

MECT: 40B Should Respect And Protect Its Surroundings

To the Editor:

I'm fond of saying to visitors of the conserved woodlands and swamps in these parts that "it's not here by accident". This is especially so in the area around Cedar Swamp and the upper School Street trailhead for the "Wilderness Conservation Area", where the Manchester Essex Conservation Trust, Essex County Greenbelt, and the Town of Manchester have been working to protect land for many decades. There is now, as most readers are aware, a proposal for a "40B" apartment complex of 157 units, 40 of which are designated affordable, to be built atop Shingle Hill, the ridge separating "new" School Street from the old road alongside the swamp, the popular boardwalk, and the gateway to the extensive trail system maintained for the public by MECT.

The developer, Strategic Land Ventures (SLV), has filed its "Local Initiative Program" (LIP) application and is asking the Selectmen to submit a letter of support to the State Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD), which would qualify it as a "friendly" 40B application. DHCD requires that the application include a "description of current site conditions" and an "appraisal of the site". Shingle Hill is a steep, rocky and challenging site, proximate to Cedar Swamp and Sawmill Brook. The LIP application lacks information on stormwater runoff and contaminants, wastewater treatment, and impacts on the conservation land due to light, noise and traffic.

We are asking that the Selectmen incorporate conditions in the LIP letter requiring SLV to address these issues, most importantly, how the project in all its phases from construction to operation will protect Cedar Swamp, Sawmill Brook, and the Town's watershed. MECT has engaged with both Town officials and the developer, on behalf of our conservation values, our membership, and, we hope people will agree, the interests of the Town as a whole. We will stay on it throughout the public review process.

This project and other prospective development on upper School Street will affect the Wilderness Conservation Area and other conservation jewels such as Agassiz Rock long into the future and will change the character of the Town. Yes, Manchester needs affordable housing, but in this case must proceed very carefully and press SLV as much as appropriately possible to provide we citizens with all the information we need to judge the proposal's merits and, if it is to be built, to get a project that respects and protects its surroundings and that we'll still be proud of for decades to come.

Michael Dyer

President, MECT