

May 11, 2021

My name is Lisa St. Hilaire, and as you know, I live at 63 River Ave and am an abutter to the Gardiner Green project at the hospital site on Dresden Ave. Because of the late submission of updated (and reportedly final) application material from Mr. Boghossian, which is different than what we've seen in the past, I am compelled to submit new comment for the public record. I apologize for this late submission.

There have been changes upon changes to this project, and all the while it seems that the applicant is not providing what the Planning Board has requested. The Board has spent many hours in I believe six public meetings indicating what is needed for this to move forward, yet information that was requested is not in this final application. Our time (the Board's and the neighbors') is valuable, and though I appreciate Mr. Boghossian's general ideas about this site, without details and specific materials requested by the Board, it feels like we're being strung along.

There are still few details in this final application, and since the meeting on April 13, there are 5 new structures for a total of 56 (versus 51) units. This feels a bit like a bait and switch tactic.

The Proposed Site Plan Map still does not show everything that is in the application, and much of it is still not labeled. There is inconsistency in number of parking spaces labeled on the maps (within and between maps). A sunken garden is mentioned in the Site Plan Application but not indicated on the map. There are new building footprints on this new Site Plan Map, but no details for these in the other application materials.

There is still no letter of reference from a financial institution. This is required by our LUO. Mr. Boghossian's history with Gehring Green in Bethel, and the potential for blight should the Dresden Ave site sit vacant, especially with the neighboring Manor House, further point to the necessity of a letter of reference from a financial institution that fully understands the plan for this site, including layout and size of all of the units.

Mr. Boghossian has submitted only general concepts for this project and is hoping for Planning Board approval based on those concepts. This is a very large rehabilitation project, and a phased development, and I feel like the board should be cautious and careful in its deliberations. There does not seem to be enough here for this to be considered a complete application, even for 'concept'. Mr. Boghossian further indicates in the current Site Plan Application that 'we are open to having the board review the plans for the successive buildings to make sure they adhere to the same high standard' that he references in Appendix 1, Building Renderings, which are not included with this application. If these are the same as renderings in previous material submitted, there is not enough detail to understand exactly what this high standard refers to.

I encourage the Board to reject this proposal as the application is not complete. Should the Board consider it complete enough to hear, I have further comment.

Phased Project

At previous meetings, and in all materials, Mr. Boghossian has indicated the phased nature of the project. The Board has noted that it has not in the past approved a phased project. Mr. Boghossian is seeking approval of concept and has not provided details required by the LUO. He is hoping that with approval of concept, the various phases can rely on approval of the Code Enforcement Officer. This seems to be a process that is in contradiction to the LUO. Section 7 notes that in the HDR zone, multi-family dwellings are permissible with review of the Planning Board, NOT with review of the Code Enforcement Officer.

At most, it seems that the Board could conditionally approve the Subdivision Plan, but there is not enough information to even hear the Site Plan Application. The Maine Municipal Association's Manual for Local Planning Boards notes (on page 43), that 'before granting approval with conditions, as a practical matter, the board should be certain that the applicant has the financial and technical ability to meet those conditions.' Is it possible for the Board to grant conditional approval of the Subdivision Plan provided that the Site Plan Application for all three phases is received and approved within two years and that the project is begun within that time? This time frame is well within the applicant's project plan-timeline for the project.

Flag Lot

I encourage the Board to make a clear finding of fact and conclusion of law regarding the flag lot. At the April 13 meeting, Attorney Jon Pottle noted that the Board articulated their reasoning at the last meeting regarding the flag lot, but in the minutes for the March 9 meeting all I can find is the discussion and straw vote regarding this topic.

Density Bonus

Though Mr. Boghossian has repeatedly indicated that the affordable housing units will be similar to (or the same as) the fit and finish of the other units, there is still no detail about this fit/finish. Previously there was inconsistency about which units will be affordable. Is it the one-bedroom units? Is it the four studios, two 1-bedroom units, and one 2-bedroom unit? Currently none of this information is included in the Site Plan Application. Most importantly, Mr. Boghossian has not addressed the Board's comments from April 13, 2021 that these units be considered affordable housing in perpetuity rather than the requested 5-year time period.

