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M E M O R A N D U M

DATE: November 29, 2013

TO: Planning and Development Board

FROM: Candace Havens, Director of Planning and Development
Alexandra Ananth, Chief Planner for Current Planning
Rob Muollo, Interim Housing Programs Manager
Stephen Pantalone, Senior Planner

RE: Myrtle Village Project

In response to questions raised at the previous public hearing held by the Planning and Development Board, the Planning Department is providing the following information for the upcoming Planning and Development Board Meeting.

Land Uses in the Surrounding Neighborhood

The site is located in a Multi-Residence 2 Zoning District. The land uses in the surrounding neighborhood consist mainly of single-family and two-family dwellings. There are also several multi-family dwellings, religious institutions and educational facilities in the neighborhood. Most of the non-residential uses are located on Washington Street closer to the Mass Pike ramp.

Zoning

Based on the initial site plan the project will likely need zoning relief from certain dimensional requirements under the Ordinance. The following table provides the required/allowed dimensions in an MR2 Zone for attached dwellings, the existing dimensions and the proposed dimensions.

MR2 Zone	Required/Allowed	Existing	Proposed
Lot Size (attached dwellings)	15,000 sf	15,770 sf	15,770 sf
Lot Area Per Unit	4,000 sf	3,942.5 sf	2,252 sf
Frontage	80 ft.	200 ft.	200 ft.

MR2 Zone	Required/Allowed	Existing	Proposed
Setbacks			
• Front	25 ft.	14.4 feet	14.44 ft. to existing, 15 ft. to new construction
• Side	25 ft.	6.2 ft.	6.2 ft. to existing, 8 ft. to new construction
• Rear	25 ft.	NA	14 ft. to new construction
Building Height	36 ft.	NA	26 ft.
Max Number of Stories	2.5	2	2
Lot Coverage	25%	NA	24%
Open Space	50%	NA	71%
Parking Stalls	2 stalls/unit = 14	6 (approximate)	3 on-site & 11 off-site
FAR	.43	NA	.48

It is important to note that submitted plans are conceptual in nature and all projected dimensional relief is preliminary until an engineered site plan is submitted to the Zoning Board of Appeals.

Parking

The applicant is providing three parking stalls on-site and is seeking zoning relief to locate the eleven remaining required stalls in the Myrtle Baptist Church parking lot. As part of the Comprehensive Permit application, the Planning Department will request that the applicant provide a parking study of the Myrtle Street parking lot. The study should clearly indicate that use of the church's parking spaces by the residents of Myrtle Village on a full-time basis will not create a parking problem during services or other church events. The Comprehensive Permit will require that the applicant provide a parking management plan to address any issues.

Traffic

The proposed development will add approximately eight cars to the site, which will generate approximately 23 new car trips during weekdays, including 3 new car trips during peak morning hours and 3 new car trips during peak evening hours. The Planning Department believes that the street is designed to handle this increase in vehicle trips and anticipates no safety risk to the neighborhood.

The site is located within a block of Washington Street and the Mass Pike entrance, which is heavily traveled during peak hours and many concerns were expressed regarding the existing cut-through traffic. The City Traffic Engineer indicated that in the spring of 2014 the signal at Prospect and Washington Street will be upgraded with vehicle detection technology and engineering staff will study the timing of the signal at Auburn and Washington Street to see if it needs to be adjusted. For the longer term, both intersections are expected to receive additional upgrades as part of the traffic

mitigation for the recently-approved Station at Riverside project to improve traffic flow on Washington Street so that neighborhood streets are used less as a cut-through.

The neighborhood has seen a number of new projects in recent years and is expecting additional development in the future. A number of the recent, ongoing, and potential future developments include:

- 70 Crescent Street. This City-owned land, which was previously occupied by the Parks and Recreation Department, is proposed for reuse, since the Department has relocated to Newton Corner and the building is in poor condition. A citizen's Joint Advisory Group proposed between 8 and 20 units of housing on the site and Planning staff suggests 6-15 units. In either scenario, the existing playground or one of equal or greater size is proposed to be maintained for neighborhood enjoyment in the immediate vicinity. The Real Property Reuse Committee is expected to continue its review of the options in January; however, the traffic generated by as many as 20 units is projected to increase traffic by an estimated 117 cars per day, including 13 new car trips during peak morning hours and 15 new car trips during peak evening hours, and is not expected to have a serious effect on existing conditions.
- 75-77 Auburn Street. A special permit was recently approved for four residential units at this location. This project is projected to add 19 new car trips a day, including 2 new car trips during peak morning hours and 2 new car trips during peak evening hours.

