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# **WABAN AREA COUNCIL**

[www.wabanareacouncil.com](http://www.wabanareacouncil.com)

wabanareacouncil@newtonma.gov

May 12, 2016

Ms. Alexandra Ananth  
Chief Planner for Current Planning  
Newton City Hall  
1000 Commonwealth Ave.  
Newton, MA 02459

***Re: Proposed Development at 1615 Beacon Street in Waban***

Dear Ms. Ananth:

We are writing to comment on the Project Eligibility application recently submitted by 1615 Beacon LLC (the “Applicant”) to the Massachusetts Housing Partnership (“MHP”) for a proposed development at 1615 Beacon St. in Waban (the “Project”). As you know, the Waban Area Council is an elected local council that hears, responds to, and represents concerns of the village of Waban.

We recognize that, as a general matter, the property at 1615 Beacon is an appropriate site for multi-family and affordable housing. We look forward to the design review that MHP will apply at this stage to ensure that the proposed design is generally appropriate for the site before allowing the Applicant to apply to the Zoning Board of Appeals for the comprehensive permit.<sup>1</sup> As MHP applies the criteria of 760 CMR 56.04(4), we point out the following areas of concern: (i) a potential safety issue regarding the garage entrance/exit, (ii) building massing and scale, (iii) amount of usable green space, and (iv) historic preservation.

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<sup>1</sup> We are encouraged by MHP Exec. Director Clark Ziegler’s recent testimony before the Joint Committee on Housing, where he pointed out that legitimate complaints over the years about the way 40B has been implemented have been addressed through changes to state policy, among them: “critically evaluating project design against state standards before allowing a developer to apply for a comprehensive permit.” *Testimony of Clark L. Ziegler, Executive Director Massachusetts Housing Partnership before the Joint Committee on Housing, February 2, 2016.*

### **Safety Issue – Garage Entrance/Exit**

The proposed development has 37 parking spaces, with 31 spaces in a semi-underground parking garage (some tandem spaces) and 6 above-ground spaces. Cars from the site will exit onto Windsor Rd. near the busy intersection of Windsor Rd. and Beacon St. The garage entrance/exit appears to be 10-12 feet from the sidewalk and the ramp to the garage slopes down immediately from the sidewalk. This sidewalk sees heavy pedestrian use throughout the year, *especially among school-aged children*. Cars for customers of the retail establishments across the street are parked along the road throughout the day. We are very concerned about the sight lines of drivers exiting the garage and ask that MHP pay particular attention to this issue.

### **Massing and Setbacks**

1615 Beacon St. occupies a prominent spot in the heart of the Waban village center. We recognize that a 40B development will, by its nature, introduce buildings that differ from their environs in terms of massing and scale, but we are hopeful that MHP’s design review standards will be applied to ensure that the Project integrates well with the surrounding neighborhood. We ask that MHP examine whether the mass of the proposed new building overwhelms the historic farmhouse and neighboring buildings. We also draw attention to the 5 ft. 1 inch side setbacks, which could exacerbate the impact of the mass of the apartment building on surrounding properties. We have not seen any contextual renderings in the application and hope that MHP will have opportunity to review street-scape or aerial renderings that illustrate the size of the proposed new buildings relative to surrounding buildings.

### **Green Space**

The current plans show little usable greenspace for the residents of the 24 units. We ask that MHP take into consideration whether the lack of green space is appropriate given the setting for the proposed development.

### **Historical Preservation – MHC Review**

The house at 1615 Beacon sits on the site of a farmhouse built by Deacon John Staples in the late 1600’s. Staples was a prominent citizen who was appointed Newton’s first schoolmaster in 1700. The current home was erected in the mid-1700’s by Staples’ heir, and incorporates the foundation, structural members, and hardware of the original 17<sup>th</sup> century house. The 93-acre property was a working farm until the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century. In the 1870’s the property was acquired by William Strong, who developed the estate into streets and frontage lots. The final

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subdivision of the original estate at 1615 Beacon occurred in 1917 when a tract of land was sold to the Waban Neighborhood Club (renamed the Windsor Club).

Since 1986 the property has been listed on the National Register of Historic Places, meeting National Register criteria because “the farmstead is an important visual link to Waban’s 18<sup>th</sup> century agricultural beginnings and has associations with...families who were among the area’s earliest inhabitants.” (MHC Inv. # NWT.3740). In addition to its own historical significance, the property is surrounded by other historically-significant buildings (including the Waban Library Center directly across Beacon St., also listed on the National Register; see MHC Inv. # NWT.DV for information on the Village Center buildings).

We are pleased that the Applicant intends to preserve the historic portion of the existing home, but are concerned about the potential adverse impact the large new apartment building may have on the historic nature of the property and its surroundings. The Applicant may have already submitted a Project Notification Form to the Massachusetts Historic Commission to initiate early MHC review pursuant to M.G.L. Ch. 9, §§ 26-27C. If a PNF has not yet been submitted, we ask that you request that Mass Housing Partnership initiate the early review.<sup>2</sup> We would be happy to assist in notifying the public of MHC review to facilitate participation in the process pursuant to 950 CMR 71.02(d).

**Conclusion**

We hope that the Planning Department will incorporate into their MHP comment letter these concerns regarding safety, massing and scale, green space, and historic preservation. We are prepared to assist the Planning Dept. in any way to keep the community up to date on the status of this application and on the opportunities for public comment.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

**Waban Area Council**

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<sup>2</sup> “[N]otice should be given to the MHC as early as possible in the planning process of a project, and must be given before a state body takes action or makes a decision which forecloses alternatives that could eliminate, minimize, or mitigate adverse effects, or limits the MHC’s ability to comment or consult.” 950 CMR 71.07(1).

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**By:** Sallee Lipshutz, President

**cc:** Hon. Mayor Setti Warren  
[David Hanifin], Massachusetts Housing Partnership  
City Councilor Deb Crossley  
City Councilor John Rice  
City Councilor Brian Yates