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Judi Barrett  
BARRETT PLANNING GROUP LLC  
[judi@barrettplanningllc.com](mailto:judi@barrettplanningllc.com)

240A Elm Street  
Somerville, MA 02144  
617.628.5700, tel  
[davissquarearchitects.com](http://davissquarearchitects.com)

Re: Red Robin Pastures, Dover MA 40B  
Preliminary Architectural Peer Review

Clifford J. Boehmer, AIA  
Ross A. Speer, AIA  
Iric L. Rex, AIA

Dear Judi:

Thanks for asking me to work with you and the Dover ZBA on the review of the proposed 39-unit 40B development at 61-63 County Street (Route 109). I am writing to you now to provide you with my preliminary architectural assessment of the project. This letter follows the form of my proposal for services that I sent you on February 28, 2021. I am looking forward to presenting these thoughts and answering any questions you and the ZBA may have at the hearing that is scheduled for the evening of April 26, 2021.

1. *Review the developer's application, plans and drawings, reports from other peer reviewers and Town officials, letters from neighboring residents, etc.* For the proposed project at 61-63 County Street, I have reviewed the following materials (most of which were included in the Comprehensive Permit Application dated December 2020):
  - PEL Application to MassHousing dated May 2020.
  - Drawing set "Red Robin Pastures Dover, Massachusetts" that includes architectural drawings A1 through A6 dated 04/27/20 prepared by Signature Designs, drawings C1 through C7 dated 12-18-20 presumably prepared by Ron Tiber, PE, drawings L1 through L2 dated 12/14/2020 presumably prepared by Green Bean Designs.
  - Project Data Summary prepared by the Applicant.
  - Illustrative Plan (rendered site plan with nearby context) dated 12/14/20 prepared by Signature Designs.
  - Proposed Conditions Plan (undated) detailing retaining wall design and fire department access points off of County Street (presumably prepared by project civil engineer?).
  - Project Eligibility Letter dated September 22, 2020 from MassHousing.
  - Memo to Dover ZBA "Applicant Response to Original Town Comments to Site Approval Application" dated February 19, 2021.
  - Letter to Paul McGovern from Colonial Water Company dated 11/2/20.

Town, Peer Review, and other Reports:

- Town Comments to MassHousing Site Approval Application dated June 1, 2020.

Communications from citizenry:

- No letters/emails have been provided to this reviewer.

(REFERENCE MATERIALS)

- Local 40B Review and Decision Guidelines published by MHP and Edith Netter, November 2005
- Handbook: Approach to Chapter 40B Design Reviews, prepared by The Cecil Group, Inc. for DHCD, MassDevelopment, MassHousing, and MHP, January, 2011

2. *Participate in an initial meeting at the site with the developer's design team and a representative of the Town*  
No meeting at site with the developer or Town representative(s) has occurred at this point. Content of this letter is based solely on an unaccompanied site visit on April 20, 2021 and review of posted materials.

3. *Conduct site visit and reconnaissance assessment of surrounding residential and nonresidential areas within 1/2 mile of the project site* Letter is based on site visit and drive through of nearby neighborhoods on April 20, 2021, as well as Google Earth review.

**Comments on site reconnaissance:** The site is located on the north side of a heavily used section of County Street (Route 109) near the edge of Dover between Routes 95 and 495. The overall pattern of development is relatively uniform with a mix of modest to very large single-family homes on generous lots, with wooded interstitial areas. Within a half mile of the site in either direction there is minimal commercial use along County Street, limited to a childcare facility and a tennis club. The architectural style of the existing housing stock is generally "traditional", one to 2.5 stories, wood clad with pitched roofs.

The abutter immediately to the west is a small residential development with a shared driveway, and slightly further in that direction is a multi-building condominium development of 46 townhouses (as reported in the Project Data Summary). Immediately to the east is a singlefamily home.

Because of fastmoving traffic and the absence of sidewalks, Route 109 near the site is not pedestrian friendly. The pedestrian experience is significantly better on nearby side streets, some of which have walkways, but more importantly, far fewer, and much slower moving cars and trucks. The width of paved shoulder along 109 that could potentially be relatively safe for bicycle traffic is variable in width, from zero to several feet. Essentially, the only safe way to get to a pleasant walking experience would be to drive there from the site (particularly in winter when the shoulders of 109 may not be walkable). This reviewer is not aware of any public transportation system that serves the site.

There are existing structures on the two-acre site that will be demolished to make way for the new U-shaped multi-family structure.

4. *Consult with the Applicant's design team, as appropriate.* No consultation has occurred at this point.
5. *Provide an initial oral presentation to the ZBA. Said presentation typically includes comments and preliminary recommendations on the following* (presentation is scheduled for April 26):

- a. *Orientation of building in relation to parking areas, open space and on-site amenities.*

**Comments:** The proposed building is a large (in relation to nearby context) "U-shaped," 3.5 story structure (three full-footprint levels and one loft level). Both legs of the U-shape run north-south, creating a landscaped courtyard that faces Route 109. The southern ends of the U are set back from the road a little further than the neighbors immediately to the west, but less than most structures along 109. Within the courtyard is buried a 16,000-gallon tank to supply the buildings fire suppression systems (sprinklers).

