DRB Memorandum
Revised (in italics)
Piper Lane
Condominiums
05-01-19

Second Review
This is the second review of the proposed Piper Lane 40B project.

DRB members in attendance: Holly Ben-Joseph (Chair), Peter Darlow (Assistant Chair), Kim Montella, and Dean Charter, (Board of Selectmen liaison).

The project's proponents in attendance: Steve Paquette representing Piper Lane, LLC, the developer and Bruce Ringwall with GPR, (Goldsmith, Prest & Ringwall), the developer's civil engineering team.

Neighbors: Ms. Jillian Watson, Dr. Gene Beresin, Ms. Michela Moran, Ms. Supriya Khandekar, Ms. Sandra Mika, Ms. Alissa Nicol, and Mr. Jeff Chormann

Documents Reviewed:
Piper Lane Condominiums Powerpoint Presentation Set, (no date provided), consisting of:

- Cover sheet rendering of typical townhouse group of three residences
- Review sheet highlighting concerns raised by BOS and ACHC of first project proposal
- Revised proposal sheet highlighting adjustments made as a part of the redesigned submission
- Proposed typical floor plan sheet highlighting numbers and mix of units
- Proposed townhouse group of four residences rendered exterior elevations sheet A4, dated 02-07-2019, prepared by Udelsman Associates
- Proposed townhouse group of three residences exterior elevations sheet A2b, prepared by Udelsman Associates
- Proposed townhouse group of four residences exterior elevations sheet A4a, dated 03-08-2019, prepared by Udelsman Associates
- Natural features plan sheet C3.3, dated March 2019, prepared by GPR
- Planting and lighting plan sheet L1.01, dated 03-12-2019, prepared by GPR
- Sheet of images of projects accomplished by applicant

Portions of Piper Lane Condominiums Comprehensive Permit Site Plan Set, dated March 2019:

- C1.1 Title Sheet
- C2.1 Masterplan
- C3.1 and C3.2 Existing Conditions Plans
- C4.1 and C4.2 Site Layout and Utilities Plans
- C5.1 and C5.2 Grading, Drainage and Paving Plans

The existing approximate 6.59 acre site is comprised of four separate parcels, the largest of which extends into the Great Hill Conservation Area, and includes an existing walking trail. The one existing building on the site is the historic Tuttle Barn built circa 1850s. The majority of the site is heavily wooded. The proposed

multifamily condominium will be comprised of a mix of two and three bedroom units within 28 two story townhouses. The townhouses will be set within a two plus acre portion of the site in building clusters of three and four units each.

The School Street frontage is very limited, making site access tight. The project sits adjacent to the South Acton Historic District (the opposite side of School Street is in the historic district), and in a neighborhood of mostly modestly sized single family homes, about half of them historic. In addition, the neighborhood includes a fire station, a church, and a few active commercial buildings on Route 27. The South Acton commuter rail station is less than a half mile away.

The site's topography is steeply sloping from the School Street access to the property's approximate midpoint. A significant wetland is located within the north end of the property, adjacent to the Great Hill Conservation lands.

The DRB does not support this 40B development due to its unfortunate and forced vehicular and pedestrian access road, its vehicular impact to School Street, its visual and contextual impact to the local neighborhood, and its significant interruption of the integrity of the town's Great Hill Conservation area.

The following are comments on the development as presented:

1. Most of the development slices up into the Great Hill Conservation Land and the DRB believes this will destroy the integrity of this important open space, and could be harmful to the ecosystems the Town has worked for years protect. As recently as 2015, the Town bought the adjacent Gaeble property for protection and enhancement of the Great Hill Lands.

2. The 28 units are to be situated on a single access drive with a T turn around for larger fire emergency vehicles at the far end of the drive. The more than 1000 feet long length of the single access drive proposed exceeds the town zoning code standard. The proponents are pointing to an exemption within the code that allows for a single access road of up to 1500 feet given there is proposed to be more than 30% of the site left as open space and no residential development will occur within 300 feet of School Street. *The DRB mentioned in previous comments that the one access and long drive for 28 units is not a typical layout, especially since there is no cul-de sac circle at the end of the street. (moved this sentence from end of point 3.)*

3. The 28 townhouse units will be developed within an approximate 2.3 acre portion of the site. The narrow access portion of the site off of School Street and a wetlands portion of the site at the far end, near the Great Hill playing fields will be left "open". To capture ground water runoff from the impervious portions of the development a manmade wetlands will be developed at the far end of the drive.

