

October 16, 2013

Mr. Jon Schneider  
Zoning Board of Appeals  
Town of Needham  
500 Dedham Avenue  
Needham, MA 02492

Reference: Needham Mews Comprehensive Permit

Dear Mr. Schneider:

Per your request, RKG Associates, Inc., has reviewed the proposed Chapter 40B development known as "Needham Mews," a 268-unit apartment community proposed for a 6.02-acre site on Greendale Avenue. RKG was asked to examine a sample of mixed-income, multi-family rental developments in the Boston metro area and provide a comparison analysis of gross density and open space and recreation amenities. Toward these ends, we provide the attached report.

As you know, I am unable to attend the Board's October 17, 2013 meeting due to a prior commitment. Should you have any questions, please don't hesitate to contact me at (617) 455-8641 or by email at jbarrett@rkgassociates.com.

Sincerely,



Judi Barrett  
Director of Municipal Services

## Needham Mews

As requested by the Needham Zoning Board of Appeals (“Board”), RKG Associates, Inc., has reviewed the proposed Needham Mews apartment development and collected data for a regional comparison analysis of gross density and open space and recreation amenities. The Board wanted to know if the density of Needham Mews is comparable to that of other recently built mixed-income apartment developments in the Boston area and whether the project offers similar outdoor recreation facilities. Accordingly, RKG has obtained density data for a sample of twenty-three suburban apartment communities and recreation data for a limited number of these developments. The following table summarizes the density data we received to date and identifies the sources we used to obtain the data. We are still confirming open space information for several of these developments.

| <b>Table 1. Gross Density of Recent Apartment Developments in Boston-Area Suburbs</b> |                                |             |              |               |                    |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------|-------------|--------------|---------------|--------------------|
| Town                                                                                  | Development                    | Total Units | Site (Acres) | Gross Density | Source             |
| Needham                                                                               | Needham Mews                   | 268         | 6.0          | 44.5          | Town Planner       |
| Acton                                                                                 | Avalon Acton                   | 360         | 35.0         | 10.3          | Consultant's Files |
| Andover                                                                               | Rolling Green                  | 224         | 45.3         | 4.9           | Consultant's Files |
| Braintree                                                                             | Ridge at Blue Hills            | 186         | 17.1         | 10.9          | Online             |
| Burlington                                                                            | Arborpoint at Seven Springs    | 331         | 37.8         | 8.8           | Online             |
| Concord                                                                               | Concord Mews                   | 350         | 30.0         | 11.7          | Online             |
| Foxborough                                                                            | The Lodge at Foxborough        | 250         | 22.8         | 11.0          | Consultant's Files |
| Hingham                                                                               | Avalon at Hingham Shipyard     | 235         | 9.9          | 23.6          | Consultant's Files |
| Hopkinton                                                                             | Alta Legacy Farms*             | 240         | 18.2         | 13.2          | Town Planner       |
| Lexington                                                                             | Avalon at Lexington Hills      | 387         | 22.1         | 17.5          | Online             |
| Lexington                                                                             | Avalon at Lexington            | 198         | 16.9         | 11.7          | Online             |
| Melrose                                                                               | Windsor at Oak Grove           | 401         | 16.0         | 25.1          | Online             |
| Needham                                                                               | Charles River Landing          | 350         | 7.9          | 44.1          | Consultant's Files |
| Newton                                                                                | Avalon at Newton Highlands     | 294         | 7.8          | 37.7          | Online             |
| Newton                                                                                | Arborpoint at Woodland Station | 180         | 8.8          | 20.3          | Online             |
| Northborough                                                                          | Avalon Northborough            | 382         | 42.0         | 9.1           | Online             |
| Pembroke                                                                              | Pembroke Woods (Alexan)        | 240         | 51.0         | 4.7           | Online             |
| Saugus                                                                                | Residences at Stevens Pond     | 326         | 82.6         | 3.9           | Online             |
| Shrewsbury                                                                            | Madison Place*                 | 96          | 12.0         | 8.0           | Town Planner       |
| Shrewsbury                                                                            | Avalon Shrewsbury              | 251         | 23.6         | 10.6          | Online             |
| Stoughton                                                                             | Lodge at Stoughton             | 240         | 13.1         | 18.3          | Online             |
| Tewksbury                                                                             | Lodge at Ames Pond             | 364         | 52.7         | 6.9           | Town Planner       |
| Watertown                                                                             | Watertown Mews**               | 206         | 6.5          | 31.7          | Town Planner       |
| Westborough                                                                           | Flanders Hill at Westborough   | 280         | 62.0         | 4.5           | Online             |
| *Inclusionary zoning, not a Chapter 40B comprehensive permit.                         |                                |             |              |               |                    |
| **Watertown Mews is Phase II of a larger housing project on Pleasant Street.          |                                |             |              |               |                    |

