of new homes proposed is now comprised of a much higher quantity of large 3BR homes, (5 larger homes have replaced 5 smaller homes per the previous proposal submission). The placement of the homes on the site has been tightened significantly in sections. In particular, the segment of the development along Edgar Drive shows two pairs of very large side by side duplex structures, (Mayapple), that are built within 10 feet of the road, are separated by a similar 10 foot side yard from neighboring homes and separated by less than 20 feet on their back sides from the Foxglove styled homes on Kayla Lane. The minimal front yards of the Mayapple homes will not allow for off street parking on a driveway except for use of the garage. The DRB also notes a significant and visually incongruous disparity of scale between the neighboring Mayapple and Foxglove styled properties.

The density of the site layout is so great that one aspect of the layout appears infeasible. The driveways of homes 5, 18 and 19 will not allow for a car to back out of the property without utilizing the drive of a neighboring home.

The DRB is pleased that the proposal saves some of the existing trees along the entry drive, but notes that with one exception at Connor Drive, most of the largest trees on the farm properties continue to be slated for removal. The DRB believes it is very important to protect these trees, as they represent the legacy of the farm properties and recommends reworking the site layout to achieve this goal.

Respectfully submitted,

Peter Darlow
DRB Member