4. The proposed Summit Drive intersection with School Street is located on a portion of the School Street that is curved and pitched to the south and is within less than 200 feet of the intersection between School Street and Piper Road to the north. Though the proponents offer studies on traffic patterns along School Street that support this project, actual site distances for drivers turning onto School Street, and the calculation of a very modest quantity of vehicle trips generated from future residents of the complex, the board members question the safety of the intersection and expressed doubts on some of the findings of the studies. In particular, the DRB is troubled by the suggested school bus stop at the Summit Drive curb cut with School Street.

5. With respect to the school bus stop, it was suggested by the proponents that perhaps as few as five students will be residents of the condominium. The board members do not agree with this very low number, given the consistent growth of the school population in town in part due to the highly desired school district driving much of the town's residential growth. In addition, the proponent suggested that many of the units will be getting additional bedrooms as is desired by ACHC, thereby allowing for more families with more children to move in (see notes 17 and 18). It is more likely

there will be a significant number of school children living at the condominium which will lead to multiple bus stops at the bottom of the drive, and longer loading times, exacerbating the already bad traffic congestion on School Street.

6. To access the condominium complex, the proposed Summit Drive will require a very significant excavation of the high point of the existing steep topography at a portion of the site that is quite narrow. With the limited width available to spread out the cut through the hill, the proponents propose two retaining walls of 10 and 14 foot heights above the drive grade. The two retaining walls will flank each side of the drive at the site's tightest width, along a curve, and will establish what the proponent deems as a "modest gorge". The board questioned the proponents ability to construct the retaining walls so close to the flanking private properties of the neighbors to the North and South. Though there was mention of driving sheet piling ahead of the excavation, the proponent has not engineered the solution and therefore cannot speak to the reality of how these structures will be constructed. Given these are structures under the state building code each wall will be required to adhere to property setbacks and due to the extreme height of each wall, will be required to have safety guardrails on their top side to protect the neighboring property owners. The DRB advises the project not be approved until the engineering of these walls be submitted.

7. The board asked whether the drive between the two retaining walls has been studied in three dimensions. It has apparently not been. The board believes this is a visually important part of the project, and requests that a three dimensional study be undertaken and presented to the town.

8. The drive, as it passes between the two retaining walls, will be rising at a 10% pitch for a couple of hundred feet of length prior to cresting just before the first residential buildings. There is a proposed five foot buffer on the north side and a five foot sidewalk and three foot buffer on the South side. In a winter of significant snow, the proponents believe the combined width will offer relief for snow piling between the flanking retaining walls.

9. The intent is to build up the topography as much as possible along the retaining walls where these pull back from the drive and to plant these hills with native natural wild flowers. The board questioned how this will be maintained. The proponents do not have a plan at this time to maintain the plantings. Typically wild meadow plantings need to be mown back once a year. These slopes could be an eyesore if not maintained properly. Another concern of the Summit Drive flanking retaining walls is how groundwater will circumnavigate the significant cut through the existing topography. There was no comments offered as to mitigation of this concern.

10. The revised site plans propose a continuous sidewalk along one side of Summit Drive, and show the existing hiking trail relocated around the proposed manmade wetlands at the far end of the property, leaving the existing wetlands close to the Great Hill playing fields untouched. However, the revised design does not offer any flat open area for community gatherings or for play by the youngest residents. Given the tightly positioned townhomes, most of the outdoor play area will likely become the paved portions of Summit Drive and the individual townhouse driveways. The DRB previously suggested community space be made available for residents, however the only proposed community space is the trail, which doesn't satisfy the needs for children's play.

