



TOWN OF CONCORD

Planning Board

141 Keyes Road, Concord, MA 01742

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MEMORANDUM

To: Concord Zoning Board of Appeals

From: Planning Board Members
Elizabeth Hughes, Town Planner

Date: November 29, 2023

Re: 292-294 Baker Ave. – NOVO Riverside Commons Comprehensive Permit – Planning Board Comments & Recommendations

The Concord Planning Board appreciates this opportunity to submit comments concerning the NOVO Riverside Commons project. Our objective is to encourage the most appropriate use of land throughout the Town and to preserve and increase amenities and the development of the natural, scenic and aesthetic qualities of the community: lessen congestion, secure safety, provide adequate light and air, encourage housing for persons of all income levels, facilitate the adequate provision of transportation, water supply, drainage, sewage disposal, and open space and conserve the value of land and buildings, including conservation of natural resources.

The proposed NOVO Riverside Commons Project, to be located near the pedestrian-friendly village center of West Concord, the Bruce Freeman Rail Trail, and the West Concord MBTA station, offers an ideal setting for transit-oriented development. As a 40B project it offers the potential to house a diverse community by including a substantial percentage of affordable housing within a market-rate residential building. And, based on the developer's commitments, it may provide green and smart-growth options with no fossil fuel requirements and with elements that support Concord's sustainability principles.

However, many details regarding the project's architecture, impact on traffic and public safety, and effect on natural resources need to be better understood prior to support of this potentially attractive project.

TRAFFIC AND PUBLIC SAFETY

Public Safety

It is unclear how the project complies with public safety standards and good design practices related to drive-aisle widths, turning radii and sight distances along the site drive and parking areas. As highlighted in the GPI letter of November 6, 2023, site circulation, access and egress could benefit from modifications to road markings, signage, sidewalk locations, traffic-calming measures, location of parking spaces, and attention to turning paths for many vehicle types.

Traffic Demand Management

Traffic Demand Management tools will be used to mitigate the proposed 20% increase in traffic volume from the two buildings. Both the GPI report and the Concord Transportation Advisory Committee memo of October 26, 2023, indicate that additional strategies should be considered including increased ride share parking spaces, transit subsidies, implementation of shared parking with the adjacent office development, enhanced bicycle parking (both outdoor and indoor) and greater support of public transit.

Traffic Impact

The project will impact several areas in Concord where traffic is currently of concern. However, as mentioned in the GPI report, other intersections and traffic patterns have been overlooked in the analysis provided as have other developments underway in the area. This includes, but is not limited to:

- the intersection of Baker Avenue Extension and 300 Baker Avenue driveway,
- the intersection of Baker Avenue, Main Street, Old Bridge Road and Crest Street,
- both Cottage Street and Elm Street, and,
- the 768 Elm Street project application.

Adequacy of Railroad Crossing

The GPI report recommends that due to the proximity of the proposed site driveway to the existing railroad crossing, the safety and adequacy of signage, signals, gates and pedestrian crossing should be reviewed.

Loading and Earth Fill and Removal

During construction, movement of the volume of materials required for construction as well as that of earth removal is significant. It is reported that earth removal alone will total 30,000 cu yards. Local roads and parking lots cannot support this process without a detailed traffic management plan and potential mitigation measures in place prior to the start of construction. A process for this movement, that will protect mature plantings and sensitive areas in or bordering on wetlands needs to be understood.

An adequate process for loading, deliveries, trash removal and circulation of emergency vehicles, for when the building is occupied, needs to be detailed and documented.

ARCHITECTURE

Massing and exterior lighting need to be better understood, especially from the perspective of abutters and neighbors in the somewhat dense areas of West Concord Center and Concord Green. All exterior lighting should be 3000K or lower in color temperature, to protect the diurnal cycles of humans, other animals, and plants.

Retaining wall landscaping and fencing need to be examined as well as the parking areas at the entry of the site and the potential for requiring residents to cross the site entry to reach a sidewalk.

AMENITIES

Access Trail

The Applicant has indicated that as part of the project, they will construct approximately 1,124 feet of trail that is 10' wide with 3' shoulders, of which certain portions would be wood, beginning at Baker Avenue and running through to the Assabet River Multi-Use Bridge, and that the trail will be open to the public.

1. *Confirm* that Taurus will maintain any portion of the trail that it builds and will do snow removal of the trail, independent of whether the Town provides snow removal of the Assabet River Multi-Use Bridge and remaining portion of the trail on the other side of the Assabet River.
2. *Confirm* that the development of the access trail will be completed at the same time the residences are complete.
3. Question: How will the trail be marked so that it will be clearly denoted that public access is permitted?

Pond

1. *Confirm* that the invasive species around the pond will be removed and the area replanted with native species.
 - Question: What will be the timing of the “reclamation” of the pond?
2. *Confirm* that there will be seating areas placed selectively around the pond.
3. *Confirm* that there will be no fencing around the pond to protect the pond or residents?
4. *Confirm* that the pond will not be accessible to the public and only for use by residents of the development.
 - Question: How will this be enforced? What signage will be used?

Outdoor and indoor amenities

1. *Confirm* that play areas, seating areas, kayak storage are included in the design.
2. *Confirm* that 300 Baker Avenue amenities including the basketball court will be available to 292 and 294 Baker Avenue NOVO residents.
3. *Confirm* that there will be a gym, meeting spaces and bicycle storage interior to the buildings.
4. Question: Will there be a dog park along the trail?

SUSTAINABILITY

Geothermal

1. *Confirm* that 100% of the heating and cooling needs of the building will be provided from the geothermal system.

2. *Confirm* that the savings from this geothermal system will reduce heating and cooling energy consumption by 50-60% for the buildings.
3. *Confirm* that a large portion of hot water demands for the buildings and residences will be preheated by the rejected heat from the geothermal system.
4. *Confirm* how each residential unit will benefit from the geothermal system.
5. *Confirm* that test (geothermal test bore hole) locations to determine if a geothermal system can be utilized are still scheduled for early December.

Fossil Fuel Free

1. *Confirm* that the buildings will be 100% electric with no on-site provision for use of fossil fuels.

Thank you for your consideration of these comments.

Sincerely,

Linda Miller, Chair
Concord Planning Board