The primary entry to the building is on the north side of the U, facing the parking lot that is accessed from a driveway along the west side of the site. There is a landscaped area between the north face of the building and the parking. The parking lot is a double, double-loaded configuration with no proposed internal landscaping. The other proposed outdoor amenities are on the north side of the parking lot, and consist of a "lawn area", a "dog park area", and a "community garden area" with what appears may be raised planting beds. That far north end of the site is a section contained within a long retaining wall system that creates the amenity space above, and proposed stormwater management below. The leaching area for the on-site septic system is located beneath the parking lot.

It is not clear from the plans how trash and recycling will be handled on the site (there are no dumpster location(s), and no trash rooms indicated on the floor plans).

There does not appear to be a walkway proposed from the building to the street (which is likely a requirement of the Massachusetts Architectural Access Board). While the applicant has stated that there is a school bus pull out area included in the site plan, it does not appear to be indicated on any of the plans available to this reviewer (note that 30 of the 39 units are two bedrooms or greater).

In this reviewer's opinion, there are several important issues with the proposed site plan, as outlined below:

- The placement of a tall, U-shaped building close to and oriented towards the busy roadway will "capture" road noise, potentially making the outdoor space unpleasant and making the units noisier than necessary. While the notion of concealing the parking behind the structure and presenting the minor elevations to the

street is often a good approach, consideration should be given to moving the building further back, perhaps placing landscaped parking between the building and the street.

- The utility of the courtyard within the U-shape is further diminished because of its narrow dimension, with the proposed common use amenities immediately outside of unit bedrooms and living rooms oriented towards the courtyard. Consider abandoning the U-shape in favor of a building form that better fits the relatively narrow lot.
- Currently, the "usable" outdoor spaces are divided into three discreet areas including the courtyard, the entry side landscaped area, and the larger green spaces at the north end of the site. Two of those three areas are of questionable utility. Consider modifying the site plan to consolidate the green spaces into more functional, larger contiguous spaces immediately accessible from the building (this is perhaps another argument for bringing the parking to the front of the site).
- Given the relative "isolation" of the site, there should be on-site play space for young children included in the program.
- The landscape plan does not appear to be coordinated with the civil plans, which makes it difficult to assess the feasibility of the proposed site amenities (for example, see Town comments regarding fall protection on the retaining wall, which is not depicted on the Landscape plan).
- In all likelihood, the fire suppression system will require back-up power. There does not appear to be a generator on the site plans.
- Transformer location is not indicated on site plans.
- No outdoor bike racks for visitors are indicated on the site plans.
- The form of the building and its placement on the site maximizes the proposed structure's impact to the neighbors to the west. Placement of the parking access drive on that side exacerbates the problem, as there is inadequate space for effective landscape buffering.
- Create a walkway that connects the building to the street and to a protected school bus waiting area. As noted above, an accessible path to a public way is a requirement under the Massachusetts Architectural Access Board. Also, all proposed site amenities must be fully accessible.
- Designate space on the site for a tot lot.
- Can one parking space be used as a Zip Car site?
- Reference is made in the application materials to on-site treatment plant. Does this require an additional structure on the site to house equipment, etc.
- The roof plan does not include mechanical equipment. Is all of it proposed to be ground-mounted, and if so, where will it be?

*b. Function, use and adequacy of open space and landscaped areas.*

**Comments:** As noted above, this reviewer believes that the overall site plan needs to be modified to enhance the functionality of the proposed outdoor amenities, minimize impact to the immediate abutters to the west, and to diminish the impact of road noise on the residents of the building.

*c. Use and treatment of natural resources.*

**Comments:** In order to support the parking, sewage treatment, and stormwater management needs (not to mention creation of usable outdoor space for the residents) of the proposed development, the northern 20% or so of the site must be filled to raise the grade. This is accomplished through the construction of a variable height retaining wall. The efficacy and impact of this infrastructure proposal will be reviewed in detail by other peer reviewers. However, it does seem clear to this reviewer that given the site plan issues noted above, the proposed intensity of use of the site seems excessive.

*d. Building design, setbacks, massing and scale in relationship to the surrounding context and topography.*

**Comments:** It is important to note that the drawing set is very "light." There is no plan provided at the basement level, all of the elevations have not been provided, there are no building sections, and the architectural and landscape site plans are not coordinated with the civil engineering plans. In addition, there are no material call-outs on the building elevations, which makes it difficult to assess how well the proposed materials relate to other nearby structures.

