



TOWN OF ARLINGTON

DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING and
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

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MEMORANDUM

To: Zoning Board of Appeals

From: Jennifer Raitt, Director of Planning and Community Development

cc: Erin Zwirko, AICP LEED AP, Assistant Director of Planning and Community Development
Daniel Amstutz, AICP, Senior Transportation Planner
Emily Sullivan, AICP Candidate, Environmental Planner and Conservation Agent

Date: January 8, 2021

RE: Thorndike Place Comments from Department of Planning and Community Development

To aid the Arlington Zoning Board of Appeals (ZBA) in their review of the Arlington Land Realty, LLC Application for a Comprehensive Permit to develop Thorndike Place, the Department is providing the following comments and questions on the proposed project, organized by topical issue:

- 1. Conservation and Environmental Amenities:** The Conservation Commission provided significant comments and recommendations which should be considered to protect the wetlands and address stormwater issues. The Department has the following comments in addition to comments provided by the Conservation Commission and BETA Group, the Town's third-party reviewer:
 - The Applicant should consider placing a Conservation Restriction (CR) on the undeveloped portion of the property to protect the open space in perpetuity. The CR could then be managed by the property owner, Conservation Commission, and a nonprofit entity such as the Arlington Land Trust. In the CR Management Plan, the Applicant could create a phased restoration plan for the entirety of the protected open space. The phased restoration plan should prioritize invasive species removal and management, as well as understory revegetation. The Applicant should consult with the Conservation Commission on appropriate restoration species. This phased approach would enhance the site over time, creating higher quality habitat and better functioning resource areas.

- As part of the CR, the Applicant should consider a trail system through the protected open space. Trails could be created with a combination of natural materials (e.g. mulch or stone dust) or boardwalks and should be designed to minimize resource area impacts. The Applicant should aim for an ADA compliant trail network. The trails should connect to the Minuteman Bikeway and Alewife Greenway. The Applicant should consider the Alewife Greenway and Alewife Wetlands Area as design models. The trail system should include signage for wayfinding, ecological identification, resource area identification, history of area, and climate change design considerations.
- Ornamental vegetation proposed around the buildings should be native species. The Applicant should consider reducing the amount of lawn turf onsite, and maximize natural meadow and pollinator gardens throughout the developed portion of the site.
- The Applicant should consider installing a community garden area as an onsite amenity and community-building asset for residents. The Applicant can refer to the Magnolia Park Community Garden.
- Where feasible, the Applicant should consider installing porous pavement for pathways, sidewalks, and parking areas to reduce localized stormwater flooding and to reduce stormwater pollution.

2. Circulation, Parking, Access, and Connections: The Transportation Advisory Committee (TAC) provided a review of traffic and circulation including reviewing the initial and updated Traffic Impact Assessment Study (TIAS). The Department has the following comments in addition to comments provided by TAC and BETA Group:

- First and foremost, the number of parking spaces per housing unit is very high and we recommend reducing it to an allocation of fewer than 200 spaces. The Applicant should consider compact car spaces and reduce the size of surface parking areas.
- The Applicant should clarify on Garage Level Plan the number of bike parking spaces in each area. There is one reference to the Bicycle Room and the number “108” next to it, which is lower than the 144 spaces proposed.
- The Applicant should clarify that the ingress/egress method is the same as vehicles; some residents may use the elevator or walk bikes out using east side garage door.
- The Department recommends that the “5’ wide gravel path” (Layout & Materials Plan) connecting east side garage door to asphalt path/sidewalk is paved with same materials as asphalt path under the assumption that some residents may use this entry to the garage as pedestrians or cyclists. Porous materials would be preferred, see note in prior section.
- The Applicant should clarify details of bike parking design to align with Arlington Bicycle Parking Guidelines. Bike parking that requires a person to physically lift a bicycle to park it is not permitted. Review dimensional guidance from Bicycle Parking Guidelines to ensure enough space is provided for 144 bike parking spaces.
- On the Layout & Materials Plan, an accessible ramp and stairs is shown on the south side of the building, but it is not clear where this goes to. There is no door shown on this section of the plan and no door shown at this location in the Garage Level Plan. The Applicant should clarify what this ramp connects to for understanding why a ramp and stairs are needed.

