

Patricia and Edward Browne
49 Mary St
Arlington, MA 02474

February 1, 2021

Town of Arlington
Zoning Board of Appeals
51 Grove St
Arlington, MA 02476

Re: Thorndike Place

Dear Members of the Arlington Zoning Board of Appeals

We live in the Dorothy Rd neighborhood, and like our neighbors, we have several concerns about Thorndike Place that have not been addressed. We also have some suggestions that might be appealing for the neighborhood.

Design:

The design presented last week (Thorndike Apartment 3D Visualization, November 3, 2020 <https://www.arlingtonma.gov/home/showpublisheddocument?id=53976>) is totally out of character with the surrounding neighborhood. “Brick banding” on a few sections of wall in a “nod to the neighboring houses” is simply not enough. The design is much more appropriate on a busy city block than a neighborhood dominated by 2-family homes. The design of structure should be in keeping with the colonial architecture and four-square style of the neighborhood. Pitched roofs, varied front façades, front porches, etc. Modular companies do these types of design elements all the time.

The design presented last week is too large – especially the front façade. Three or four stories close to the street totally overwhelms the neighborhood. Perhaps stepping the design back and only having two stories facing the street with a more varied façade would help.

The developer and future owners should be precluded from any additional exterior infrastructure on the building including but not limited to cellular antennas, solar panels, satellite TV dishes or antennas, and any appendages that would alter the look of the building or the shadow line of the final approved drawings.

Has a shadow line study been requested?

Parking and Transit:

The developer has indicated bike racks and a bike storage room on their plans. Will they include any electric chargers for bikes or scooters?

Could the developer consider designating some parking for 3-5 shared-use cars like Zipcar? This may be a good option for the residents who are car-free to make the occasional trips that need a car.

Is the developer planning on including charging for electric vehicles inside the garage? Electric cars will become much more common as vehicle manufacturers phase out gas-engine cars. Having the charging infrastructure in place would be an attractive way to encourage electric vehicles and remove a barrier for residents to own this type of car.

We wrote a letter last week regarding cutting down on the number of parking spaces substantially and making parking only for demonstrated need rather than by-right. Embrace the transit lifestyle that the developer keeps talking about. Having living spaces that do not include parking is common in neighboring cities such as Somerville, Boston, and Cambridge when the housing is built as “transit-oriented.” We suggest the following:

- 75-80 garage spaces for people with needs (disability, health, age, family) The parking spaces could only be allocated strictly by demonstrated, documented need. Since it is a new development, this should be easy to implement from the beginning. People would know upfront the conditions for getting a parking space. Anyone whose needs change can be put on a waitlist or can choose to move. Anyone who is moving in going forward would know if parking is or is not available for them. Parking would not be by-right but by allocation by management. Draw up a specific set of criteria for applying for a parking space.
- 10 “admin-flex” garage spaces for current residents that could be emergency use for people with genuine immediate needs who are on the waitlist or have temporary needs. Unused spaces could be day-use for visitors.
- 10-15 outdoor visitor spaces where overnight parking is not allowed except by prior approval by apartment complex management. They will need to agree to enforce this so that these spaces don’t turn into de facto resident parking. Apartment residents who don’t have assigned parking spots at Thorndike will not be able to park on the streets instead as overnight parking permits are tied to the address of the person requesting and are required to park in front of that property. Because Arlington does not allow overnight, on-street parking, this should be easy to enforce.

Infrastructure:

The developer has stated this will be an all-electric building. How will the new electric infrastructure be designed and installed to serve this site? If above ground, what will be the impact on the neighborhood? If below ground...same question. What is the route of the electric infrastructure?

The neighborhood has had numerous underground gas leaks. If the streets are disturbed, will the developer be paying for gas main upgrades? Will street opening permits have requirement to repair any

leaking gas branch lines known and unknown along the route. What is the route of the gas main upgrade?

Adding 176 units will probably require upgrades to the water and sewer system. Will the developer be paying for these water and sewer upgrades including repaving the streets to their pre-construction state? What about fire hydrants and sprinkler water mains?

Since the developer is proposing to bring in modular buildings, this will probably include heavy trucking vehicles and at least one crane. Who will be responsible for repairing any street damage and give assurances that no trees or tree limbs will be damaged?

Traffic:

Traffic patterns inside the neighborhood still seem to be unaddressed post construction. What is the plan?

Based on the current plan, access would seem to be naturally directed out onto Little John St. Will there be any changes to signage or traffic flow?

Will the Mary Street “shared street” modifications be going forward? We are concerned about traffic calming and congestion as this will naturally become the “cut through” to avoid backups on Lake Street – especially since Mott Street is one-way.

