



Citizens Initiative for Manchester Affordable Housing

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January 20, 2021

Mr. Geoffrey Engler
Strategic Land Ventures
257 Hillside Avenue
Needham, MA 02494

Dear Mr. Engler:

Thank you for attending our Town's Board of Selectmen's 40B workshop on Thursday, January 14th. It was a pleasure to welcome an entrepreneur such as yourself, and we look forward to seeing you back on Zoom for future meetings related to your proposal to erect a 157-unit multifamily complex on top of the pristine wilderness of Shingle Hill.

As you might imagine, we have a long list of questions for you, and we plan on sending them to you regularly, and publishing them as open letters available to the Boards and citizens of Manchester and of other towns with an interest in your activities, so that you can respond to them thoroughly. We write you not in any official capacity, but simply as citizens wishing the best for our town.

Our topic for this week pertains to the safety of your proposed development to those families who will live in it. The Town has recorded the January 14th call and you find it at:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k2SDv0GMSI0&feature=youtu.be>.

That evening, Manchester's Traffic Impact Peer Review Consultant Gary Hebert, PE, of Stantec Consulting, characterized the project you wish to build as less safe, due to its lack of a secondary access road. He recommended that one be provided. If we heard you correctly, you acknowledged that your design is less safe: "Mr. Hebert said, 'It's less safe,' I would agree with that. That doesn't mean it's unsafe." During the call, you also indicated that you would be responsive to the recommendations of Manchester's consultants. Mr. Hebert recommended both in his written report and on the town call that this development include a secondary roadway for safety. On the call you also made it clear that you would not include this secondary access road in your plans.

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- Your words: "We're receptive to your peer reviewer's recommendations." "Ultimately, we will do what Mr. Hebert requested."
- Mr. Hebert's recommendation: "It's not as safe. Without that second access, it's definitely not as safe. I can't sit here and say straight-faced that that's fine, because it's not fine. I would like to see a second access."
- Your words: "We cannot provide a secondary means of egress to this site."

Why do you believe that your proposal warrants further discussion, given your setting "less safe" as your guiding standard for Manchester's first-ever large multi-family residential complex? You asserted that plenty of other 40B developments have similar access characteristics. Please provide a comprehensive list of Massachusetts 40B developments which share the essential site safety characteristics of your proposal for Shingle Hill. These are:

1. Steep grade;
2. Long access road;
3. Curvilinear access road;
4. Steep slopes on either side of the access road;
5. Extreme vertical separation between development site and town road;
6. No secondary access road; and
7. High unit density.

We believe your proposal closely resembles the 40B project in *Lexington Woods LLC vs. Waltham*, 2005, wherein the State Housing Appeals Committee sided with the Town of Waltham's denial of the 40B proposal. According to the HAC: "the valid local health and safety concerns raised by the lack of secondary access to the site, in combination with the grade and design of the single access drive into the proposed development, outweigh the regional need for affordable housing." Why do you believe that your project as proposed does not violate the exact same safety standards? Is your professed standard of "less safe" really how you intend to protect the lives of those who would live in it?

If only based on this single life/safety factor, your project is at an impasse. Why persist with a proposal that is so obviously ill-conceived? Why not withdraw it now before investing more time and capital in a process that will unveil so many more failings? Why do you wish to demonstrate to the citizens of Manchester and of other towns that you do not live up to your promises, such as complying with safety recommendations?

In coming weeks, we will have other questions about your proposal and about other aspects of your business practices. In the meantime, we look forward to hearing your response, as do many hundreds of our fellow citizens. We will circulate it to them upon its receipt.

Thanks in advance for your illumination, and please let me know of any questions or comments.

Sincerely,

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