As previously stated in multiple meetings, Mr. Boghossian is not seeking federal or state low-income funding, and without the federal or state oversight incorporated within these funding sources, the onus of administration & management of these units as low income will fall to the City of Gardiner.

The Density Bonus is being used as a tool to increase the number of allowable units, not because of a true desire to help low income residents of our City. I encourage the Board to make a clear finding of fact and conclusion of law regarding the low-income density bonus.

Lighting

There is no lighting plan in this submission. Phase 1 notes that 'parking lot lighting improvements on the western half of the site to enhance the dark sky would be done in this phase.' This is reiterated for Phase 3 and the eastern half of the site. No lighting enhances a dark sky, and it feels like this was included to toss out some jargon in an effort to satisfy the ordinance. I don't believe there is enough detail here regarding lighting to satisfy Gardiner's LUO.

Building Specifics

The three phases are more detailed in this submission than previous submissions, and that is helpful. However, the information is still vague and does not have enough detail to review. For each phase, the Site Plan Application notes 'the building façade and design to be approved by the board prior to the issuance of a building permit.' Is it the intention that each phase will come back before the Board for full review with an opportunity for public comment at each phase? What is the guarantee that all three phases will be completed?

Concept and Materials Narrative and Gardiner Green Aesthetics

I admire Louis Kahn's Salk Institute, but I find that the images presented along with the descriptive narrative bring up more questions than answers.

Building 6 (the large hospital building)

Where are the large glass curtain walls and cantilevered precast decks going? Will they extend the footprint of the building? Decks/patios have been mentioned, will these be on the cantilevered sections? Will there be inset decks as shown on the Salk Institute images? How will the mix of wood, steel, and concrete be shown on the exterior of the building? Will there be angled wings as shown on the Salk Institute images? If so, what is going in them-living space or decks? Where is this sunken garden?

Details regarding the size and layout of the interior units for this building have been absent in the past several applications. What are those details? Noting 'an average of 620 square feet' is not particularly informative. There is a roof study included in the application materials that is for this building and the attached Building 5.

Building 5 (the annex to the hospital)

Cloaking the building in metal with similar elements to the #6, but what does this mean? Where are details regarding size and layout of the proposed units and their decks/patios? Details regarding materials for the second story/new roof?

Boiler Building

What is the cross gable? Where are details regarding size/layout units?

GFM Building

Where are details regarding size/layout of garages (are they individual? One large garage with 15 spaces?)? Where are details regarding size/layout of units and porches. What are the bays? 'Market permitting' regarding the pool seems pretty vague and squishy. As does the number of units noted in the Site Plan Application ('about seven or eight'). The roof height is listed as 'no more than 42 feet', which is also vague. It seems that this building needs a roof study rather than the two concept renderings.

Character of the Neighborhood

I am concerned that the steel and glass planned for the exterior for these buildings is not in keeping with the character of the neighborhood. Without details, it is hard to comment further on this. I will reiterate my concern that these highly reflective surfaces at this site with rather a lot of asphalt will result in heat gain for the neighborhood, an issue that will become more and more prevalent and problematic with our changing climate.

I would also like to comment, yet again, that the proposed density is not in keeping with the character of the neighborhood. I recognize that the Board indicated at the last meeting that 'character of the neighborhood' represents physical aspects of the neighborhood rather than personal aspects, but I would suggest that since there is no definition in the City's LUO that the Board look to the Comprehensive Plan regarding this subjective issue.

The LUO does not include any understanding of the social and cultural character of residential neighborhoods, but the Comprehensive Plan does. Though this area is within the HDR Zone, it is NOT within a Growth Area. Putting in a development on one lot that brings in 1.5 times the population of the entire length of Dresden Ave will drastically change the character of this neighborhood that we all love.

At the last meeting, Pam Mitchell noted that Gardiner should be a leader and should set the standard regarding no sunset on the low-income units being in perpetuity. I suggest that the Board be a leader on the character of the neighborhood and include social and cultural aspects and population density in its considerations of whether or not this project meets the LUO. I also request that the Board make a clear finding of fact and conclusion of law regarding the Gardiner Green project and the character of the Dresden Ave neighborhood.

Thank you,

Lisa St. Hilaire

63 River Ave, Gardiner