The scale of the proposed structure is considerably greater than any other nearby residential buildings. Its placement close to the street does not provide enough space to effectively mitigate its impact on the public realm, and its orientation and proximity to the neighbor to the west actually maximizes the building's impact. In order to assess the structure's impact, the developer should provide more three-dimensional information that includes nearby context, as

well as street level views from County Street. It is likely that the building as currently configured and set on the site would be a better "fit" if it were 2.5 stories instead of 3.5.

While there is very little articulation of the building's primary footprint, the use of bay windows and a complex roofscape help to break up the massing of the structure. The rendered building elevations show color variation, and some mix of cladding materials (although as noted above, no material callouts are included on the elevations). The missing elevations should be included in the application materials.

All of the elevations are drawn as if the building is on a perfectly flat site. The elevations should be coordinated with the actual proposed grading of the site.

As noted above, the reviewer does not believe that the width of the site supports the notion of a U-shaped building, at least not as currently proposed. A different building scale and form should be considered to address the impact concerns expressed above.

*e. Viewsheds of the project visible from the public street, public areas and from the vantage point of nearby residential neighborhoods.*

**Comments:** Most importantly, this reviewer believes that a building of this scale in this context must employ multiple mitigation strategies in order to minimize impact on the public realm and the immediate abutters. More images that include existing context should be provided for the benefit of the ZBA and the public.

*f. Pedestrian and vehicular access and circulation; adequacy of accessibility provisions. Of particular interest are the implications of access and egress in terms of pedestrians, bicyclists and motorists. Adequacy of parking facilities.*

**Comments:** This is discussed above. The site is not pedestrian or particularly bike friendly due to the heavy traffic and lack of sidewalks on County Street.

*g. Integration of building and site, including but not limited to preservation of existing tree cover, if any.*

**Comments:** It appears that the site will have to be totally cleared in order to construct the proposed development. As such, and given the minimal proposed buffering landscaping, the project is not well integrated into the existing context. Grades on the site will be significantly modified in order to provide for all of the required infrastructure. Within the site itself, no landscaping is proposed in the parking area, and the usable outdoor space is divided into three discreet areas with little relation to each other.

*h. Exterior materials.*

**Comments:** Building elevations have not been annotated to indicate material selections. Also, mechanical equipment is not shown on plans, elevations, or site plans.

*i. Energy efficiency.*

**Comments:** Drawings and specifications are not adequately developed at this point to assess efficiency.

*j. Exterior lighting.*

**Comments:** A lighting plan is included in the posted materials. Given the lack of buffering landscape materials, the development will be very visible at night.

*k. Proposed landscape elements, planting materials, and planting design.*

**Comments:** See comments above.

*l. Feasibility of incorporating environmental and energy performance standards in the design, construction and operation of the buildings.*

**Comments:** There are a multitude of third party environmental and energy performance standards that a building of this type could comply with (LEED, Energy Star, Passive House, Enterprise Green). Additionally, Dover is a Stretch Code community, which if revised and coordinated with an updated base building code, will require the project to be designed to comply with a high standard for energy performance.

*m. Any other design-related considerations identified by me, ZBA, town staff, working group, or the citizenry of Dover.*

**Comments:** As noted above, there are several missing exhibits, and some of the submitted materials are in conflict with each other. This needs to be remedied in order to do a more detailed review. Other issues that have emerged from review of what has been submitted include:

- Not clear how school bus drop-off and pick up works. Is there protection from the weather provided?
- How many AAB Group 2 units are proposed, and where are they in the building.
- Where do residents store their bicycles?
- Are there EV spaces proposed?

*n. Techniques to mitigate visual and other impacts.*

**Comments:** Potential mitigation strategies for the perception of the building from the immediate neighbors, as well as all of the travelers on County Street are discussed above.

6. *Participate in meeting(s) with municipal staff and the developer team ("working sessions"), to address to the ZBA's charge(s) to the developer.* No working session has been scheduled at this point)
7. *Provide a written report(s) and oral presentation(s) to the ZBA on the Applicant's submission(s) prior to the close of the public hearings that addresses, at a minimum, the aspects of the development identified in number 5 above. Said report(s) and oral presentation(s) shall also include recommendations relative to design-related conditions to be incorporated in a potential approval of the Comprehensive Permit, including but not limited to modifying specific aspects of the site and building design in order to improve the overall development and its relationship to its surroundings and to mitigate potential negative impacts.* Final report not yet drafted.

In brief summary, this reviewer believes that while this may be a suitable 40B site, the current plans present serious issues related to non-integration into the community, impact on the abutters and the public realm, as well as adequacy of amenities (primarily outdoor) for the residents.

I look forward to attending the ZBA hearing this coming Monday, as well as reviewing more complete documentation of the project. Please get in touch if you have any questions about this preliminary report.

Sincerely,  
DAVIS SQUARE ARCHITECTS, INC



Clifford Boehmer AIA  
President + Principal