The cumulative effect of these new developments is a concern to the neighborhood. Yet, residential traffic generation generally is very low, particularly in a neighborhood that has good access to existing public transportation, including the commuter rail station in West Newton, several bus stops on Washington Street and Commonwealth Avenue, and the Green Line at Riverside Station. As other developments occur, including the turnover of single-family houses to two-family houses and the demolition of existing houses for larger units, parking and traffic considerations will continue to be monitored.

Funding and Permitting Process

The applicant is currently seeking CDBG, HOME and Community Preservation Program funding commitments. If funds are committed, the applicant will apply to the Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) which will determine if the project qualifies under Massachusetts General Law Chapter 40B. If DHCD determines that the project is eligible, the applicant will then apply for a Comprehensive Permit from the Newton Zoning Board of Appeals. Detailed site plans, traffic, and other studies will be submitted as part of this application. City Departments will review and provide analysis on the application and all interested parties are able to testify at public hearings prior to a decision by the Zoning Board of Appeals. Should funds be committed to the project, their release will be subject to various conditions that may be imposed by the Comprehensive Permit, so long as they do not render the project uneconomic.

Property Values

Concerns about decreased property values in communities with Chapter 40B developments have prompted many studies from educational institutions. Most of these studies have found a neutral or positive effect of a “40B” development, while downward trends were attributed to factors unrelated to the projects. These studies are available on the project webpage on the City of Newton website.

Lottery and Displacement

The use of federal funds necessitates compliance with the federal Uniform Relocation Act of 1970 (URA). The URA provides displacement and relocation protections and assistance for people affected by the acquisition, rehabilitation, or demolition of real property for federally-assisted projects and aims to avoid displacement. In keeping with the URA, it is the policy of Planning Department to take all reasonable steps to minimize such displacement. In some cases permanent displacement is unavoidable. In 2010, a federally-assisted development at 61 Pearl Street required the permanent relocation of existing tenants that were not income eligible. In accordance with the URA, the City provided \$20,800 in federal assistance for the relocation of these tenants to comparable, safe and sanitary housing.

There are three existing units on the properties that are currently occupied. Each household will be able to remain within the project upon its completion if the Planning Department determines they are income eligible and appropriately housed. An affordable housing lottery will then be administered for the remaining four units. The Planning Department will assist with temporary relocation, as needed.

Rental Housing Needs

Creating homeownership and rental opportunities for low-and moderate-income households are priorities in the City's *Consolidated Plan*, which assesses this population's housing needs and identifies strategies to meet those needs. The applicant has cited relevant sections of the *Consolidated Plan* in its funding application, which is available on the project webpage.

Newton's rental housing costs are some of the highest in the Greater Boston Area. The median gross rent in Newton is \$1,611 according to Census 2012 data, and more recent market data shows an average rent of \$1,900. Cost burden is also an issue for existing Newton renters. Approximately 15 percent of residents are paying more than 30 percent of their income toward rent, which is regarded as unaffordable by federal and State standards. Currently, there are approximately 1,000 households on waiting lists for existing affordable rental housing units in the City. Affordable homeownership is also in high demand; ten affordable, deed-restricted homeownership units were completed in 2011 on Lexington Street in Auburndale and nine more are being proposed in Newtonville.

Units on Newton's affordable housing inventory are priced for different income levels. Only 3% of the existing inventory is affordable to households earning between 80-100% of the area median income. Conversely, 36% of existing units are affordable to households earning below 30% of the area median income. This project includes three units priced for households earning within the 80-100% range, adding to the diversity in Newton's affordable housing stock where it is needed.

Conflict of Interest

In April 2012, City housing staff identified that the daughter of the applicant's co-manager Mr. Haywood lived at an existing unit. This represented a conflict of interest pursuant to CDBG conflict of interest provisions, as Mr. Haywood's daughter may financially benefit from residing in the federally-assisted project. To eliminate the conflict of interest, Mr. Haywood stepped down as co-manager in June of 2012. In accordance with CDBG regulations, the applicant was able to reapply for federal funds one year after the conflict of interest was eliminated. Under the current income limits, the household is eligible to maintain residence in one of the affordable units once the project is completed.

Organizational Structure

The Planning Department has asked the applicant to provide additional information regarding its structure including board membership, mission and financial capacity.