

July 1, 2021

To: Christian Klein, Chair, and the members of the Arlington Zoning Board of Appeals

RE: Transportation and Travel Issues as related to the proposed Thorndike Place development on the Mugar Wetlands property

Dear Chairman Klein and members of the Arlington ZBA,

Thank you for the opportunity to speak during the public comment period during the June 29, 2021 hearing regarding the proposed development in East Arlington in the Mugar Wetlands property. Per your request, I have put my comments in writing, doing my best to recall what I said.

As a social worker at a local Council on Aging, I work in the community, with adults over age 60, on many different issues. Housing is one of the most frequent issues for my clients. I have many clients who live in “independent living” apartments, some market rate, some subsidized by either the state or federal programs.

Arlington is fortunate to have 5 affordable, subsidized (roughly paying 30-33% of ones' monthly income in rent) independent living apartment buildings in town that are for “elderly” (ages 60 or 62+) and “non elderly disabled adults.” Four are subsidized in state programs and run by the Arlington Housing Authority, and one is in a federal program and run by a private management company.

Each of these buildings are on a major roadway, four are right in the center of Arlington, and the exception is the Drake Village complex, which is down off of Mass Ave in Arlington Heights, but right off the bike path and also very close to Walgreens and Trader Joes in the Heights. None of the buildings are tucked away in the very back of a residential neighborhood. None of the buildings are in a neighborhood at all, really, but in more urban, walkable, areas. Wait lists are very long to get into any of these units, often 6 months to a year.

In my experience, some folks do take public transportation, like the route 77 MBTA bus up and down Mass Ave, but not as many venture into the city via public transportation, and few take trips via Alewife. Not all home health workers and the types of visitors listed below would take public transportation to this location.

As folks at the meeting were discussing transportation issues, and how not as many parking spaces are needed at such a large building due to the age of the residents, I noted that, in my experience, as many spots as are available at an apartment building parking lot for an aging population, there will be as many residents with cars to fill those spots. At the existing senior housing apartment buildings noted above, they all have waiting lists for parking spots

I also noted that for those without their own cars, and sometimes for those that do, there will also be an influx of cars, and of the visits IN to the apartment area, in this case, going up and down Littlejohn Street all day and sometimes at night will include the following types of visitors, that I have observed visiting older adults in independent living apartments:

home health aides
personal care attendants
housecleaners
family members
companions
physical therapists
occupational therapists
first responders (sometimes just fire, police, or ambulance, sometimes all three at once)

social workers
nurses
hospice workers
food deliver including Peapod, Meals on Wheels, Arlington Eats (food pantry)
Amazon
UPS
USPS

Also, there will be many trips OUT of the apartment complex, not only by resident's personal cars, but also:

MBTA The Ride
Senior Center/Council on Aging vans
Door to Door Senior transportation
the complexes own proposed "jitney"

Uber, Lyft
medical escorts using their own cars
family
taxi

I am sure I am leaving out some key services, but I think this makes it clear, there will be too much traffic in and out of the neighborhood if this project is allowed to be built as requested by the Mugar.

I also want to point out that although many older adults are active and can walk up to and along the Minuteman Bikeway, there will be more residents that choose to walk the loops of the neighborhood, increasing the likelihood of car/pedestrian accidents, especially near the narrow, singular, entry and exit proposed to this apartment building, as well as the new proposed 14 homes in front of the apartment building along Dorothy Road.

As much as I advocate for (and know we need) more affordable senior housing, this is just not the right spot for such a building. IF it had to be built, I would strongly urge for much more than 25% of the units to be affordable—it should be 100% affordable.

Please feel free to reach out if you have questions about any of the above.

Regards,

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