

CAC Letter to ZBA Re: 275 Forest Ridge Rd

November 22, 2024

To members of the Concord Zoning Board of Appeals:

The Concord Climate Action committee has discussed Thoreau Residences LLC's request for waiver from the Specialized Stretch Energy Code requirements adopted through Article 23 at the April 2023 Town Meeting by nearly unanimous vote. The developers' reasoning is to "allow for a variety of energy options", which we interpret as seeking the least expensive option for the developer. The wording of the specific requirement they seek to waive ("That the "Zero Energy Pathway" and "Mixed-Fuel Pathway" shall not be permitted for new construction shall not install any new combustion equipment.") is confusing and not proper grammatically, but we interpret it to mean that they may not want to follow the requirements for a) wiring for "electrification ready"; b) implementing solar PV or other renewables if using fossil fuels; and c) Passive House design.

Our committee strongly opposes granting such a waiver for this project. The Specialized Stretch Code is intended to apply to all new construction, including affordable housing. The specialized code article passed with the support of Concord's affordable housing community for the reason that the additional expense to follow the code provisions should be very low, a much lower cost than retrofitting them in the future.

Through Article 31 at 2024 Town Meeting, Concord citizens overwhelmingly adopted a Climate Emergency declaration, recognizing that climate change threatens humanity. CO<sub>2</sub> emissions from heating and cooling buildings are the largest contribution to the Town's emissions, and these emissions permanently add to the worsening climate, and need to be minimized or avoided altogether. Our Town's emission reduction goals for 2030 and subsequent years mean that all buildings which can feasibly be made emissions-free will need to be retrofitted. New construction that isn't fossil fuel free from the beginning will be retrofitted at significantly greater expense to homeowners and/or the Town in the very near future. There is simply no excuse for this project to be built outside of the parameters of the Specialized Stretch Code, which is why the applicant did not provide sufficient reasoning in its application to waive this requirement.

The Climate Action Committee respectfully urges the applicants to follow the fossil-fuel free pathway, approved nearly unanimously by Town Meeting, regardless of whether they are required to do so based on the timing of their permitting. Building fossil-free is the right thing to do, and the Town Sustainability Division and CMLP should support the developers in doing so with technical resources and the financial incentives available to all residential developers.

Sincerely,

Town of Concord Climate Action Committee:

Brad Hubbard-Nelson (Co-Chair), Janet Miller (Co-Chair), Cheryl Baggen, Gavin Colbert, Brad Dye, Jerry Frenkil, Kathryn Hopkins, Paul Kirshen, Michael McDonald