

February 11, 2016 12:01AM

Town, Trask continue discussion on waivers for Fields of Sherborn

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The board had hoped to discuss the findings by Nobis Engineering, from whom they had a representative, hydrogeologist Dr. James Vernon, calling remotely to participate in the meeting. However, the peer reviewer for the project and Sherborn Health Agent Mark Oram did not have time to review some of the groundwater information, according to Chair Daryl Beardsley.

The board did hear from developer Ben Stevens of Trask Development about what has been updated on the plan.

The Board of Health has approved waivers for preconstruction requirements for the septic system installation in a multi-unit project and for system size and design, but denied a vertical grades and clearances waiver.

As Stevens explained, there are two requirements for a 2 percent minimum ground cover grading and maximum ground cover of a one-foot minimum for the field.

He said with a septic system of the size needed, the cover of between 1 and 2 feet is “virtually impossible to do” because it is impractical for the project due to the size of the leaching fields.

He added the only way to employ this would be to go to a three- or four-field system that is all stepped with “higher grading” and more retaining walls against the property.

Stevens called the system “a lot more complicated and probably less efficient.”

He added, “It really is not a practical application for our type of project.”

Oram, as asked by Christopher Quinn, M.D., a member of the Board of Health, said the cover is more than 2 feet in different areas.

He added, “They’re asking for relief from that, and I have noted to the board previously that I can’t recommend that to the board.”

He said it can be engineered, and if three fields are required, then there are three fields. He explained the importance of trans-evaporation in the soil absorption area.

Philip Paradis, senior project manager at BETA Group Inc., the firm acting in peer review, believed it was possible to grade it so as to meet the 2 percent and the two-foot minimum cover without changing the system. It could be achieved, he said, with a high point in the middle of the system and downgrading in a mound shape.

Oram thanked Paradis for the advice.

Stevens disagreed and did not believe it was feasible from an engineering standpoint. He noted the critical issue was proper grading and not the three-foot cover on the field.

Another waiver Stevens spoke about was one for a bylaw that requires septic tanks to be no less than 50 feet from the structure it serves, which he believes for the Fields at Sherborn does not make sense.

To meet this requirement, he said it would mean a constant grade between the septic tanks and the house, as well as the tanks and distribution boxes, which are a contrivance used to equalize the flow of septic-tank effluent into the various tile lines of the disposal field.

Stevens noted that at the Abbey Road development deviates from this requirement, as it goes down and then up again for ground cover and then levels off.

He added, “That’s all we’re asking — is for the same consideration.”

Stevens said he would be happy to put aeration or venting on areas of the fields with more than 2 feet of cover.

With a force main between the tank and distribution box, as part of the pressure dosing system, he said there could not be a constant grade.

Oram noted the purpose for Section 13.0 of the local bylaw, which pertains to the distance between septic tanks and serving structures, is to ensure there is no downward dip in grade.

Oram said, “Engineering-wise, it’s not suggested, and that’s way we have that as a regulation.”

Stevens responded that Abbey Road does in fact not have a constant upward grade, which is acceptable in a pump system, and Oram said he would look at that.



Quinn added that at Abbey Road the houses are at the top of the hill, and Oram said the grading goes both up and down.

Beardsley said as they did not have the agent who reviewed those plans present, they would have to look into it.

Oram spoke to the previously mound formation suggested by Paradis and noted that he liked that idea as well as venting the cover.

He said, "I still think the system needs to be vented at no more than two feet of fill, in my view, to give this system an extra opportunity to function."

Dr. Rebecca Hunnewell of the Board of Health said she believes its proper functioning correlates to the drinking water in town and public health in town.

She said, "There are risks to the groundwater, the drinking water that need to be considered."

The Board of Health agreed to continue the discussion of the Fields at Sherborn on Feb. 11 at 5 p.m. prior to the Zoning Board of Appeals meeting that same day.