There are many reasons for the significant differences in density reported in Table 1. The fact that one apartment development was constructed at an exceptionally low density does not mean all rental housing developments would be feasible at the same density. As the Board knows from Needham’s own experience with Chapter 40B, the sites chosen for comprehensive permit developments tend to be problematic, e.g., extensive wetlands, steep

slopes, land unsuitable or unmarketable for the purposes for which it is zoned, and so on. Accordingly, a given parcel may be large in total area but have only a small portion that is actually buildable. That is the case for developments such as Rolling Green in Andover and Flanders Hill in Westborough. Nevertheless, the average density in our sample, not including the highest (Charles River Landing) and lowest (Residences at Stevens Pond) in range, is 14.3 units per acre. The sample midpoint is 11 units per acre.

The higher-density developments in our sample have some noteworthy characteristics that the Board may wish to consider. For example:

- Windsor at Oak Grove straddles the Melrose-Malden city line, with nearby and walkable access to the Oak Grove T Station and direct access to MBTA bus service. Over 75 percent of the project lies within Melrose. The entire project was developed at an average density of approximately 25 units per acre. Like most apartment developments, Windsor at Oak Grove also has a conventional community building and an outdoor pool. In addition, the apartment buildings are connected by a network of curved walkways and informal and formal (landscaped) open spaces, including areas designed for outdoor leisure use.
- Avalon at Newton Highlands is prominently located on a major street in Newton. Abutting and nearby land uses include the Newton Technology Park, offices, retail stores, and restaurant space. The project has direct access to MBTA bus service. The closest ramp to Route 95 is approximately one mile away. Onsite amenities include both indoor facilities (community building, fitness center) and outdoor facilities, such as landscaped open space throughout the site, a picnic area, a pool, and an outdoor sports court.
- Charles River Landing is located on Second Avenue in a redeveloping office/industrial park, with goods and services nearby on Highland Avenue. It has very little open space – mainly two courtyards, including one with an outdoor pool, and a park feature on the south side of the building where Second and Fourth Avenues converge. This development directly abuts open space along the Charles River. This project was developed under a Local Initiative Program (LIP) comprehensive permit, with pre-permit negotiations between the proponent and the Needham Board of Selectmen.
- Watertown Mews is located on Pleasant Street in Watertown. Mill Creek Residential developed Phase II of a two-phase project known as Repton Place, which was originally permitted by Beacon Communities. Together, Phases I and II include 385 units on 14.7 acres, or a project-wide average of 26.2 units per acre. Phase I is a condominium development; Phase II, apartments. Several years ago, Watertown commissioned a master plan for the Pleasant Street corridor, recognizing that this post-industrial area – from Myrtle Street to the Waltham line – was gradually transitioning to a residential mixed-use neighborhood. Since completing the corridor plan, Watertown has approved over 650 new multifamily units along Pleasant Street and the adjacent side streets. At least two established MBTA bus lines run along Pleasant Street, with one stop directly in front of Repton Place/Watertown Mews.

- Avalon at Hingham Shipyard is a transit-adjacent development in a mixed-use area in the Hingham Shipyard. The residents have access to more than one public transportation option – MBTA bus lines and commuter boat service – and a wide variety of goods and services. The vicinity of the shipyard has attracted considerable investment in new retail and commercial space in the past several years. These amenities are within easy walking distance of AvalonBay's apartment development. As we understand it, Avalon at Hingham Shipyard does not have many outdoor recreation facilities. It has customary features such as an outdoor pool, a grill and landscaped picnic areas.

Our sample includes three apartment developments that were built without need for a comprehensive permit. They include Alta Legacy Farms in Hopkinton, Madison Place in Shrewsbury, and Watertown Mews. As we understand it, Alta Legacy Farms is the only one in which 25 percent of the apartments are affordable to low- or moderate-income households, thereby making the entire project eligible for the Chapter 40B Subsidized Housing Inventory (SHI).

We would be pleased to address any questions the Board may have about the data we obtained or the sites we included in our sample.