



Sherborn CAC: Town needs more time with Fields proposal

More information about this proposed development can be found on the town of Sherborn website: <http://sherbornma.org/Pages/The%20Fields%20at%20Sherborn/>

Editor's Note: The following was submitted by the Sherborn Citizens Action Committee.

The Fields at Sherborn, as currently proposed is a high-density 40B development not in keeping with its surroundings in Sherborn and represents potential health, safety and environmental risks to all Sherborn residents, and perhaps to Holliston residents as well.

The 36-unit, 10-building development is planned by Trask Development on less than 6 acres of a 17-acre parcel off Washington Street near the western end of town. The development, which is planned to include nine affordable units, would be built under the provisions of the Massachusetts 40B law, which enables the developer to (a) bypass town building regulations, and (b) seek a unified building permit from only one town board, the local Zoning Board of Appeals. If the ZBA turns down a developer's permit application, the developer can appeal the decision to the Massachusetts Housing Commission, which in the vast majority of cases overturns the local board's decision.

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Local boards have regulations in place to manage conditions that uniquely apply to the town or city itself. Regulation 40B allows a developer to override local guidelines and regulations in favor of state regulations designed to accommodate all cities and towns in the commonwealth. Sherborn is a small rural town zoned largely for single-family residential properties with well water and septic systems designed for single-family residences.

We agree on the need and benefits of affordable housing in our town to ensure older or handicapped citizens, military veterans, teachers, artisans and others vital to our community enjoy living in Sherborn. Our town is a very special place where the health and safety of our residents and the beauty of nature are at the core of what makes Sherborn a wonderful and desirable place to live.

Our disagreement is the use of the 40B permitting process to create incredibly dense developments. 40B regulations were designed to create affordable housing options for Massachusetts citizens, but instead are manipulated by developers for profit. We welcome residential development, but not at the expense of Sherborn citizens' health — whether current or new to Sherborn.

We and many other Sherborn residents have established the Citizens Action Committee, which has met regularly over the past two months, including two open meetings at Town Hall, to discuss the following community concerns about the development:

1. The original parcel of land was protected by a state regulation permitting the town to buy the land or exercise the right of first refusal; it remains unclear to what extent the buyer made his intentions apparent to the town beyond claiming a "residential" use.
2. The development would come within 3 feet of wetlands, and a significant percentage of the entire footprint would be situated within a 100-foot buffer zone for wetlands protection.
3. Ten wells — nine of them in the wetland buffer zone — would service the ten buildings. The developer estimates each well would supply water for 24 residents, assuming residents do not convert additional finished rooms into bedrooms. Massachusetts requires installation of a public water supply, which would have to be tested monthly, when 25 or more people use a water supply.
4. The proposed septic system, designed to handle 9,600 gallons of waste daily (about 5 percent below the state requirement for building and operating a wastewater treatment system), would require significant regular maintenance for which the condominium association would be responsible. Failure of this system could potentially contaminate groundwater, affecting the health of development residents and abutters in both Sherborn and Holliston. If groundwater becomes contaminated such that drinking water for development residents and abutters becomes unsafe, Sherborn might need to eventually install a townwide water system, which could only be financially supported by substantially increasing its tax base.
5. The proposed development's planned density devoid of sidewalks may adversely affect fire, traffic and pedestrian safety for development residents and others.
6. There is insufficient time for town boards and commissions to review plans for the development. The developer has recently submitted final plans for the development, and the Sherborn ZBA is granted 180 days, until Sept. 8, to make its decision of the developer's permit application, unless the developer agrees to an extension.

The Citizens Action Committee is striving to improve awareness about this proposed development and to coordinate actions to oppose the current plan. You can learn more about the proposed development and how you can become involved in the work of the Citizens Action Committee, such as by signing a petition urging extension of the review period, via its website, sherbornnac.org.

You can also share your concerns at upcoming open meetings at Town Hall of the Board of Health (on Aug. 19), the Conservation Commission (on Aug. 20), and, most importantly, the Zoning Board of Appeals on Aug. 12 or by writing Alan Rubenstein, chairman of ZBA, c/o jeanne.guthrie@sherbornma.org.

