

A public comment from a current resident and home owner residing in the town of Arlington, Massachusetts.

The Mugar Development (henceforth “Development”, or “Project”):

176 Units

205 Underground parking spaces

40B Design Review Concerns:

According to the Massachusetts “Handbook: Approach to Chapter 40B Design Reviews”:¹

“... commitment to ensuring that 40B affordable housing developments adhere to high standards of site and building design that enhance the quality of life for residents and the communities in which they reside.”

The handbook continues:

“This Handbook instead suggests that the site and building design, not the numerical density, determines if a development is ‘generally appropriate for the site.’ In some instances, a proposed development may contain more units than a site can reasonably accommodate.”

The scope of the Development, as quoted from the original application submission to the Massachusetts Housing Authority in 2015:²

“The Project will include 12 homeownership units (3 affordable) and 207 units of rental housing (52 affordable) and will be located off of Dorothy Road in Arlington, MA (the ‘Municipality’ or the ‘Town’) on 17.814 acres (5.6 buildable acres) of land in an area currently zoned Planned Unit Development (PUD). The Project will include 6 duplex style townhouse homes and 1, four-story apartment building. A total of 304 parking spaces will be provided including 2 garage spaces for each townhouse (24 total), 178 covered spaces in the apartment podium garage, and 102 surface parking spaces.”

The Development has undergone significant changes since the original 40B submission. In an updated document submitted to the Arlington Zoning Board of Appeals (ZBA) on November 3rd, 2020:³

- 1) The proposed six (6) duplex style townhouse homes have been removed altogether
- 2) The apartment complex has been moved to sit along Dorothy Road

¹ <https://www.mass.gov/files/documents/2017/10/16/handbook-approachtoch40b-designreviewa.pdf>

² <https://www.arlingtonma.gov/home/showpublisheddocument?id=32279>

³ <https://www.arlingtonma.gov/home/showpublisheddocument?id=53976>;
<https://www.arlingtonma.gov/home/showpublisheddocument?id=54004>

- 3) The 207 units of rental housing have been decreased to 176
- 4) The 178 underground parking spaces have been increased to 205
- 5) The three (3) vehicular ingress and egress points have been reduced to one (1)

Using the Handbook as comparison, we'll step through some of the "Key Design Issues" as related to the Development:

- 1) Scale – The scale of a structure should be compatible with the surrounding architecture and landscape context.

The scale of the Development is not compatible with the surrounding architecture. Locating the structure along Route 2, similar to the Vox on Two complex, would scale the site correctly. However, in the most recent iteration, the Development resides on Dorothy Road, where the surrounding community is a mix of single, and multi-family homes.

- 2) Height – The height of the proposed buildings should generally be compatible with the surrounding buildings and structures.

The Development will be a three, stepping back to four-story apartment complex; larger in height than any of the existing homes in the surrounding neighborhood.

- 3) Proportion – The proportions of building elements can define the character of a building. The widths, heights, and separations of doors, windows, signs and other architectural elements should be generally compatible with existing buildings and structures.

The Development will be proportionally out of place in the surrounding neighborhood, which is a mix of single, and multi-family homes.

Local street concerns:

Unlike the aforementioned Vox on Two apartments, the Development would not have direct access to Lake Street, or Route 2. Instead, all residents of the 176 units would exit out via a single driveway located at the intersection of Littlejohn Street and Dorothy Street, before exiting the community through local streets onto Lake Street.

Due to complaints from neighbors on both sides of Lake Street, the town instituted "No Entry" restrictions from 7am - 9am, and 4pm - 7pm Monday through Friday for Wilson Avenue, Littlejohn Street, and Homestead Road.

In Fall of 2020, the town installed traffic calming measures on Mary Street, from Littlejohn Street to Margaret Street, as part of the "Shared Streets" pilot program.⁴ Any traffic illegally turning into the community on Wilson Avenue, or Littlejohn Street, was slowed, but could continue down

⁴ <https://www.arlingtonma.gov/home/showpublisheddocument?id=53093>

Littlejohn St. to Dorothy Rd., bypassing the Shared Street pilot, and inconveniencing the lesser trafficked Dorothy Street.

According to an Arlington ZBA meeting held on January 12, 2021,⁵ the town stated that the “No Entry” restrictions would remain in place. In addition, the traffic calming measures tested on Mary Street would also continue for the foreseeable future.

Assuming that a development with the scale, height, and proportions to the existing neighborhood is built, it would include approximately 12 parking spaces. The 205 proposed underground parking spaces is a 17x increase in vehicle traffic to the neighborhood. It is unknown if any traffic calming restrictions will be implemented for vehicles entering or exiting the Development.

Flooding:

Flooding is a major concern not only in the community adjacent to the Development, but in all of East Arlington. The Mugar property is included in the “Community Resilience Building Workshop Summary of Findings & Recommendations” from the town of Arlington, May 2018.⁶

In the section “CURRENT CONCERNS & CHALLENGES PRESENTED BY HAZARDS”, the summary states: “Participants identified a variety of factors that could influence stormwater flooding in town, including geology, groundwater levels, topography, drainage systems, land use, and dam/reservoir management. They were also concerned that decisions made by private property owners, neighboring communities, and regional agencies could be worsening Arlington’s flood risks.”

Under its “TOP RECOMMENDATIONS”, the summary also states that “East Arlington is more exposed to flooding and heat hazards than any other neighborhood in Arlington. Its exposure to flooding is related to its topography and proximity to Alewife Brook and the Mystic River. Its high heat exposure is due to the density of housing and limited tree cover and pervious surfaces.”

The Development would further aggravate issues already plaguing East Arlington by removing trees, excavating large amounts of open land for an underground parking garage, installing impervious surfaces, and building upon land shown by FEMA⁷ and BSC⁸ to be within a floodplain, and which borders sensitive wetlands.

⁵ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=18716bRjcb8>

⁶ <https://www.arlingtonma.gov/home/showdocument?id=43409>

⁷ <https://www.arlingtonma.gov/home/showdocument?id=20413>

⁸ <https://www.arlingtonma.gov/home/showpublisheddocument?id=53974>

Conclusion:

The Mugar Development, as it stands presently, will be an infrastructure and ecological disaster for East Arlington, and the neighborhood community situated around it.

The numerous changes made after the 40B application approval should be resubmitted to the Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD), both for review, and for further public comment.

Sincerely, and with utmost respect to the Mugar family,
Matthew McKinnon
9 Littlejohn St., Arlington, MA