11. The renderings of the townhouse clusters do not show the quantity of pavement planned for each townhome accurately, as space is now proposed for two cars outside of the garage for each unit, whereas the rendering shows space for a single car.

12. Landscaping was only discussed as presented in the renderings. The planting plan was not presented. A detailed review should be undertaken at a future meeting. No study has been made to determine whether some of the existing mature trees can be maintained.

13. The townhouse clusters of three or four are shown to be developed flat on grade or split by a height change of from 12" to five feet at a midpoint of the townhomes to coordinate with the topography.

Except for the 5 foot split the board questions the split architecturally, as depicted on sheet A4a, when the change of height is proposed to be 1 to 2 feet total. The break in the building roof line is very unnatural and awkwardly managed between roof gables and entrance porches. The board would prefer to see the townhomes be developed as a continuous single height since space is not available in most cases to create a more pronounced plan change of plane between the townhomes to better and more logically separate the massing of the roof lines and entrance porches.

14. The exterior presentation of the townhomes is car centric, with the garage doors and associated roof line the prominent feature. It was noted that the window shown above the pair of garage doors is along a townhome demising wall and is therefore a false window. The board recommends making more of an effort to accentuate the townhome front door entrances.

15. The board has no concerns with the overall design style proposed for the exterior of the townhome buildings.

16. The board noted that the floor plan of the three bedroom townhome illustrates a bedroom at the basement level that has no toilet facility available on the basement level, access to a shower is two floors up, and access to the bedroom is presently suggested to be through an unfinished basement storage space. The proponents note that this is being studied with a potential shift of the basement level bedroom to the bottom of the access stair to avoid passing through the unfinished basement.

17. The proponent noted that the proposed unfinished mechanical space presently shown to be above the single car garage for each unit is potentially available to add a 3rd bedroom or in some cases relocate the bedroom out of the basement level. This in turn will impact the exterior design presently suggested for the roof lines and window placement above the garage.

18. The potential to develop more of the building interior, either above the garage or within the unfinished basement space, will increase the proposed square footage of the townhomes and potentially increase the overall condominium population which in turn will impact the presently proposed calculation on population, school age children, vehicle trips, sewage and water usage and overall project density.

19. Several of the townhome clusters will be developed tight to the neighboring property lines. Due to the topography and height of the buildings proposed, the townhomes will be very visible, especially to the neighbors along School Street to the South. It is recommended that evergreens be planted along the property edge as an attempt to help screen some of the visibility.

The following are a brief summary of comments made by citizens attending the meeting.

- Gene Beresin, 80 School Street, presented a rebuttal document outlining several concerns with the projects impact on safety for motorists, a new school bus stop, bicyclists, and pedestrians using School Street, given the placement of the access to the site in such close proximity to Piper Road in combination with the curved hill of School Street. As well, the rebuttal questions the legitimacy of allowing the use of the zoning code exception for the proposed Summit Drive to be a single access drive of over 500 feet given the proposed project is a condominium, not a subdivision. The document presented to the DRB will be made available to the proponents.

- Supriya Khandekar, 2 Piper Road, is very concerned with the proposed bus stop at the Summit Drive intersection with School Street due to the lack of visibility while traveling School Street. Supriya has first-hand knowledge of the difficult site lines as she has been involved with an accident at this location.

- Alissa Nicol, 76 School Street, questions the stated open space percentage, given the wetlands is not developable and therefore should this be accounted for within the stated open space set aside acreage. Alissa also points out the visibility of the townhomes close to her property line given the

height of the land they will be built upon, and how out of context with the balance of the local district this will appear.

- Michela Moran, 80 School Street, points out the project is to be developed very close to a historic district. The scale of the development is out of character with the historic district and will be too visible of an impact to the neighborhood.

- Jeff Chormann, 13 Piper Road, asked whether the proponents have tested the land for arsenic, given the property was historically an apple orchard. The proponents have not yet done so. Jeff also noted how the uplands adjacent to the flagged wetlands are a natural habitat for many of the native creatures that utilize the wetlands. This habitat will be eliminated as a part of the development.

Respectfully Submitted
Design Review Board