



The Trustees
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January 13, 2021

Via Email

Hon. Eli Bolling, Chair
Manchester-by-the-Sea Board of Selectmen
10 Central Street
Manchester-by-the-Sea, MA 01944

Re: 40B Proposal for Shingle Hill
SLV School Street, LLC

To the Board of Selectmen:

I am writing to the Board on behalf of The Trustees of Reservations, as a direct abutter to the proposed development site (Manchester Assessor's Map 43, Parcel 16), and as the steward of the Trustees' Agassiz Rock Reservation, proximate to the development site on the easterly side of Southern Avenue, to express our opposition to the project as proposed. Beyond our specific ownership interests, however, as members of the broader conservation community, we are very concerned with potential impacts to all the conservation holdings in the vicinity, including notably the abutting Wilderness Conservation Area, which comprises lands protected by the Manchester-Essex Conservation Trust, Essex County Greenbelt, and The Trustees, as well as the towns of Manchester and Essex. This is a conservation area of statewide significance, assembled painstakingly over decades, and truly a resource to be treasured, and, perhaps more to the point, zealously protected.

We have had an opportunity to review the materials submitted to date by Strategic Land Ventures, have walked the site on several occasions, and have attended the information sessions held by your board. In addition, we have had the opportunity to speak with a representative from Strategic Land Ventures, and with town planning staff. At this juncture, we have grave concerns about a variety of the impacts created by the proposed project, given the lack of specificity in the various materials provided to date. Specifically, given that the project area drains through Sawmill Brook, which bisects our parcel, we have very significant concerns about stormwater management, given the density of development and related infrastructure, and the slopes and soils conditions on-site. We would note further that the course of Sawmill Brook traverses our Agassiz Rock Reservation for some 3,500 linear feet east of Southern Avenue, making The Trustees perhaps the most directly impacted landowner from a stormwater perspective. Similarly, we are very concerned about the wastewater treatment plant proposed for the site, for which virtually no information has been provided. We would note further that any development of the site at the scale proposed by Strategic Land Ventures will necessitate extensive blasting, and the impacts that the blasting will have on the abutting conservation parcels, which have been identified by the Massachusetts Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Program as a high priority for wildlife habitat, have not been assessed.

Beyond the specific concerns noted above, we find that impacts related to traffic and lighting have the potential to significantly impact the conservation values of the Wilderness Conservation Area and Agassiz Rock Reservation.

Stepping back from the specific project, we recommend that the town not turn its back on decades of sound planning practice as reflected in Manchester's Zoning bylaw, which identified this area as appropriate for development at relatively low levels of density. The fact that Strategic Land Ventures has seen the need to propose a development which grossly exceeds the underlying density allowed should serve to affirm, rather than deny, the wisdom of the town's approach to planning and zoning in the outlying districts of the community.

In closing, in a number of venues, the fact that the proposed site has no residential abutters has been identified as one of the positive attributes of the project. While this is inarguable, we feel that it misses an important consideration, which in fact makes the site particularly un-suitable for a development of this scale: the surrounding land owned by the Manchester-Essex Conservation Trust and by The Trustees is held in trust for all of us. It is everyone's back yard. As such, it should be viewed as especially valuable, rather than targeted for a development which will likely have significant impacts on the conservation values of the area. Given the scale of the project, the importance of the conservation resources, and the scope of the potential impacts, we feel that we have an obligation to voice our opposition to the proposed project, and would request that the Board of Selectmen take action to address the impacts noted herein.

Yours most sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Jocelyn Forbush".

Jocelyn Forbush
Acting President and CEO