



FW: Alta Nashoba Valley 40B Proposal, 580 Main St, Bolton MA, ZBA Review

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Valerie, thank you for sending along the Wood Partners' application for their proposed luxury apartment homes (also described as "high quality Class-A rental housing") at 580 Main St in Bolton. I am still in the process of wading through the extensive application materials provided to the ZBA in October, but I do have some initial comments which I would like to see addressed in the course of the ZBA review.

To begin, I think Bolton could benefit from some increase in the supply of high quality rental housing, including some affordable units for Bolton residents. Further, the proposed site, an underused office complex immediately adjacent to I-495, is a sensible location for a well-conceived and appropriately scaled rental complex.

That said, the Wood Partners proposal would be the largest apartment complex/40B project ever built in Bolton, **by at least a factor of four**. Accordingly, it is particularly important that the Project be designed, scaled and managed so that it complements the Town's rural/suburban character **AND** so that it does not become an incremental burden to the Town's already heavily taxed residential property owners.

While the latter is my primary concern, I will begin with a few design related comments:

1. I understand that Wood Partners is proposing an elevator in only one of the four planned three-story apartment buildings. I think this is very short sighted and an affront to the Town's efforts to continually improve access for wheel chair users, and others with temporary or permanent mobility challenges. As tenants age, or as tenants are confronted with health challenges, they should not have to move from a second or third floor unit because a short sighted developer was unwilling to provide an elevator in each of the 36 to 75 unit buildings. I strongly encourage the ZBA to make sure all four buildings are equipped with elevators.
2. Access to the proposed complex from 117 is via a long-established entry drive on the south side of the road. The entry drive is west of the four lane to two lane "neck down" section of 117; there is an existing left hand turn lane (for west bound traffic turning into the complex). However, traffic exiting the complex to travel westbound on 117 will need execute a difficult turn across traffic (the east bound lane and the turn lane). As we all know this is a difficult and potentially dangerous maneuver on a busy section of 117 filled with impatient and often distracted commuters. A review of the weekly Bolton police blotter reveals a great many rear-enders as well as turning related accidents in this short stretch of 117. Depending on the resident population and their commuting patterns, this issue may or may not rise to the level of a traffic light (coordinated with the existing light at Sugar Road/495 ramp). A simple alternative could be to restrict exit from the complex to east bound (right hand turn) only.....at least for weekday morning and evening commuting times. In any event, this issue warrants an objective traffic study and further negotiation.
3. Other concerned Bolton residents have questioned the developer's plans with respect to rooftop solar. As I understand the developers' response, rooftop PV "will be considered". Given the scale of the complex, and the developers intention to use electric heating and cooling (presumably via heat pumps), I think a firm commitment to full roof top solar should be the minimum requirement. Further, given the extensive surface parking, the developer should also be encouraged to examine incremental ground mounted solar capacity. Solar panels over portions of the parking areas could bring significant clean energy benefits as well as providing some semi covered parking for residents. Properly designed, this would provide summer shade as well as some winter snow/ice protection.
4. The earlier materials provided to the Town described Wood Partners as the project developer. The most current formal application lists "Limited Dividend Affiliate of WP East Acquisitions, LLC " as the applicant. Are commitments made by this entity fully supported by Wood Partners? I assume the ZBA will be asking for further detail on this entity, with the assistance of counsel as needed.

Financial Impact: While the issues above, as well as the design, access and land use comments offered by others, are important, the potential financial burden of a 229-unit complex is my overarching concern at this juncture. The materials provided by Wood Partners lists 16 projects, ranging in size from 88 to 392 units. With the sole exception of a project being built in Wayland, of the Wood Partner's projects are in large cities (Cambridge, Somerville, Watertown, Arlington, Melrose) or large suburban towns (Framingham, Franklin, Wakefield, Stoneham, Hopkinton). These communities have populations which are 10 to 20 times the size of Bolton, with extensive commercial property bases.

Such communities have a far greater ability to accommodate a 200 plus unit apartment complex than Bolton, with its nearly non-existent commercial property base and very limited public safety infrastructure. Moreover, Bolton has a very high residential property tax rate (nearly \$21 per thousand of assessed valuation). With an average residential tax bill approaching \$10,000 per year, Bolton is in the top 20 towns statewide. In dramatic contrast, the luxury apartment homes being proposed by Wood Partners would pay a bit over \$3,000 per year per unit.

The Wood Partners' project could add 500 +/- residents to the Town's population of approximately 5600. Accordingly, it is essential that the Wood Partners project pays sufficient taxes to cover the incremental school and public safety costs as well as a portion of Town overhead costs. According to materials presented in the application the Project has an estimated all-in cost of \$66.6 million. At the Town's current millage rate, this would yield a full valuation tax bill of nearly \$1.4 million. The developer's financial information includes an estimated tax payment of \$767,000 per year. I could not find any explanation or justification for this tax figure, nor any discussion of proposed escalation over time.

While our Selectmen have made some enthusiastic comments about the prospect of more that \$700,000 per year in incremental tax revenue, thus sum could be very quickly consumed by incremental school costs and to a lesser extent, incremental public safety and Town administrative costs. In earlier comments Mr. Sterling noted the possibility of 150-200 children living at the 580 Main complex. Lets say for sake of discussion, the more than 130 two and three bedroom units attract 65 school age children. At an incremental Bolton cost of \$15,000 per student this is a cost of \$975,000 per year. (I have seen numbers as high as \$17,500 per Bolton student per year).

On the public safety front, maintaining Bolton's current ratio of officers per 1000 residents would require at least one new officer. As a placeholder, this could be a \$100,000 cost.

Bottom line, I think the Town needs a serious and detailed cost assessment of the Project, in addition to the usual wetlands, traffic and water/wastewater studies. I hope the ZBA will make this a major focus of the pending third party review effort. Moreover, I hope that the Town's Advisory Committee will weigh in with a well considered life of Project financial assessment.

Thanks for considering my comments, regards, Ted Barten, [35 Vaughn Hill Road, Bolton](#)