Our streets in the neighborhood are narrow. With most of the houses being two-families, cars are often parked on the street during the day because of shared driveways. Cars sometimes park overnight, with permission, on these streets. Has there been a safety study around getting emergency vehicles in and out and what the anticipated increase in safety calls will be? There was a letter from Fire Chief Jefferson dated June 6, 2020 that specifically state that they do not have adequate information – and raises concerns around fire hydrants.

Neighborhood:

As stated, this development is expected to draw commuters who will walk to Alewife. What is the plan to require better sidewalks on Dorothy? The Traffic Plan (Transportation Impact Assessment, Vanasse & Associates, November 2020 <https://www.arlingtonma.gov/home/showpublisheddocument?id=53948> and all subsequent drawings) inaccurately depicts sidewalks on parts of Dorothy Rd where there are no sidewalks currently.

Are there any plans to create a walking path through the property? This was noted in Zoning Board of Appeals, January 8, 2021, Section 1, second bullet point.

<https://www.arlingtonma.gov/home/showpublisheddocument?id=54407> The close-by Alewife Brook Reservation/Alewife Brook Pathway just outside the Alewife T Station is an excellent example of this concept of providing access to people of all ages and abilities – not just those who can traverse an uneven path.

Could an inclusive neighborhood playground be installed? There is a very small playground noted on the site plans Thorndike Place Civil Drawings, November 3, 2020

(<https://www.arlingtonma.gov/home/showpublisheddocument?id=54004>) but this would appear to be strictly for use by the apartment residents. Can something larger for the entire neighborhood be built?

The current plan shows access via a narrow path that runs along the side of the building, close to apartment windows. This would probably discourage neighbors from accessing it.

Trees and plantings:

The drawings showed extensive large trees and shrubs as buffers. Can we require that trees and shrubs of a sufficient size be planted to be both a noise and visual buffer from the start rather than trees and shrubs that will grow into buffers in 10-20 years? I recognize that full-grown trees cannot be planted, but trees of a larger size can – especially when many trees will be removed to build this development.

Has there been a tree plan presented per Title V Regulations Upon the Use of Private Property, Article 16, Tree Protection and Preservation to determine the size and number of trees that will be removed to build this? Reading the “Wildlife Habitat and Vegetation Evaluation”, November 2020, BSC Group seems to indicate that there are many large trees scattered throughout the property.

Flooding and water table:

A large development like this that will require careful management of storm water. And there is always the risk of changes to the water table. How will these changes be monitored? How will any impact(s) be addressed during and post-construction? Not only wet basements and garages, but we are also concerned about old-growth trees along Dorothy and on the rest of the site as the water table will almost certainly change.

How long will the town require the developer to provide follow up reports?

Building Services:

Where will the services and loading docks be located?

Where will trash and recycling be located and how will they be serviced?

Rats are a problem in this neighborhood. How will rat problems and issues be handled before, during, and after construction?

Construction:

We understand that the developer is proposing to bring 65-foot-long modules in. Have they shown that they can safely bring these in from the still-unknown off-site staging area? They estimated that there will be in excess of 240 of these units which would have to make the turn from Lake Street onto narrow

side streets. Have they shown that this is possible in a safe and responsible way without damage to existing trees, roads, sidewalks, or structures?

Is the developer planning on using union labor and hiring local, Arlington-based contractors and workers where possible?

Has the developer presented a plan to deal with noise during construction per Title V Regulations Upon the Use of Private Property, Article 12?

The Traffic Plan (Transportation Impact Assessment, Vanasse & Associates, January 2021 <https://www.arlingtonma.gov/home/showpublisheddocument?id=54419>) cites in Comment #41 that BSC will separately respond to construction impact. Has the Board received this report?

School Impact:

Has there been any studies on the estimate of number of children who would most likely be living at Thorndike Place? Has a school impact study been completed? One of the reports discussed the Hardy School in very general current-capacity state, but we could not find any further studies on this.

Lighting:

Has the developer put forth a plan to address light pollution from the project per Title V Regulations Upon the Use of Private Property, Article 14? There needs to be a balance between safety and creating lighting nuisance for neighbors.

I am sure that there are many questions that the board has already answered around these questions. We have tried to do our homework and read the many, many supporting documents that have been posted online. But this project seems to be constantly changing, so we would like the most current answers to these questions.

Thank you for your attention and service. We appreciate all the work and late nights that you and the other boards in the Town of Arlington are devoting not only to this project but to the Town in general.

Patricia and Edward Browne

49 Mary St
Arlington

CC: Town of Arlington Select Board, Town Manager, Adam Chapdelaine