- The Applicant should show entry and exit doorways with accessible sidewalk pathways to access the street or around the building. Of particular note are doorways on the east side of the building and the doorway on the southwest side of the building near the garage entrance.
- The Department recommends an accessible sidewalk connection on the west side of the building to connect the south courtyard to the outdoor parking area.
- The sidewalk along Dorothy Road should be a minimum 5' wide and constructed of concrete, not asphalt. All other outdoor walkways should be at least 5' wide.
- The crosswalk connecting the west outdoor parking area to the building should be a continental or zebra-style crosswalk instead of only parallel lines. In addition, the curb ramps for this crosswalk are offset in the Layout and Materials Plan. They should be directly across from each other to the extent practicable.
- Crosswalks should also be included across the driveway aprons for the small parking area in the front of the building if it is assumed that frequent drop-offs and deliveries will be done in this area.

Traffic Impact Assessment (TIA) Report

- The Department agrees with BETA Group regarding the scope of the TIA and the methodology for determining current traffic volumes, adjusted due to COVID-19.
- Figure 2 of existing conditions notes the crosswalk for the Minuteman Bikeway crossing of Lake St but does not identify whether it is a signalized or unsignalized intersection. Existing conditions should be updated to note that this is now a signalized intersection.
- Figure 2 of existing conditions and other street network diagrams exclude a number of streets in the neighborhood, and erroneously show Mary Street ending at Burch Street in the east and Littlejohn at the south, and Burch Street ending at Dorothy Road. Mary Street ends at Margaret Street in the east and Wilson Ave in the south, and Burch Street ends at Edith Street. Include Osborne Road and Edith Street in analysis as they will likely be used by cyclists and pedestrians for accessing the Minuteman Bikeway and Thorndike Field.
- As part of the existing intersection signage and geometry, note that the north/eastbound approach to Burch Street from Lake Street has a red and white sign that says "Thorndike Field Parking" with an arrow directing traffic down Burch Street.
- The Department agrees with BETA Group's comment T32 regarding timed entry restrictions, with clarification that Burch Street does not have an entry restriction. Reference note above that signage directs traffic down Burch Street to get to Thorndike Field parking.
- The TIA recommendation to install a 23-dock Bluebikes station in the vicinity of the existing Bluebikes station at Magnolia Field/Minuteman Bikeway should be clarified to explain a more specific location, or if it would be adding to the existing Bluebikes station. Alternatively, the Applicant could work with the Town to identify the exact location and number of docks in consultation with Bluebikes staff.
- The intersection of Dorothy Road and Littlejohn Street is currently Stop-controlled on only one approach: Dorothy Road approaching Littlejohn. The approach from Littlejohn to Dorothy Road is uncontrolled. For the TIA recommendation to put the

project driveway under Stop sign control, it is unclear if the approach from Littlejohn Street to Dorothy Road/project should also be put under Stop sign control.

3. Design: The Department has the following comments:

- The Department appreciates the inclusion of an upper story step back, particularly how far it steps back fronting Dorothy Road. However, it is not clear if that space will be used as outdoor space for the residents (plan only indicates roof below). This should be clarified as there may be sound impacts if used for common space.
- Consideration should be given to the building color scheme. Improvements to accent colors denoting where the main entrances are located and other key locations of building interest could be emphasized with alternate colors. We believe the building design is an improvement from the prior design choices.
- Additional renderings, including improved street review, would be helpful in conducting this review.
- While the Applicant has made some interesting choices for sustainable design, including modular design and blue roofs, we recommend that the Applicant consider more recent goals set by the Town to achieve net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050, including fossil fuel free infrastructure, solar, and other considerations to reduce building emissions.
- Outdoor space around the building is minimal and should be improved or enhanced.

4. Affordable Housing: The Department has the following comments:

- While we appreciate the responses to the Town's Housing Production Plan (HPP) adopted by the Select Board and Redevelopment Board in 2016, the Applicant does not address why they are unable to match the Zoning Bylaw inclusionary requirements at a minimum, particularly lowering the prices and incomes for rental units.
- Further, per the Town's Inclusionary Zoning requirements, the Department recommends that the Applicant clearly show that the affordable units are dispersed throughout the development and comparable to market rate units in terms of quality and character, room size, and external appearance. Parking for affordable units should also be comparable in location and appearance to parking for market rate units.
- The Applicant should provide the Affirmative Fair Housing Marketing Plan to determine the market for these homes.

The Department is available to discuss any of the above comments and questions with the ZBA. We would appreciate the opportunity to discuss the project design further with the ZBA and with the Applicant.