



Open Space Committee

March 29, 2021

Christian Klein, Chair
Zoning Board of Appeals
Arlington Town Hall
51 Grove St.
Arlington, MA 02476

Dear Mr. Klein and Zoning Board Members,

Following up on the Arlington Open Space Committee's previous letter of July 6, 2020, I am writing to express again our strong opposition to the proposed Thorndike Place project, as revised and discussed over the past nine months. The current proposal for 172 units in a single building on Dorothy Road is simply the wrong type of development in the wrong location.

As you know, the Open Space Committee is responsible for preparing the Town's Open Space and Recreation Plan. The current edition of the plan, covering the years 2015-2022, specifically addresses the Mugar property. Among the Plan's primary goals is:

"Goal 1. Acquire ecologically valuable undeveloped lands or ensure their protection through conservation restrictions or other means."

Throughout the Plan, references are made to this goal to protect the entire 17.7-acre Mugar parcel, not only the 11 acres that the original 2016 Thorndike Place Application suggested. For example, on page 5 of the 2015 Plan: "...Town Meeting voted in 2000 to approve the 1996 Plan's goal of acquiring the Mugar parcel for open space purposes ... In May 2001, Town Meeting reaffirmed its commitment to preserving the Mugar property as open space ..." On page 10: "The 17-acre Mugar property in East Arlington remains the highest priority goal for acquisition and protection as open space and floodwater storage."

On page 10, the 2015 Plan continues:

"In 2010 FEMA released updated floodplain maps that show much of the Mugar land encumbered by several levels of flood zones, making extensive development difficult. The Arlington Redevelopment Board [ARB] voted in 2011 to formally adopt the [2007-2014] Open Space and Recreation Plan, thereby making the Plan, including acquisition and preservation of the Mugar property, Town policy, and thus signaling the Town's discouragement of any development of the property."

The ARB subsequently adopted the 2015-2022 Plan on March 30, 2015, reinforcing the Plan's status as Town policy. Complementing the Open Space and Recreation Plan is the Town's 2015 Master Plan, which also recommends protection of the Mugar property for open space and flood management. The committee is now beginning the process of updating the Plan for 2022-2029, and the long-stated goal of conserving the entire Mugar site will continue to be a top priority.

In spite of repeated efforts on the part of Town officials, the Arlington Land Trust and others, the Mugar family has been unwilling to pursue a serious alternative plan that would allow for conservation of the entire parcel. The ZBA hearings over the past several months have only reinforced the Town's and neighbors' concerns, and numerous environmental assessments confirm the inappropriateness of this project in this location.

The Open Space Committee joins many other Town committees, officials, and residents in opposing the proposed Thorndike Place development. We support the ZBA in doing everything within its authority to evaluate the extensive engineering and other technical analyses that have been submitted by the Applicant and by the Town's Conservation Commission and outside consultants.

If the ZBA deems it impossible to deny the entire project outright, we trust that strict conditions will be incorporated into the board's final decision to limit the disastrous consequences of development in this environmentally vulnerable part of Arlington.

Further, the proposed transfer of about 12 acres of the site to the Town or another entity for conservation purposes also requires extensive pre-conditions, as outlined in the Town Manager's recent letter to the ZBA. The known hazards and unknown site contamination must be scientifically assessed, documented and remediated before any such transfer could occur.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Ann LeRoy". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Ann LeRoy, Chair
Open Space Committee

cc: Adam Chapdelaine, Town Manager
John V. Hurd, Chair, Select Board
Jennifer Raitt, Director, Department of Planning and Community Development
Emily Sullivan, Environmental Planner and Conservation Agent
Susan Chapnick, Chair, Conservation Commission